

PRIVATIZED YOUTH SPORTS: ARE YOUTH BEING LEFT BEHIND

By

GLENN JOSEPH CASSIDY

A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School of Education

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor Of Education

Graduate Program in Education, Culture and Society

Written under the direction of

Dr. Beth Rubin, Ph.D.

And approved by

Dr. Beth Rubin, Ph.D.

Dr. Ben Justice, Ph.D.

Dr. Michael Panella, Ph.D.

New Brunswick, New Jersey

January, 2018

© 2018
Glenn J. Cassidy
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Abstract

A change is happening in the world of youth sports (Ripley, 2013; Longman, 2015; Fitzgerald 2013; Bowen & Hitt, 2013). Privatized youth sport teams, also known as club teams, have grown in number, size, and influence. Increasingly, high school age athletes are being forced to choose between their school team and their club team. While popular news outlets have reported on this change (Ripley, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2013), there has been no academic review of this particular phenomenon. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to compare the experiences of students participating in school-based and club-based athletics in order to better understand opportunities and potential disparities/inequalities between these two approaches to athletics. The identification-commitment model (Marsh & Kleitman) and the social inequality gap reduction model (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002) served as the lenses through which data was analyzed. Coaches, Parents, and Student-Athletes were individually interviewed or participated in focus groups. Three major findings emerged. First, winning and losing have taken on different meanings between high school and club teams. Second, athletes on both high school and club teams were able to develop a form of social capital (Coleman, 1987), however, only high school athletes saw an associated academic benefit. Finally, whereas high school athletes were able to participate with little monetary investment, the costs associated with club teams were very high and access to financial assistance was either not available or was not well-known. Implications of these findings and general recommendations as well as recommendations for parents, athletes, high school, and club officials are discussed.

Acknowledgements

There were many times over the last four years that I doubted if I would ever get to this point. However, as the Jesus reminded us, “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). Faith and support from various people has allowed me to get to this point. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I take this time to acknowledge the many people that have made this possible.

First and foremost, I would like to thank all of the members of my family, beginning with my mother – Kathryn. Mom, it is often said that your mother is always your mother, no matter how old you are. This is certainly true in my case. As a child, you did everything possible to provide opportunities for me and to keep me firmly grounded. As an adult, you never let me be complacent. Without ever being pushy, you gently encouraged me to continue my education and seek the highest possibilities. I am certain that I would not have pushed myself to the doctorate level without your prompting.

Rian, your love and support has been invaluable. From the planning phase through completion, you have been patient and supportive. You have been a sounding board and a proof-reader. You kept me focused when I was not and provided me with distractions when needed. I truly love and appreciate you and look forward to our future together.

Andrew, you’ve came into my life just at the time that I was undertaking this endeavor. Upon meeting you, I had no idea that you would adopt me and I would soon become a parent to a teenager. While you drive me absolutely crazy and did not necessarily make it easier for me to complete this degree, I truly believe I would be losing out if you weren’t in my life. I am proud to call you son and am very glad that you are able to celebrate this moment with me.

Radee and Jordan, you round out my immediate family. I appreciate your love and trust in me. I appreciate your support of me through this process. Please know that I am extremely

proud of both of you and your families. I am also glad that I have been able to be a part of your lives.

To all of my extended family, the Logans, Murphys, Tumultys, Cassidys, and Moughans, going back to our days in grandmom's and grandpop's cozy apartment, we have always had a lot of love and appreciation for one another. While we may not be as close as we once were, I share this great accomplishment with all of you and thank you for your support of me through the years.

Next, I would like to thank my St. Benedict's family. I have been a part of this community since I was 12 years old. There are so many special people that have come and gone through the years that I cannot even begin to thank everyone. Nevertheless, there are a few people that I believe deserve special mention here.

Fr. Mark, I'm not sure if I ever got to tell you how much I appreciated you and considered you a father-figure. I looked up to you from my earliest days at Benedict's. You were one of the smartest, kindest, and most loving individuals I have ever met. I am a better man for knowing you and thank you for all that you gave to me. I will always miss you.

Fr. Ed, Lamourt, Michelle, Duff, David, Candace, Onion, Russ, Mr. Greene and I'm sure others that I'm leaving out, thanks for being a part of my life. Thanks for pushing me when and / or allowing me the opportunity to push myself. Thanks for providing support me through this process and helping me to be a better educator and person.

To the students of St. Benedict's past and present, I will not try to name all those of you who have made such an impact on me over the years. However, I want you to know that I hope that I have passed on a fraction of the wisdom that I have learned from all of you. I can honestly say that I love my job because of all of you. To those of you with whom I've developed close,

lasting relationships, I'm so glad that to now be able to count you as a friend. To those of you who have been present through the dissertation process, who provided constant pressure and encouragement, I truly thank you for caring about me and my progress.

Next, I would like to thank my committee. Dr. Beth Rubin, you served as my advisor and committee chair. I enjoyed, greatly, the classes you taught. I was excited to have you as my advisor. I believe you provided just the right amount of guidance – allowing me to figure things out for myself while gently pointing in the right directions or pointing out things I was missing. I will be forever grateful. Dr. Ben Justice, I truly appreciated your class and your willingness to serve on my committee. Your insight and feedback was extremely helpful. Dr. Mike Panella, I have known you for many years in different capacities. I was honored that you accepted the invitation to be part of my committee and glad to be able to share this accomplishment with you.

To the faculty of the Rutgers Graduate School of Education and the members of the 2013 Ed.D. cohort. I truly thank all of you. I enjoyed my classes and all of the things I learned throughout the Ed.D process both from professors and classmates. Despite the pressures and amount of work, I have enjoyed this process and know that I am a better educator because of it. I would especially like to recognize Dr. Thea Abu El-Hajj. It was you who helped me to truly believe in myself and overcome my imposter syndrome. I learned so much from your classes and appreciate the tremendous confidence boost that I received from your feedback.

Jonathan, Mike, Khyati, Henaz, Kehinde and everyone else that I have worked with and gotten to know through Anytown, Lead For Diversity, Project Inclusion, and other programs, I developed my love, passion, and understanding of social justice education because of all of you. It has been a great pleasure and honor to work with all of you over the years and to learn from all

of you. I look forward to many more years of working together and learning from one another. Thanks to all of you.

To all of my friends and my Blessed Sacrament family, thank you for your support, encouragement and prayers. It feels great knowing that there has always been a support system behind me.

Thanks to the students, coaches, and parents who participated in this study. Upon beginning this study, I was not sure how interesting it would be. However, all of you gave of your time and insight to provide so much information. I was truly surprised at how well this all came together. Thanks for being willing to participate.

Thanks also to the Cedar Stars, Deep End Aquatics, and Total Force Wrestling Club organizations. I realize that there is some risk involved with allowing people to research your operations. However, that did not stop you from being willing to allow me in. I am grateful.

Finally, I would like to thank the funders and administrator of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship and the Samuel D. Proctor Scholarship at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education. Without the financial help of these scholarships, I am not sure that I would have been able to complete this degree.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Problem Statement and Research Questions	1
Problem Statement	1
Research Questions	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review	6
History of Youth Sport	7
Specialization, Privatization, and Commercialization of Youth Sport	10
The Research on High School Athletics	14
Capital	18
Theoretical Frameworks	22
Gaps in Literature	24
Chapter 3: Methodology	25
Working Definitions	25
Context and Participants	25
Data Collection	30
Researcher Positionality	34
Data Analysis	36
Validity	38
Chapter 4: Winning and Losing Have Different Meanings	40
Introduction	40
There Is No ‘I’ in Team, But There Is In Individual	43
Intensity	66
Chapter 5: Social Capital	79
Academics and Sports	80
The Student Athlete	80
The High School Benefit	89
The Relationship Aspect	96
Parental Role	102
Discussion	111
Chapter 6: Pay to Play	116
Investing In Youth Sports	117

Sacrifice and Stress	126
Financial Assistance	129
Discussion	139
Chapter 7: Overview of Study, Implications, Recommendations, Limitations, Conclusion	142
`Overview of Study	142
Implications	145
Recommendations for Moving Forward	147
Limitations of Study	150
Conclusion	151
References	153
Appendix A: Youth Interview Protocol	159
Appendix B: Coach’s Interview Protocol:	162
Appendix C: Parent Interview Protocol	166
Appendix D: Focus Group Guide	169

List of Tables

Table 1: Participant Information.....	28
Table 2: Data Collection Methods	33

Chapter 1: Problem Statement and Research Questions

Extracurricular and social activities may remain as the primary source of attachment to the school for students whose academic work is weak (Finn, 1989, p.129).

Problem Statement

Changes are happening in the world of youth sports and their consequences could be significant (Ripley, 2013; Longman, 2015; Fitzgerald 2013; Bowen & Hitt, 2013). For many years, high schools have served as the center of athletic life for teenagers across the country. The benefits and drawbacks of participation in high school sports have been examined in countless studies (Anderson, 1990; Bowen & Greene, 2012; Camp, 1990; Emmons; 1995; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Fritch, 1999; Guèvremont, Findlay, & Kohen, 2014; Jordan, 1999; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; McNeal, 1995; Shifrer, Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2012;). However, in recent years, there has been an increasing presence of privately-run, non-school based, youth club teams which seem to compete with high schools for their athletes (Ripley, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2013). While multiple news outlets nationwide have reported on this phenomenon, there are few, if any, academic studies investigating this shift and its potential impact on high schools and the student-athletes, especially those from low-income backgrounds.

Athletic activity in schools is extremely popular. In 2013-2014, just under 7.8 million students participated in high school sports nationwide. This represents the highest number of participants ever and continues a 22-year pattern of growth (NFHS, 2014). Other researchers have found that approximately 30% of students participate in some form of high school athletics (Cohen, Taylor, Zonta, Vestal, & Shuster, 2007). Sports have indeed become very important among American high school students. More than that, they have an important place in American society, even for those who do not participate. This is confirmed by the myriad of movies and

television shows that focus on high school sports teams or the culture that has developed around them; by the amount of money spent on high school sports in this country; and by the traditions and ceremonies held around athletic events.

Many school officials believe that athletics are critical to the academic and overall social development of students. While there are some conflicting data, most studies suggest that student athletes perform better academically (Holloway, 1999, Lipscomb, 2007), have fewer disciplinary issues (Guèvremont, Findlay, & Kohen, 2014; Zill, Westat & And, 1995), and identify more with school than non-participants (Finn, 1989, Marsh & Kleitman, 2002).

Most high schoolers see athletics as more than just a recreational activity. Participating in the right sport is often a means to a higher social standing in the community. In many places, parents, alumni, local business owners, and even teachers show favor to athletes – especially those who play in the big name sports of football and basketball. Teams become the center of many students' social lives with teammates becoming best friends. Many believe that sports will help their chances of getting into the college of their choice – or better, help to pay for college through scholarships.

Additionally, over the years most athletic programs in high schools have been offered at no charge (save fees that might be needed for personal equipment). This has allowed students from different socioeconomic backgrounds to have access to these opportunities. In response to increasing budget constraints, some schools have begun to move away from these fully funded programs. “Pay to play” teams have emerged at many high schools nationwide (Cook, 2012) requiring students to come up with at least part, if not all, of the money that it costs to have a team. With some schools charging students in excess of \$500 per sport, this has begun to change the landscape of high school athletics and the nature of who has access (Cook, 2012).

Nevertheless, public schools spend millions of dollars per year on high school athletics. One recent article noted, “The United States routinely spends more tax dollars per high-school athlete than per high-school math student—unlike most countries worldwide” (Ripley, 2013). In fact, the phenomenon of high school athletics is pretty unique to the United States. Few other countries regard schools as a primary sponsor and site for athletics. In other countries, sports are conducted by academies and clubs, completely independent of schools (Freeman, 1978). This being the case, we must ask if high schools are the right place for athletic programs in the first place. What benefits do students gain from participating in athletics *within* and not just *during* high school?

Not much is known about the benefits of non-school based, privately run youth club sports. Recent data has pointed to the idea that youth on these teams are happy and satisfied with their experience (Matz, 2014), but no studies have been conducted to understand whether or not the students who participate on club teams have the same types and rates of academic and disciplinary success as those who participate in high schools. Part of this challenge comes from the fact that until recently most students who participated in club programs also competed for their high schools. The more recent trend of students shunning their high schools in order to participate in their club program raises new questions that require attention. In addition, given the fact that these teams are private, often for-profit, organizations, there is little understanding of how available these opportunities are to youth of varying socioeconomic backgrounds.

Many writers have acknowledged the different forms of capital that can be derived from participation in high school sports. Bowen and Green (2012) noted the ways in which participation in high school athletics brings youth together with adults in formal and informal ways. In addition, high school sporting events tend to bring local parents together around a

common cause. This coming together of different families and generations has the ability to build social capital (Coleman, 1987) among students. Social capital can be defined as the “norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child’s growing up.” (Coleman, 1987, p.36) While Coleman noted the ways that students in religious schools built social capital by attending religious events with their parents and other adults, Bowen and Green (2012) considered how the same phenomenon exists around sports. More about the idea of building capital will be presented in the literature review.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to compare the experiences of students participating in school-based and club-based athletics in order to better understand opportunities and potential disparities/inequalities between these two approaches to athletics.

Research Questions

The primary research questions for this study will be:

- 1) What is the experience of urban high school students who participate only in privately-run club teams?
 - a. What academic, social, and developmental supports are provided to students participating in privately-run club teams?
 - b. What connections do they see or experience between the team and their academic and social life in school?
 - c. How does participation in these teams shape students’ access to or relationship with adults, other students, and/or community resources that allow students to better engage in/be more successful in school.
- 2) What is the experience for students of participation in school-based sports?

- a. What academic, social, and developmental supports are provided to students participating in school-based teams?
 - b. What connections do they see or experience between the team and their academic and social life in school?
 - c. How does participation in these teams shape students' access to or relationship with adults, other students, and/or community resources that allow students to better engage in/be more successful in school?
- 3) How do students who participate in both types of teams describe/understand differences and similarities between the two experiences?
- a. How do they describe the support from each type of team?
 - b. How do they compare the opportunities available through each type of team?
 - c. What are the benefits and drawbacks of each type of participation?
 - d. What are the challenges to participating in both teams?
 - e. What are the benefits of participating in both teams?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Gathering information about youth sports and the experiences of youth participating in them was somewhat complicated because of the wide-range of information available. Creating a methodology for this study was a challenge because little research has been done on the experiences of youth in the privately-run club teams. I conducted searches on EBSCO host of the Academic Search Premier, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), Family & Society Studies Worldwide, MAS Ultra – School Edition, MLA Directory of Periodicals, Newspaper Source Plus, Newswires, Primary Search, and Teacher Reference Center databases using various combinations of the following terms “high school athletics”, “high school sports”, “youth club sports”, “academy teams”, “elite teams”, “pay for play”, “extracurricular activities”, after-school activities”, “specialization of sport”, “history of youth sport, and “history of high school athletics”. These searches yielded many results. Sources were narrowed down by reviewing abstracts, key words, methods, and findings to determine which articles might be relevant. These terms were also used to search Google and Google Scholar yielding more results. Reference sections from these articles provided further sources, which will be used here.

This review of the literature is organized into five main sections. I begin by examining the history of youth sports to get a better understanding of how we have arrived at this point. With this understanding, I then highlight the changing nature of youth sports by focusing on the currently popular notion of sport specialization and the rise of the privatization and commercialization in youth sports. I continue with what the research has found about the benefits and drawbacks of high school athletics. I examine the concept of social, and other forms of, capital and how this relates to this study. I then conclude with a discussion of some of the other

major theoretical frameworks which have been used in these endeavors and the relevancy of this study.

History of Youth Sport

Youth sports in the United States developed differently than in any other country. Freeman (1978) explained that while examples of youth sports date back centuries, we saw the emergence of youth sports begin in a meaningful way in the mid-19th century. However, these programs were mostly localized and did not reach everyone. In the late 19th century and early 20th century sports among youth developed in a more prominent way for two main reasons (Freeman, 1978; Friedman 2013). First, sports were seen as a way to contain inner-city youth during their free time to keep them out of trouble (Wiggins, 2013). Second, sports were considered a way to integrate immigrant children into American values (Freeman, 1978, Friedman, 2013).

Progressive-era reforms brought about the introduction of child labor laws and the start of mass schooling. This changed the structure of how many youth spent their days. Instead of working, children were going to school. Once the school day ended, there was concern about what would happen if inner-city, mostly immigrant, youth did not have some sort of structured activity to engage in. As a result, a significant movement began to develop parks and playgrounds and provide opportunities for kids to play sports for recreation (Jable, 1979). Parks and playgrounds sprang up in various cities across the country in a relatively short period of time. As immigration continued to rise to new levels, many people saw youth sports as a way help young people more fully integrate into American society (Friedman, 2013).

Sports in the United States were seen as being open to anyone. This was very different than the system of sports that was being developed in England at the same time. There, sports

were maintained for the elite class of society. As such, sporting institutions in England developed with a single purpose and track. Sports were for the elite and there was a system organizing sports throughout the country. The fact that the United States opened sports to anyone, likely explains the quick rise to international dominance. The lack of a single-focused sporting agency meant that the U.S. was not developing great athletes within a system; instead the U.S. was gathering talent from amongst the general population (Freeman, 1978) “There was, in essence, a single philosophy of sport in England as its sporting institutions developed, while in the U.S. the school sports groups were in competition with the non-school groups, often fighting over the same group of athletes.” (Freeman, 1978, p.5)

Nevertheless, school sporting leagues began to develop across the country (Wiggins, 2013). In what was the most far-reaching plan that America had seen, the Public School Athletic League was formed in New York City in 1903. Luther Gulick, its founder, believed that

Group loyalty becomes team loyalty, and team loyalty enhances school loyalty, for the spirit of loyalty and morality demonstrated publicly spreads to all the students, not just those who compete. ‘In an institution where the athletic spirit is strong,’ maintained Gulick, ‘school spirit is strong and school spirit is likely to be of high quality.’ (Jable, 1979, p.2)

This philosophy may have influenced some of the theoretical frameworks that have guided research into school sports over the years as will be discussed later.

Through this time colleges and universities, in efforts to recruit students, began expanding their athletic programs. Regional leagues were developed. These started out as sport specific. However, it was not long until there was a recognized need to provide more organization and structure to the entire system. From this the National Collegiate Athletic

Association (NCAA) and many regional athletic conferences were formed (Freeman, 1978). High schools followed suit. While it took a longer time before any national organization was formed for high schools, local and regional leagues developed in an effort to bring more structure to the individual programs.

Soon, though, elementary schools decided that sports did not fit into their mission (Friedman, 2013). Educators and professional organizations became increasingly concerned about the emphasis on winning, overtraining, physical and emotional injuries, and inadequate coaching. These organizations pushed for legislation to regulate the industry and issued position statements condemning many of the privatized athletic programs that had emerged and the state of youth sports in general. However, none of this slowed the progression or direction of youth sports (Wiggins, 2013). As a result many elementary schools began dropping sports from their services. This left students who were interested in playing sports at an early age to find opportunities elsewhere. In most cases, this meant going to a local community organization that may or may not charge for the opportunity (Friedman, 2013). In the wake of the depression, most community organizations that offered free programs lost their funding. This caused nearly all programs to institute fees for participation. Suddenly, many lower-income youth – the very ones that many of these programs were originally designed to help – found themselves unable to participate because they could not afford the fees. As a result, lower income youth had to wait until reaching middle school or high school to participate.

There (were) opportunities in school-sponsored activities in middle school and high school, but without specialized training at a young age, it (was) difficult to compete with those who have had such training. (Friedman, 2013, p.48).

This trend seems to be repeating itself in the current atmosphere of ‘pay for play’ teams, although now those opportunities are being removed even from the high schools.

After World-War II there was an explosion of youth sport teams that emerged (Friedman, 2013). This became even more pronounced as the 1970s approached and opportunities for girls began to sprout up (Wiggins, 2013).

However, attitudes in the U.S. began to change in the 1980s and with them, so did the world of youth sports. Youth sports became professionalized (Friedman, 2013), privatized, and commercialized (Coakley, 2010a). These changes came about in the midst of larger ideological shifts in American society which emphasized that government was the problem and not the solution. As a result of this, much funding was removed from parks and recreation departments (Coakley, 2010b). Similar to what happened after the depression, this led to the cancellation of many recreation leagues for youth. Instead privately owned club teams and organizations began leasing the now available field and recreation space to sponsor their own programs (Coakley, 2010b). For the first time, youth sports became a career track and the primary source of income for some adults (Friedman, 2013; Coakley, 2010b). This meant that these entrepreneurs (Friedman, 2013) – coaches and program owners – needed to convince parents paying dues that participating year-round would be the only way their child would be as successful as possible. They dangled enhanced skills, college acceptances, college scholarships, and possibly even professional play as carrots to entice parents (Coakley, 2010b). For the most part, this movement has been wildly successful and led to the current trend of sport specialization.

Specialization, Privatization, and Commercialization of Youth Sport

Until recently, many students participating in youth athletics, at any age, participated in multiple sports (Coakley, 2010b; Friedman, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2013). Being a ‘three-sport’ athlete

in high school was celebrated (Bruno, 2015). Earning as many varsity letters as possible during a time in school was considered a major accomplishment.

Many psychologists, sociologists, physical educators, pediatricians, and youth sport advocates believe that this is an appropriate and healthy way to develop as a young athlete. The overwhelming recommendations of nearly every professional agency is that children entering the world of youth sports – at any age, but especially when very young – should be “samplers” (Bodey, Judge, & Hoover, 2013) or “generalists” (Friedman, 2013) playing a variety of sports. Most of the research has shown that athletes should begin by playing multiple sports and if they choose to specialize, consider doing so once they reach high school. By this time, it is believed, that the athlete will have developed skills and muscles in a more-rounded manner that will allow them to be more fully developed as a person. In addition to their physical development it is believed that there are greater psychological and social benefits (Bodey, Judge, & Hoover, 2013). According to a position statement of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education:

For young people under age 15, year-round specialization in a single sport is more often associated with developmental risk than rewards. Positive physical, psychological, and social development is most likely to occur when young people participate in multiple sports and informal physical activities throughout childhood and early adolescence. (Coakley, Sheridan, Howard, Graham, & Faidenbaum, 2010)

However, recent trends have deviated from this recommendation. Youth now, more and more, are being encouraged to specialize in one sport from an early age (Coakley, 2010a; Coakley, 2010b; Friedman, 2013; Hyman, 2012; Bodey, Judge, & Hoover, 2013; Jayanathi, Pnkhanm, Dugas, Patrick, & LaBella, 2013). The push for the specialization of sport has its roots

in the explosion of privately-run, year-round, youth sporting teams which has become an industry unto itself (Coakley, 2010b). Coaches and program owners who now look to youth sports as their primary source of income, have made a significant effort to convince parents and young athletes that it would be in their best interest to choose one sport, and one team, and play only that sport. According to these coaches, doing so will increase a young athlete's skills and talents in the sport, increase their chances of getting admitted to college, increase their chances of getting a college scholarship, and could even mean a chance at playing the sport professionally someday. In the shorter term, for younger athletes, playing year-round on a club team could help elevate the athlete's level of play to be able to make the elite or travel team and could, if they chose to do so, help a younger athlete earn a spot on their varsity team at school (Coakley, 2010a) – although as we will see later, even this is being more and more discouraged. It should be noted, that there is no apparent research that supports any of the claims made above (Bodey, Judge, & Hoover, 2013).

Similar to what happened in the middle of the 20th century, this trend toward specialization and privatization is raising concerns. Overuse injuries are on the rise (Bodey, Judge, & Hoover, 2013; Jayanthi et al. 2013). There is widespread belief that because young athletes are only using the same muscles in the same way all the time, that their bodies actually get into a “developmental rut” (Coakley, 2010a, p.15). In a similar way, participation in only one sport has the potential to stifle the psychological and social development of the young athlete as they only learn to make certain types of decisions, deal with specific coaches and players, and have limited time to do anything outside of their specialized sport (Bodey, Judge, & Hoover, 2013; Jayanathi et al, 2013; Coakley et al., 2013). For example, “Long-term, year-round specialization that is now the norm in soccer puts young people in the situation where their sense

of self and self-esteem is tied exclusively to their performance and identity as a soccer player.” (Coakley, 2010a) The call to specialization is leading to increased burnout and dropout from sports at younger ages (Jayanathi et al., 2013; Coakley et al., 2013). According to one report, 45% of students who start a sport quit it, many by the end of 9th grade (Kelley & Carchia, 2013). “A youth sport system that emphasizes early specialization is organized to cut out late bloomers, (and) burn out early bloomers.” (Coakley, 2010a, p.15)

Along with the specialization of sport has come the significant commercialization of youth sport. Hyman (2012) noted in his book *The Most Expensive Game in Town: The Rising Cost of Youth Sports and the Toll on Today's Families* that youth sports has become the mechanism fueling a much larger industry. Private teams and camps are perhaps the most obvious part of this industry. However, tournament and competition promoters, merchandisers, private leagues, media outlets, travel agencies and recruiting services are all examples of different parts of the industry that have become a influences over the world of youth sports (Hyman, 2012). Nationally, major companies such as Nike, Gatorade, ESPN, and IMG have all invested millions of dollars with the expectation of even more in return. As such, youth sports have become less about the youth and more about adults (Hyman, 2012; Coakley, 2010).

The implications of this privatized, commercialized world of youth sports on youth from low-income families should not be overlooked (Wiggins, 2013). Involvement in these privatized teams can cost some families up to \$20,000 per year if they have an elite athlete (Sagas & Cunningham, 2014). In addition to the costs of participating on the team, players (and their families) are responsible for all expenses related to equipment, travel, food, and lodging at games and tournaments, daily transportation expenses to and from practices, subscriptions to relevant sports magazines or websites, and possibly access to recruiting services (Hyman, 2012; Friedman

2013). Even for middle or upper-middle class families, this commitment can begin to stretch family resources in unhealthy ways (Coakley, 2010b). For low-income families, unless the athlete is extremely talented or financial assistance is provided, the cost of these programs is likely to be prohibitive (Wiggins, 2013; Hyman 2012; Coakley, 2010b). One report indicates that the biggest indicator of whether children start sports at an early age is if the parents have a household income of \$100,000 or more (Kelley & Carchia, 2013). Hence, many children from lower-income families may find themselves left behind.

The Research on High School Athletics

Previous research into extracurricular activities has generally broken these activities into categories: athletic, academic, student government, and performing arts (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). Although athletics certainly receive more attention from our society, Fredricks and Eccles (2006) found that participation in any activity was likely to be associated with greater academic success than non-participation. Indeed, most schools provided a range of structured extracurricular activities (Gilman, Meyers, & Perez, 2004) such as band, newspaper, drama, dance, choir, student government, and others. These provided opportunities for students to learn and grow beyond the classroom. While acknowledging that some of the success may be the result of pre-existing personality traits and societal factors, Fredricks and Eccles (2006) still concluded that participation in high school activities has a positive return for the students.

Specifically, participation in organized sports was shown to help students with general health and body weight (Sabo & Veliz, 2008). In addition, participation in sports has been found to improve popularity (Sabo & Veliz, 2008), improve academic achievement (Sabo & Veliz, 2008; Jordan, 1999; Holloway, 1999), improve self-esteem (Sabo & Veliz, 2008; Jordan, 1999)

allow for increased interaction with positive adults (Davis, O'Brien, Bechtel, & Beech, 2013; Jordan, 1999), and create opportunities for fellowship with other students (Davis et al., 2013; Guévremont et. Al, 2014). Marsh and Kleitman (2002) found that among the different categories of activities, athletics had the most positive impact on post-secondary outcomes. While some of these results refer to any sport participation, most of these studies focused on participation in high school sports.

Cohen, et. Al. (2007) performed a quantitative study which focused on youth participation in risky behaviors. They studied rates of juvenile arrests, births, and sexually transmitted diseases in relation to the number of athletic programs offered by the local schools. Their goal was to determine any relationship between participation in sports and risky behaviors. They found that there was a clear correlation between the size of the school, the number of disadvantaged students and the number of sports teams offered. Schools that were smaller and had higher numbers of disadvantaged students had fewer sports offerings. Furthermore, they found that in areas where schools offered more sports programs there were decreased rates of teen pregnancy and juvenile arrests. Despite the fact that they did not find any significant difference in the rates of sexually transmitted diseases, their findings suggest that students would benefit from more opportunities to participate in high school.

The most common criticism of high school athletics seemed to stem from the idea that athletic programs tend to be overemphasized and time consuming. This, the argument stated, distracted from the main focus of school – academics. Bowen and Green (2012) believed that this concern can be traced back to the work of Coleman (1961) and the “resource trade-off theory”. This theory assumed that there was a fixed and finite amount of resources (money, talent, time, energy) available to schools. More of these resources focused on athletics meant less

that were focused on academics. Coleman (1961) seemed most concerned with the idea that it was impossible to strike a balance between the two. One would always win over the other (Bowen & Green, 2012). However, this theory has not really proven itself to be true. In fact, most of the research, as I will demonstrate below, indicated the opposite to be true. Athletic participation, in most cases, was positively associated with academic performance.

One way to establish the effectiveness of athletics participation was to investigate academic performance of athletes while ‘in-season’ and that of athletes when they were ‘out-of-season’ Emmons (1995) did just this. He studied the composite mean grades in English, math, science, and social studies of 330 students from 11 New England high schools. He found that students performed just as well in-season as they did out-of-season. This implied that creating more time for students did not necessarily equate to better academic performance. He challenged ‘no pass, no play’ rules by suggesting that students need more support, encouragement, and incentives to achieve rather than restricting participation.

Anderson (1990) surveyed African-American students from the football team and students not engaged in activities at a public school in New York City. He hypothesized that African-American students would suffer academically from participation and from unrealistic aspirations of the next levels of athletics (beyond high school). Yet, what he found was that there was no significant difference in grade point averages between the participants and the non-participants. He also found that their aspirations to be great athletes were not hindrances to their academic performance. Moreover, his findings agree with Emmons (1995) that more time did not automatically lead to better grades. Based on the fact that non-participants, those with more available time on a daily basis, were not demonstrating greater academic success than participants, he questioned whether or not athletes would actually perform better if they did not

spend as much time in sports. He suggested that removing students from athletics is unlikely to yield better test scores.

Overall, the research suggested that sports participation helped academic progress. Boatright (2009), Camp (1990), Holland and Andre (1987), Jordan (1999), Marsh and Kleitman (2002), Shulruf, Tumen and Tolley (2008), and Siliker and Quirk (1997) all consistently found that athletic participation in school, more than participation in any other activities, resulted in higher grades or grade point averages. Lipscomb (2007) found that athletic participation was associated with a 2% increase in math and science testing scores and any participation in activities (athletic or non-athletic) resulted in a 5% increase in the likelihood of attaining a bachelor's degree. Even more significant, Gerber (1996) found that these positive relationships between extracurricular activities and academic achievement were stronger for school-based activities than they were for out-of-school activities.

It is worth noting that there may be some problems with the research into sports and academic success. Holland and Andre (1987) stressed that the sampling pools may not have been adequately controlled for in these studies. In other words, it was unclear if the academic success of student-athletes resulted from their participation in athletics, or if it was that more motivated students were choosing to be involved in athletics. Therefore, these motivated students would be academically successful with or without the team. Given the fact that many of these studies took place within a single school or district, generalizability continues to be a challenge. Additionally parental academic achievement and socioeconomic status have seldom been controlled for in these studies. Therefore, correlations between athletic achievement and academic success may be more strained than the literature would suggest. Nevertheless, the overwhelming body of literature has suggested that there were academic benefits to athletic participation in schools.

Assuming that we accept this correlation, the challenge, as Jordan (1999) and Cohen et al. (2007) found, was that the number of students who were involved in interscholastic sports was relatively low across the country. Cohen et al. (2007) found that in schools with fewer than 13 sports offerings, approximately 14% of students participated. In schools with more than 16 sports programs, 31% participated. Jordan (1999) further found that only about 21% of 10th grade students reported being involved in team sports with another 15% involved in individual sports. These numbers decreased for African-Americans to 18% and 10% respectively. “This suggests that whatever positive outcomes might have accrued from sports participation, few students realized those benefits” (p.9).

Guévremont, Findlay, and Kohen (2014) studied the differences in overall outcomes for students participating in school sponsored activities and those participating in non-school sponsored activities. Their findings suggested that participation in any activities, school or non-school, promoted positive youth development. In an odd result, they found that athletes who participated in school sponsored sports were more likely to have failed a class in the last two years. However, they acknowledge that this finding was contrary to most other research in this area and encourage further study about this.

If we can assume, then, that there is some correlation between high school athletic participation and academic success, it would be helpful to have a better understanding of the possible reasons for this success. Bowen and Green (2012) and Fritch (1999) suggested that much of this success might be due to increased social capital.

Capital

Much of the debate around youth sports had directly or indirectly centered on the idea of capital. As mentioned before, Coleman (1987) put forth the concept of social capital as a means

of explaining why students in Catholic schools tended to do better academically and have fewer behavioral problems than their public school counterparts. Social capital was defined as “the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child’s growing up. Social capital exists within the family, but also outside the family, in the community.” (Coleman, 1987, p.36). In the community, social capital is the involvement of one adult in the activities of someone else’s child. This could be a teacher, minister, coach, mentor, volunteer, or other. Social capital helped to explain the differences between Catholic and other schools because religious events brought together youth and adults from different families. These interactions served as a reinforcement of parental values in the school and conversely of school values by the parents. The notion of social capital could probably be most greatly associated with the African proverb that ‘it takes a village to raise a child.’ In other words, having access to different adults who share common goals and values is extremely beneficial to overall student development. Moreover, Coleman (1987) found that this was especially true for children who came from homes that lacked this social capital. Essentially, the community created by the school – in conjunction with the parents – was able to overcome the obstacle of parents who were struggling at home.

Fritch (1999), building off of Coleman, suggested that “Social capital refers to the resources available to actors that result from their interaction within a social network. These are common in communities where people know each other, trust each other, exchange information, and reinforce community norms.” (p.3) Bowen and Green (2012) extend this definition by adding that social capital “refers to the strength of social networks and connections in helping people to achieve their goals.” (p.5) Therefore, the resources of people that are available to and assist students in achieving their goals can be referred to as their social capital. Students develop

greater social capital when they have more access to adults who have their interests at heart and have the resources to help.

Coleman (1961) apparently never considered the role of athletics in building social capital (Bowen & Green, 2012). Remember that Coleman was the one who put forth the ‘resource trade-off theory’ that suggested that athletics were pulling resources from academics. If Coleman considered the role of social capital in athletics, would he feel the same way (Bowen and Green, 2012)? Athletic events in schools have ways of bringing together parents, teachers and school staff, and children – not just the ones playing on the field. When these parents and staff come together, they are not just watching a game, they are discussing school business and the lives of the students in the school (Fritch, 1999). Sports help to promote student development and social ties among students, parents and schools (Broh, 2002; Jordan, 1999).

Sabo and Veliz (2008) conducted a study for the Women’s Sports Foundation in which they found that girls, even more than boys, experienced benefits from sports participation. Family satisfaction levels were higher for both genders as reported by both the students and the parents. Youth and their parents had better communication and spent more time together as a result of organized sports participation – social capital. They also documented the physical, mental, and emotional health benefits from sports.

Can the benefits of social capital only be developed from high school sports or can club sports provide the same experience? There is no direct research available on this at this time. Certainly, we know that youth who participate in club sports typically have a lot of access to their parents and other team adults – including coaches and other parents. However, Coleman (1987) initially posited that the reason that social capital was so much more meaningful in Catholic schools than independent schools was because Catholic schools are community based.

His theory was that because independent schools – like club teams – draw from a much wider population, the parents may not be able to come together in support of the students in the same way and therefore the sense of community would be broken down. If it is true that school-based athletic events build up social capital for students because school staff and parents come together and can discuss community/school based issues (Fritch, 1999; Bowen & Green, 2012) then club teams may not provide this same opportunity as the players and parents come from different communities and different schools. While they may build up a “competitive kid capital” (Friedman 2013), this may not have the same effect on academic achievement as social capital seems to.

Competitive Kid Capital refers to “the lessons and skills that parents hope their children gain from participating in competitive activities” (Friedman, 2013, p.17). Friedman (2013) looked to extend the work of Lareau (2011) who found that the structured life that middle class parents set up for their children leads to a certain cultural capital. This cultural capital helps students navigate different social situations (schools, for example) because of the opportunities granted to them by their parents. She posited that this cultural capital provided an advantage to middle-class students that was not present for lower-income students who may not have had access to this same form of capital.

Competitive kid capital, then suggests that youth who are engaged in competitive ventures from a young age may have access to certain lessons and skills that are missing for youth that have not participated. This theory, similar to Lareau (2011), implies that youth from middle and upper middle-class homes are benefitting from opportunities that are available to them, but not available to people who cannot afford them. For Friedman (2013) this was the ability to play for privatized competitive sports teams from a young age.

Theoretical Frameworks

I have already identified or made reference to several of the models which have been used to frame this research over the years. What follows here is a brief, but more specific view of each of those models and how they apply.

Identification-participation model. Students who participate in school will find themselves more closely identifying with the school and therefore be more willing to accept school values and norms (Finn, 1989). This model follows directly from the Social Capital (Coleman, 1987) theory that greater access to adults outside of the classroom, in less-formal ways, would lead to greater investment on the part of the student (Jordan, 1999). This investment in turn would lead to greater success in school (Holloway, 1999).

Zero-sum model. The zero sum model is traced back to Coleman (1961) and his belief that the resources available to schools were fixed and finite. Therefore, anything being put towards athletics is being taken away from academics. While this model is consistently referred to by critics of high-school athletics, there seems to be little research-based support for this model (Bowen & Green, 2012).

Threshold model. The threshold model supposes that while there seem to be benefits to participating in school-based activities, there is a threshold at which over-participation can lead to diminishing returns (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). Students who participate in a few activities may experience the academic benefits, but those who participate in too many activities may experience negative academic results.

Developmental model. The developmental model, proposed by Holland and Andre (1987) was designed to be an alternative to the zero-sum model. Holland and Andre (1987) proposed that participating in extracurricular activities was beneficial because students had many

positive non-academic outcomes and these may even lead to positive academic outcomes. It should be noted, though, that their theory was not focused on the more narrowly defined academic outcomes about which Coleman (1961) was concerned (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002).

Identification-commitment model. Whereas the identification-participation model focused on any participation within the school, the identification-commitment model focuses more specifically on extracurricular activity participation and its effects. Marsh & Kleitman (2002) found that even though a student may participate in school functions, it did not have the same academic benefits as being involved in a formal extracurricular activity. They also found that working a part-time job had a negative effect on academic performance.

Social inequality gap reduction model. This model suggests that extracurricular school activities have the ability to reduce the gap between socioeconomically advantaged students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. This model is based off of the participation-identification and the identification-commitment models, as well as the theory of social capital, in proposing that disadvantaged students are likely to benefit more from access to extracurricular activities in schools than those who enter with advantage (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). In this way, activities can serve the purpose of reducing some of the inequities in society. In their own study, Marsh and Kleitman (2002) found that in some areas students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who participated in school-based extracurricular activities experienced greater academic success. In other areas, the differences in success seemed to be non-significant. However, they point out, that there were no areas for which the effect of academic success was greater for students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds than for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This lends some support to this model (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002).

For this study, I will use the identification-commitment and the social inequality gap reduction models as the primary lenses for analyzing data.

Gaps in Literature

As noted in the review above, while there is significant research that informs our understanding of the benefits of athletics in schools, there is little that helps us understand what happens when students participate in teams outside of schools. The little evidence that we do have suggests that out of school participation does not have the same academic benefits as in-school participation (Gerber, 1996; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Finn, 1989). As the number of students being pressured to specialize and commit only to private non-school based teams increases, it is important for us to explore this issue more deeply. Especially at issue are the questions of social capital and inequality. If school-based athletics have been a means of building social capital which is considered to lead to more successful academic outcomes, is that social capital reproducible by participating in club teams? If it is, and more sports move from high schools to private clubs, what happens to the students from lower socioeconomic families that may not be able to participate on these teams? That is the purpose of this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study sought to identify and understand how social capital may be affected by participating in club sports as opposed to high school sports, and to identify any differences in opportunity that may exist between the two approaches. A qualitative approach is the best way to reach deeper understandings of social and human conditions (Creswell, 2009), and thus was used for this study. I used a combination of semi-structured interviews (Patton, 1990) and focus groups (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990) as well as observations (Patton, 1990) and a review of relevant documents (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990) to gather data. All of the data was thoroughly reviewed and coded to identify trends and themes.

Working Definitions

Academy Team – Refers to privately-run elite soccer teams. For the purposes of this study, academy is used interchangeably with club.

Club Team – Refers any privately-run team. For the purposes of this study club is used interchangeably with academy.

High School Team – Refers to any team sponsored by the high school.

Context and Participants

A criterion sample of students, parents, and coaches was selected from the community of St. Benedict's Prep in Newark, NJ or affiliated club programs.

School and community context. Newark is a major city located in the northeast section of New Jersey. According to the US Census Bureau, Newark is a city of approximately 280,000 residents. The median household income was \$33,139. Just under 30% of Newark residents live in poverty. Newark was made up of approximately 52% Black/African American residents, 34% Latino/Hispanic residents, 12% White residents, and small percentages of Asian, American

Indian, and bi-racial/multi-racial residents. While 72% of residents age 25 or older hold at least high school diploma or higher, only 13% of Newark residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

Located in the heart of Newark, NJ, St. Benedict's is a school comprised of 550 boys in grades 7-12. The majority of the students are Black/African American or Latino (65% and 25%, respectively), but there remains a significant number (approximately 10%) of White students with a nominal percentage of students who are Asian. While 45% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch – according to the government standards, approximately 80% of the students receive financial aid for the tuition of \$12,500 per year. There are 45 full time faculty members / administrators and 6 part time faculty members, along with approximately 25 other staff positions. The researcher is a full time faculty member/administrator.

St. Benedict's has a long and successful athletic program. The school sponsors 13 varsity sports. Most of these teams have junior varsity and freshman teams associated with them. In some sports there are teams for 7th and 8th graders. The school's soccer team has won 10 national championships over the last 20 years, including 3 of the last 4 years. The basketball team is routinely ranked in the top 20 in the nation. The swimming team has produced an Olympic gold medalist and several college level swimmers. The currently top-ranked college distance runner was a member of the school's cross-country and track and field teams. The track and field, wrestling, and fencing teams have produced several all-Americans. The school believes so heavily in the value of athletics (and activities in general) that all students are required to participate in one or more activities each year. For most students, the only way to fulfill this requirement is to participate on a sports team.

In an effort to serve more people than just those that attend the school, St. Benedict's has partnered with a club soccer program and a club swimming program that use the facilities at the school for a fee, but also offer special pricing and benefits to St. Benedict's students.

Because of the level of athletic success, it should be no surprise that there are many students in the school who participate in both club and high school sports programs. There are also several faculty members who coach both for St. Benedict's and for private clubs. In recent years there has also been an increase in the number of students who have opted out of sports at the school in favor of their club team with whom they have participated for years.

Participants. I purposefully selected (Creswell, 2009) different types of participants for the study in order to provide varied perspectives on the phenomena. .

Faculty. Four faculty members who were both high school and club coaches were interviewed to better understand their experience of each world and provide more of a glimpse into how they, as coaches, provided for the social capital of their athletes as well as how they addressed the needs of those who cannot afford the team fees. These coaches were also asked to share documents that might help to better inform how their teams worked and the supports available in their programs.

Students. Eleven students participated in the study. These students were in three different groups. First were four students from St. Benedict's who competed only for St. Benedict's. They did not participate on any club teams. All members of this group participated in the same focus group. Second, were two students who only participated on club teams. These students did not participate on any St. Benedict's teams at this time. One of these students was attending a different school but transferred from St. Benedict's just prior to this study. These students were individually interviewed because we were unable to find a mutually agreed upon meeting time.

Third were five students from St. Benedict's Prep who competed in both school and club teams. One of these students was interviewed individually. The rest participated in a focus group.

Parents. Five parents of some of the participating youth were selected randomly. Parents were asked to lend their views on the current phenomenon and explain their experiences with the different teams as a parent.

Demographic information about the participants is displayed in table 1.

Table 1

Participant Information

Name	Role	Sport	HS/Club	Race/Ethnicity	SES	
Coach Denis	Coach	Swimming	HS/Club	African American/ Native American	Middle Class	
Coach Olla	Coach	Soccer	HS/Club	Ghanian	Working Class	
Coach Jackson	Coach	Soccer	HS/Club	American	Middle Class	
Coach Owen	Coach	Wrestling	HS/Club	Latino	Middle Class	
Frank	Athlete	Soccer	Club	Colombian-American		1.6
Alex	Athlete	Swimming	HS/Club	African-American		2.38
Leon	Athlete	Swimming	HS/Club	African-American		2.92
Noel	Athlete	Wrestling	HS/Club	Latino		2.17
Devon	Athlete	Wrestling	HS	African-American		2.64
Jared	Athlete	Wrestling	HS	African-American		3.27
William	Athlete	Wrestling	HS/Club	Cuban-American		3.8

Simon	Athlete	Swimming	HS	African-American		3.87
Douglas	Athlete	Swimming	HS	African-American		3.23
Josue	Athlete	Soccer	Club	Latino	Middle – Upper Class	3.04
Johnny	Athlete	Soccer	HS/Club	Latino	Middle – Upper Class	3.0
Mr. Smith	Parent	Swimming	HS	African-American	Middle	
Mrs. Smith	Parent	Swimming	HS	African-American	Middle	
Mr. Rios	Parent	Soccer	Club	Colombian	Middle	
Mr. Gomez	Parent	Wrestling	HS/Club	Cuban	Lower	
Mr. Cruz	Parent	Soccer	HS/Club	Dominican – Hispanic	Middle	

Recruitment. Four coaches from St. Benedict’s Prep, who also coach club teams, were personally asked to participate. In order to obtain a broader understanding and avoid any bias related to a particular team or sport, these coaches represented three different sports. Coaches were asked to provide a list of athletes from their school and club teams from which youth participants were selected. Potential youth participants were contacted in person or by email. Parents of potential participants were informed of the study and the role of their children. Parents were required to consent to their child’s participation. Potential parent participants had the purposes of the study explained to them prior to being asked to participate.

Since St. Benedict's is an all-male institution, all of the youth and coach participants in this study were male. All youth participants were of high school age. There were no stipulations with regards to race or class.

Data Collection

In this study, I employed a variety of qualitative methods to understand and find patterns within students' personal experiences and make note of any patterns of experiences. These methods included interviews, focus groups, observations, and a review of websites. Coaches were individually interviewed. A couple of students were interviewed individually, before conducting focus groups to help provide some context. Other students were then asked to participate in focus groups with students from their particular sample. Follow up interviews were not needed.

Team meetings, pre and post-game speeches and activities, practices, and competitions were observed to note similarities and differences between the high school and club teams.

Coaches were asked to provide documents that were given to athletes and families to better understand how the teams operated and the type of support provided to the athletes. For this review, coaches directed the researcher to the information on the respective teams' websites.

The data collection methods are outlined more specifically in Table 2 below.

Interviews. According to Patton (1990), interviewing in a qualitative study is used to understand what is in, not on, someone's mind. "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe" (p.278). In an attempt to better understand what people are experiencing, they were asked to participate in face to face interviews (Creswell, 2009) using a semi-structured interview guide (Patton, 1990) to ensure that all topics are asked of each person. Interviews lasted approximately 60 – 90 minutes each. Most of these interviews and all

of the focus groups were conducted in a conference room at St. Benedict's Prep. One interview was conducted on the sideline of the soccer field at St. Benedict's Prep during a Cedar Stars Academy practice. All interviews were designed to understand the personal opinions and experiences of the various individuals and groups. The table below outlines more specifically the focus of the questions for each group of participants.

Focus groups. Focus groups allow researchers to gain quality data through interviews from a larger sample in a short, 1-1.5 hour, period of time. The use of focus groups in this study also helped to provide some controls as members of the group challenged each other when their past experiences were not the same (Patton, 1990).

All participants were assured that their participation in the groups will have no bearing on their standing on any team or in the school and instead were used for information purposes only. The researcher was actively involved in the focus groups serving as both the facilitator and the note taker. Groups were held in a conference room at St. Benedict's Prep. They were audio recorded for accuracy. The researcher made use of field notes to capture data not able to be heard on the recordings such as body language or general mood of the group.

Observations. "The purpose of observational data is to describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in the setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspective of those observed." (Patton, 1990, p.202)

Team practices, meetings, and competitions were observed before and after the focus groups and interviews to gather information first-hand about how teams operate. Athletes, coaches, and parents were observed. The researcher was the primary observer. He was overt about the observation, but was not a participant in the activities (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher observed a practice and a competition of the SBP soccer team and the SBP wrestling team. He also observed a practice of the Cedar Stars Academy soccer team and the Total Force Wrestling club. Timing of the data collection did not allow for the observation of competitions for Cedar Stars Academy or Total Force Wrestling. The observations were conducted between November of 2016 and January of 2017 in normal practice or competition settings.

Website/Document Review. Documents are a valuable source of data for a researcher (Patton, 1990). “Program records and documents serve a dual purpose: 1) they are a basic source of information about program decisions and background, or activities and processes, and 2) they can give the evaluator ideas about important questions to pursue through more direct observations and interviewing.” (Patton, 1990, p.233) For the purpose of gaining a better understanding of how club teams work, coaches were asked to share specific documents about the operations of their teams – all documents given to players or parents, mission statements, promotional documents, team and player records that identify their progress on the team and, if available, in school. St. Benedict’s was asked to provide academic and behavioral records for students involved in the study in an effort to see if the academic claims seem to be supported by the data.

All coaches in this study referred the researcher to their team’s website for any written information. No documents were ever shared or reviewed. However, a review of the teams’ websites was conducted in an effort to gain a better understanding of the team.

A summary of data collection methods and their connection to the research questions is displayed in table 2.

Table 2

Data Collection Methods

Sample	#	Method	Focus	Research Question
Coaches	4	Interview / Website Review / Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of each type of program • Relationship to school • Academic Social Supports provided • Benefits and Drawbacks of each type of program • Financing participation 	1, 2, 3
Club Players	2	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation for only participating in club • Benefits and Drawbacks of club participation • Relationship of club team to school / Academics • Social / Academic support received from club coaches/parents/participants • Challenges specific to club participation 	1
HS Players	4	Focus Group / Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation for only participating in HS • Benefits and Drawbacks of HS participation • Relationship of HS team to school / Academics • Social / Academic support received from HS coaches/parents/participants 	2

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges specific to HS participation 	
Both Players	5	Interview / Focus Group / Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivation for participating in both Benefits and Drawbacks of participation in both teams Relationship of each team to school / Academics Social / Academic support received from club coaches/parents/participants vs. HS coaches/parents/participants Challenges specific to both forms of participation Financing participation 	3
Parents	5	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parental experience with each type of team. Benefits and Drawbacks of participation in either type of team. Relationship of each team to school / Academics Social / Academic support received from club coaches/parents/participants vs. HS coaches/parents/participants Challenges specific to both forms of participation Financing participation 	1, 2, 3

Researcher Positionality

Glenn Cassidy is a 1990 graduate of St. Benedict's Prep. After obtaining his undergraduate degree, he returned to St. Benedict's to assume the role of Aquatics Director, assistant water polo coach, and head swimming coach. Since that time Glenn has held several teaching and administrative roles at the school. At the time of this study, Glenn served as the Dean of the ninth grade. Glenn retired from coaching at the conclusion of the 2015-2016 school year after twenty-two years of water polo – thirteen as the head coach – and seventeen years as head coach of the swimming team.

“‘Backyard’ research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) involves studying the researcher’s own organization, or friends, or immediate work setting” (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). All of the participants in this study came from the researcher’s “backyard”. Therefore, it is worth noting that Glenn’s position in the school and long-time standing as a coach had potential implications for the data collection and analysis process. Glenn’s knowledge of the students and their families, as well as the athletic culture of the school and school customs, allowed him to delve deeper into these issues with the participants in interviews and focus groups. His knowledge about the demographics of the school, allowed him to put responses in context. Glenn has built relationships with the students, coaches, and parents of St. Benedict’s. These relationships likely allowed for greater trust from the participants and more candor when sharing.

Conducting this study at St. Benedict’s also created potential problem with validity (Creswell, 2009). In this situation, validity problems could be caused by Glenn’s position in the school and the participant’s desire to please him with their responses. To ensure valid data, every effort was made to develop interview protocols which asked non-leading questions. Participants were assured repeatedly that their responses would have no bearing on their status at St.

Benedict's or on any of their teams. All participants and parents will be asked to sign assent and consent forms agreeing to participate in the study.

Additional validity checks are discussed below.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is “an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study” (Creswell, 2009). Throughout the process of collecting data, recordings from interviews and focus groups were transcribed by a contracted transcription service. The transcriptions were then reviewed, with the original recording, by the researcher to make corrections or fill in any gaps. The researcher also made use of field notes to review and add to the transcriptions. As all information was transcribed, memos were used to denote anything that seemed significant or common. Data was read multiple times to identify themes and trends.

A set of codes including “Differences,” “Parental Role,” “Costs,” “Experience,” “Bonding,” “Coaches,” “Motivation,” “Intensity”, “College,” “Benefits,” and “Support” were developed based on the identified themes. These codes were further refined, several times, for specificity as the data was re-read. Many codes were subdivided between high school and club such as “HS – Parental role” and “C(lub) – Parental Role.” This allowed for a deeper analysis of the similarities and differences between high school and club teams as well as a deeper analysis of the benefits and drawbacks of each type of participation. A qualitative analysis software program, called Dedoose, was used to code and analyze the data. The Identification-Commitment and the Social Inequality Gap Reduction models were used to better understand and code the data consistently.

Interview and focus group transcripts. All recordings from the interviews and focus groups were transcribed as this provides the most desirable data (Patton, 1990). Then the data was read thoroughly, multiple times, to get a sense of the information gathered. This allowed for further organizing and sorting of the data. More codes were added following this review to further clarify the data.

Observations: Observational data was collected by use of memos and, when appropriate, audio recordings. The researcher made every attempt to capture the true spirit and essence of what was taking place at the various functions by taking copious notes. Audio recordings were only used with prior consent of the parties involved. Recordings were used for the expressed purpose of gathering information and were not shared for any purposes.

Website / Document Review. Reviewing the websites of various teams, an attempt was made to outline any commonalities among the different club teams and their approaches. This review of websites did not provide much detail.

Student transcripts were used only to confirm other information about the students and to note any trends between their participation and their academic and discipline records.

The researcher was the only person who had access to personal transcripts and the data is being presented in such a way as to protect the anonymity of the subject.

Memos. Memos were used to document as many steps and procedures used in the study as possible, including small steps that may not necessarily appear in the final report (Yin, 2003 as cited in Creswell, 2009). In addition, memos, in the form of small notes on the sides of the transcripts or documents as well as in the researcher's journal, helped to identify trends in the data and assisted in the initial development of codes (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). These

memos were kept and used throughout the entire study from design to data interpretation and findings.

Validity

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative validity “means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of findings by employing certain procedures.” (p.190) In order to establish validity in this study, a combination of procedures were used. These include triangulation of data, member checks, and peer review.

Triangulation. Triangulation is the process of reviewing the data across different sources to build coherent themes (Creswell, 2009). The data from these sources served as evidence to justify the themes developed (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). Data from the interviews and focus groups across samples was triangulated by determining if there was consistency in the findings from the documents/websites and the information gathered from interviews, focus groups, and observations. Data from the various interviews and focus groups was also triangulated with other interviews and focus groups.

Member checking. Member checking involves asking participants from the data collection samples to review the initial findings and determine if they feel that the findings accurately reflect them or their experience (Creswell, 2009, Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). To accomplish this, youth and adult participants had the opportunity to attend separate presentations of the data and findings prior to finalizing the report. During the presentations, participants were asked to provide any feedback or clarify anything that may have been misunderstood..

Peer review. Peer review involves asking others who are not familiar with this particular study, but who are familiar with qualitative research or the content area of the study to review the methods, analysis and findings (Creswell, 2009, Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). As they review

the material, they are encouraged to question anything they deem necessary. For this study, the researcher's advisor and doctoral committee were asked to provide reviews.

Chapter 4: Winning and Losing Have Different Meanings

“To be like U14 national champions, it doesn’t mean much.”

- Josue

Introduction

Visitors to St. Benedict’s Prep are often guided into a waiting room known as the “trophy room.” Around the room are large trophy cases containing awards from various teams dating back several decades. On the walk toward the gym one passes several other trophy cases lining the hallways. Once inside the gym one cannot help but notice the large banners hanging around the walls proudly displaying the conference, county, state, and national championships that the school’s teams have had over the years. Even in the “fieldhouse” building, which is alongside the soccer field and the location of the soccer locker rooms, there are trophy cases displaying recent honors.

Attending the Cedar Stars Academy practice, one does not find the same displays. There are no trophies to be seen, no banners hanging, and no trophy cases. This is because Cedar Stars Academy – the Newark division – has no building or hallways to call its own. Cedar Stars Academy, like most club teams, makes use of space that is owned and operated by St. Benedict’s Prep. There are Cedar Stars offices associated with a practice field about 30 minutes away, but most of the families involved in their Newark, or most other, divisions will likely never enter that building. Likewise, Deep End Aquatics, has no place to display championship awards because they are simply using space rented from St. Benedict’s Prep.

The only club team involved with this study that had its own space was Total Force wrestling. Entering the oversized, three family house of which Total Force occupies the bottom

floor, one does enter a small waiting room where a handful of trophies are visible. There are no trophy cases; no banners; just a few trophies on shelves or on top of small tables.

Club programs often do not have displays of success. Because these programs operate out of offices or homes, and make use of gym or field space that is being rented or shared with other organizations, most clubs do not have hallways, gyms, or their own fields to display the same measures of success as high schools. However, space may not be the only reason for the lack of trophy cases. Nearly all of the interviewees in this study, who participated on or work with club teams, agreed that winning, or losing, on the club level carried much less weight than it did in high school. In the club world, trophies and banners were not as important. This was because club owners and coaches were focused on developing the individual player – not necessarily winning games. As Coach Jackson, a high school and club soccer coach, explained:

The teams and the competitions is just a way to showcase the individual players in the academy...the ultimate outcome is not to create the best teams; it's to create the best players. Whereas in the scholastic side...you're looking to put together the best teams. The scholastic attitude was obvious when Coach Jackson addressed his St. Benedict's team during half-time of the state semi-final game and told them: "I'm all about pretty (soccer). Alright? But first and foremost, I'm about winning. So it doesn't have to be pretty and it doesn't have to be cute all the time." Coach Jackson's statement summed up the different approaches to thinking about competitions and the role of winning and losing. The participants in this study indicated that winning and losing on the high school and club levels did not carry the same impact. As Noel, a high school and club wrestler, remarked:

It's frustrating because like, in club, I guess like your record (of wins and losses) doesn't really matter. The competitions you go through your club really don't matter... And here

(in high school) it's like if we lose, we lose. It actually means something ... No one cares if one of his kids loses in a club match.

Noel's statement about the differences in the importance of winning and losing between high schools and clubs was echoed by other participants in this study. The clarity with which he was able to sum up this approach indicated that this was likely to be systemic and not limited to one person's experience. As further evidence of the systemic nature of these differences, William, also a high school and club wrestler, stated, "When I lose for a high school team, it hurts like really bad. Losing at a club, it's different."

Two factors emerged during this research that help to explain why winning appeared to be more important for those involved with high school teams than it was for participants in club teams and how that system was maintained. First, the high school teams were designed to focus significantly on the team as a unit whereas the club teams were designed to focus on the individual. This difference in approach meant that there were different measures for success. When the team was the focus, there was no individual success without the team. This meant that winning was important. When the individual was the focus, team success became less important than individual improvement. Therefore, it was possible for an individual to succeed even if the team lost.

The second factor that related to the importance of winning and losing was the different intensity of the practices and seasons between high schools and clubs. The majority of people in this study believed that high school was a much more intense environment, while club was a more relaxed – but more focused – environment. This high intensity in high schools was directly linked to the perceived importance of winning. This chapter that explores these two factors as they relate to the importance of winning and losing in youth sports.

There Is No ‘I’ in Team, But There Is In Individual

One possible way to explain the differences in the importance of winning and losing for participants in high school versus participants in club teams were the different feelings about the role of team versus that of the individual that were held by the coaches and players. A famous line in sports says that “There’s no ‘I’ in team”. Traditionally, coaches and players have worked hard to build teams made up of individuals who work together and rely on one another for success. This common approach suggests that individuality is counter to success.

Of course, this theory depends on the definition of success. When success is measured by wins and losses, this theory absolutely makes sense. However, participants in this study indicated that success in the club world was measured more by individual success than by team success. Under this distinct definition of success in the sports world, the role of the team and the individual was called into question. It seems from this research that the old mantra of “There is no ‘I’ in team” might now need to be qualified with the phrase, “but there is in individual”.

To further explore this, this section will focus on three components that are important to the role of the individual and the team. The first component relates to an athlete’s motivation to succeed. SBP participants indicated that it was important to play for their teammates and their school. Club participants indicated that they were playing mostly for themselves and their future goals. The second component relates to the importance of shared experiences. Both the high school and club participants indicated that shared experiences were very important. While the high school teams seemed to provide the most opportunity for these, club participants had plenty of examples of shared experiences as well. The final concept relates to the importance of working together with others to generate team success. For the high school participants, there was no such thing as individual success, if the team didn’t succeed. For the club participants,

individual success was possible without the team. We will examine each of these components respectively.

Play for the badge. One of the most striking comments, that was made repeatedly by the SBP soccer coaches and captains during their practice and game was that they should “play for the badge.” The badge refers to the SBP soccer logo affixed to each jersey proudly representing the school’s long successful history in soccer with stars for each of the ten national championships displayed. The idea of playing for the badge highlighted a larger overall ideal expressed by high school coaches, athletes, and parents alike – that is, playing for the high school team was about playing for each other and the reputation of the school. Participants in the club programs indicated that their focus was primarily about their own improvement and advancement in the sport. The idea that members on the club team were dependent on one another for success was not a focus for club participants.

The concept of playing for the badge was explained by Johnny, a high school and club soccer player:

There’s nothing like wearing that badge. Everything – 27 years before us the legacy that was before everything, the traditions it’s all – it all was for that one badge. We have to play like the way those 27 men – 27 years of men played before us. So everything they’ve done we have to continue their tradition and we have to play for what’s on here because you’re not playing for yourself, you’re not playing for the number on your back. Johnny’s stressed the idea that “you’re not playing for yourself” – it was the team that was important. The team worked together to bring about success. This was evident when watching all of the pre-game rituals of the soccer team as they prepared for their state semi-final game.

Everything from the disciplined warm-up drills to the forming of the number one on the sideline in tennis balls made it clear that something bigger than the self was at work here.

This same sentiment was noted at the county wrestling tournament. This was the first time that St. Benedict's wrestled in the county tournament since the early 1990's. Coach Owen, a high school and club wrestling coach, referred to this as he told his guys:

It's about time we came back and showed the rest of our county what the school is about. Nobody knows us. There's a little bit of a certain type of feeling about why we're here and who we are. Let's show them who we are. Let's show them that we are a team in Essex County to reckon with here...Let them know who you are...You guys are carrying a torch or restarting a torch that was ended almost 20 years ago.

In Coach Owen's speech, he never once mentioned an individual, despite the fact that wrestling is an individual sport. Coach Owen could have spoken to each of this thirteen wrestlers about what they needed to do, individually, in order to be successful. However, his approach was to speak to the entire team about the importance of their presence in this tournament and the importance of their succeeding as a team at this tournament. He referred to the tradition and legacy of SBP in the tournament when he stressed that the team was carrying a torch. Coach Owen referred twice to a team identity using the terms "show them" or "let them know who you are." His only focus was on the team and the team's success. He explained this a little further in an interview:

Coaching a high school team, I think, involves a lot more energy, because it's more of a team aspect. You want your team to be good and there's really one goal for the team, for the whole team, and that's to be the best...Here in a high school setting, you have to have the team doing the same things. If you have a bunch of individuals on a high school team,

it's not going to work...You do those (team drills) as somewhat of team building, getting the guys to come together, get that faster guy to pick up that slower guy. (Club) is a whole lot more individual.

The team goal superseded any other agenda on the high school team according to Coach Owen. This team aspect was so important that drills were created just to make sure that the team was working together and bonding. His statement was clear: There was one goal and everyone on the team needed to be working towards that one goal.

Coach Denis, a high school and club swimming coach, expressed similar ideas when he discussed the role of goals on each team.

When you're a club swimmer, you're more focused on your individual goal. And as a team, we're kind of working together to help everybody achieve their individual goal. Whereas in high school swimming, my individual success pushes the team's success a little higher. So both are relying on my individual success. But, I feel when it comes to high school, if I do better – for example, if I drop time and I earn a certain place in the meet or a tournament style meet, that affects the team's outcome. Usually when you're in a club situation, the club – even though you're placing high in a meet, does not affect the team's outcome. Most team's aren't focused on the outcome.

Similar to Coach Owen, Coach Denis drew a connection between the individualism on the club team, the unity on the high school team, and the importance of winning and losing. The team aspect was more affiliated with the concept of wins and losses in the present. However, the individual approach was more about preparation for future opportunities.

Frank, a club only soccer player, explained this while justifying his decision to only play academy soccer and forego the high school soccer experience:

Playing for an academy is special because you, if you're really good, you're going to have people recruit at your games and then you're going to have special people there watching me. You're always going to play against MLS teams consecutively. So if you like competition and you want to shine and get known, that's what the academy is about – to shine and get known. Because if you are good, they're going to want you and they're going to approach you if they see you.

Frank's reference to the fact that "special people" were watching him along with his statements about wanting "to shine and get known" highlighted the individualistic view that he had for his participation. Unlike Johnny, Frank never made reference to the specialness of the team he played for, the traditions or legacies that he might represent, or the importance of his teammates. His focus was on himself. He went on further to explain that he believed playing for the academy provided him with the opportunity to go pro without having to go to college. Frank's entire interview demonstrated the philosophy that playing for the academy was about the future opportunities that it opened up for him, individually and that his motivation for being on the team was inline with that philosophy. During his interview, Frank only discussed his team once. Even then, the theme of individualism was evident.

My team, I mean my team is successful in one way, but at the same time not successful in another way. Like independently, our team has independent players that are successful...but as a team, we're not as successful. It's hard to explain. Like those kids are successful independent more than we are together, so like they are more successful than the team.

Frank's individual mindset made it even difficult to discuss the team as a whole. He was only able to describe the team's success in terms of the individuals on the team – "our team has

independent players that are successful.” He struggled to find words to describe his team’s success, saying “It’s hard to explain.”

When observing the SBP soccer team, it was obvious that one would never consider the idea that an individual on the team could be more successful than the team. There was no success for anybody unless there was success for everybody and success for everybody meant winning. There was no such thing as “independent players” as Frank described them. This is exactly what the ‘no I in team’ mantra is about. Frank’s comments ran contrary to this mantra. However, he was not the only one to express this. Coach Jackson, who coached the SBP soccer team and a club team, expressed a similar idea when he discussed the purpose of the academy as a whole:

The academy, that’s really about developing players that will one day play on the national team, that will one day play in the MLS. So again, it’s more individual based. They’re trying to use that network of academy teams and academy programs around the country to identify the best players that will compete for the US national team. They’re not looking for the best teams per se. The teams and the competitions is just a way to showcase the individual players in the academy.

According to Coach Jackson, youth soccer in the United States formed these academy teams and leagues that were designed to identify the best players, and players that may be able to compete for the national team. This academy program was not designed to create great teams, just great individuals. Curiously, based on coach Jackson’s comments, despite the individual over team approach of the youth league, the ultimate goal was to create a stronger national team for the United States. It seemed contradictory to raise youth in an individual mindset, but then expect them to be able to switch to a team mindset when they reached a certain level.

Coach Jackson, as well as the other coaches, demonstrated a form of split personality as they talked about their coaching role in high school and clubs. All of the coaches interviewed indicated that they believed strongly in the importance of team for high schools and that only the team as a whole could be successful. However, these same coaches all indicated that their role as a club coach was to train the individual. This was a very different approach from their role as high school coaches and one that would surely have an influence on the individual athletes with whom these coaches worked.

For example, Johnny, a high school and club soccer player, who earlier discussed the importance of playing for the badge on the high school level, shared a different experience on his club team.

People do each other dirty everyday, they won't play for a guy that's to the left, to the right. They will leave the team the next day if they could. They don't care. They are there for themselves.

Johnny, by means of his earlier comment, strongly believed in the importance of team and playing for one another. When discussing the way that players on his club team related to one another, Johnny had a look and tone of disgust. In Johnny's experience, athletes in the club world were not concerned for their teammates or for anyone's success except their own.

Leon, a swimmer who participated in both high school and club, furthered this point:

I think a club, for swimming especially, the competition is way different. It's a different feel. You can see the competition as more of individual than the team because for swimming at a school it's more team wise – you're doing it for your teammates. But when you're doing it for club it's more for yourself. You have more pride in it.

Leon's thoughts continued the theme of the difference between team and individual. Leon described this as "a different feel." When swimming for the school "you're swimming for your teammates." When swimming for the club "it's more for yourself." Leon's description of pride was different from that of other club participants. Nevertheless, his statement seemed to indicate a sense of "pride" in the personal accomplishments on the club team; not a sense of pride in the team itself or in the team's success.

William, a wrestler who wrestled for two high schools and different clubs, offered some explanation of the pride statement:

I mean, yeah, it goes back to the kids that are dedicated. Because at club, people want to learn, they want to get better. But (in high school), they might just do it because the parents want to do it. They just do something for the activity.

Coach Owen indicated that the dedication William mentioned was observable in the different ways that high school and club athletes practiced. As SBP wrestling practice began, Coach Owen had to encourage the athletes repeatedly to start their warm up. As he did this, Coach Owen turned to the researcher and said "This wouldn't happen in club. They just start going." In his interview, Coach Owen further clarified that statement.

In a club setting...the wrestlers, on their own, determine how they want to practice.

Usually the high-level wrestlers know what it's supposed to be like, so you don't have to tell them...The intensity in a club practice is determined by the wrestler.

The idea that club wrestlers determined how they wanted to practice was something that would never be accepted at the high school. It was interesting that coach Owen was the same person who earlier discussed the importance of guys working together, with the same agenda, when discussing his high school team. Here he was defending and glorifying the fact that club

wrestlers come with their own agenda and determination. Coach Owen's, William's and Leon's comments seemed to indicate that people on the club side were more self-motivated and interested. It was not clear if this self-motivation was associated with the reason in which an athlete first sought out club play or if the club teams encouraged a form of self-motivation.

However, not everyone believed that club athletes were more self-motivated. Josue, an academy only player, had an opposite view:

I think everyone in the academy just does this for fun. Because like you don't see any, any people that actually, day in and day out like put in the work. Benedict's is different...they do a lot, they sacrifice a lot to play on this team. For Benedict's or high school soccer, they sacrifice a lot.

In Josue's experience, club athletes were less committed and sacrificed less than high school athletes. His experience stood in contrast to the opinions of William and Leon who believed that club athletes were more serious in their approach. However, Josue's experience was still consistent with the idea that clubs either encouraged or allowed the individualistic approach to participation. Josue had no experience playing on a high school team to date. He expressed some regret about that. His opinion that the high school athletes were more serious about their approach to the team may have stemmed from his desire to play for the high school team or it may have been related to his experiences as a club athlete.

This brings us back to the question of for whom exactly were the athletes performing? When Johnny discussed playing for the badge, he was making reference to the idea of playing for a school and a tradition. Coach Denis, coach Owen, and Leon all discussed the idea that participating in high school, one performed for teammates. Frank, Josue, Johnny, and Coach Jackson all agreed that participating in club, one performed for self.

Shared Experiences. Ultimately, all participation is about the experience. All experiences carry certain lessons with them. However, these experiences also provide youth with an opportunity to bond over something that is held in common. On the macro level, this is the sport in which they participate. As it is brought down, this common could be the team on which they participate, the school which they represent, the time spent together at practices and competitions, the trips that are taken with teammates or family, and the competitions, wins, and losses. All of the participants in this study discussed the importance of shared experiences. However, in keeping with what has already been discussed, most people described the high school as producing the most experiences that are shared.

An example of the difference in shared experiences was the locker room experience that Frank, the club only soccer player, discussed:

In academy, we don't have a locker room and I miss that. Because back when I played for Benedict's...we still had a locker room. So I feel like that's, that locker room, I don't know why the locker room means so much to me but I just love the locker room.

The locker room festivities were an important part of the soccer tradition at SBP. Before their game, students played music, playfully joked around, held team meetings, and cheered for one another in the locker room. However, as Frank said, on the club side of the sport, there was no locker room. Coach Olla, a high school and club soccer coach, emphasized this point, "There's no locker room meetings."

Of course, club teams did provide excellent experiences. It seemed, though, that these experiences had more of an individual slant and did not build cohesion amongst team members in the same way. This point, however, was not universally agreed upon.

Participants in this study cited travel as the primary shared experience. Nearly all of the participants believed that travelling with the team provided the greatest stories and experiences of their time in sports. This was true whether the travel was with a high school team or a club team. Coach Owen summed up this feeling from his time as an athlete, “I think some of the best times I had here were just being around the team either on a trip or at a tournament.” Douglas, a high school only swimmer, added:

When I go on weekend trips and everything, I see a different performance on myself because I actually get opportunities to seek food and then, after that, when I really need company I have my teammates there, you know, to be there in the room or in the area with me.

For Douglas, an only child, the shared experience of travel provided a companionship that he missed at home. He expressed that the trips allowed him to get closer to his teammates. This was exactly the type of bonding that several of the coaches indicated they work to build on their high school teams.

Simon, also a high-school only athlete, added:

Weekend trips are like fun for me, because you know, I’m going to this trip, hanging out with all my friends and teammates getting ready, getting turned about going to compete. It’s just fun, just getting ready talking, joking around. It’s just fun. That’s what I like about going on weekend trips.

Simon’s experience was consistent with his teammate Douglas’s experience – travelling provided a level of camaraderie that was not otherwise found. Since Simon and Douglas only competed for the high school, their comments helped to focus our discussion of these shared experiences on the high school level. Coach Owen indicated:

Travelling, travelling is pretty fun....Like going around and going to the pool, stuff like that. So it's very relaxing and stuff before you have to wrestle the next day. I think travelling is one of the best experiences, especially with your closest teammates.

Coach Owen did not indicate whether he was speaking about high school or club travel in this statement. The importance here was that travelling itself provided an opportunity for youth to bond. If they believe travel to be important, high school and club coaches would be wise to consider this when establishing season schedules or itineraries for the individual trips.

According to Aiden, a high school and club swimmer,

In my eyes, for a team, bus rides, plane rides, whatever you take as a team is one of the most vital places where you bond as a team. That is probably the most you bond – not at practice, not at meets – most times just on the bus while travelling there because you've got nothing else to do. You can't really just like wander off and go see stuff yourself.

And you're just there with each other. So it's like you start bonding with your team and you are able to do stuff with them.

Aiden indicated that it was the closeness of the space on the bus that led to teammate bonding. Aiden, who admitted that he was introverted in general, saw bus trips as a time when he could not get away from others and had to interact. This interaction allowed teammates to bond. Again, it's important to note that neither Aiden nor Coach Owen specified whether the travel they were discussing was with a club team or a high school team. In fact, it may not matter. There was a clear feeling amongst the participants that travel itself led to great experiences.

Coach Denis, the high school and club swimming coach, also thought that it was the bus rides and travelling that brought the team together:

I think some of the best times I can remember is like the long bus rides to faraway meets...the whole team comradery of all of being on the bus, all of us travelling together, all of us being together. That's kind of missed in some aspects in club swimming. When we get to the meet, we're all together. But then we leave separately. We arrive separately. Whereas in high school swimming we do everything together. We stretch together. We're training together. We travel to meets together. If it's overnight, we sleep together. Everything, we're together. So you feel a little bit more cohesion. I'm not saying that club doesn't have cohesion. The cohesion is just different.

Coach Denis's comment highlighted the different approaches to travel. Most participants made reference to the fact that, while high schools provided all of the transportation to and from competitions, club teams rarely travel together. Instead, parents were relied upon to provide the transportation. Since the importance of travelling together has already been established, this difference in travelling approaches is significant. Travelling together allowed the team to bond with one another during the trip. Travelling separately, allowed athletes to bond or interact more with their family members and possibly one or two other athletes. It is reasonable to deduct, then, that the difference in the mode of transportation had an impact on the togetherness of the team.

Frank, a club only soccer player, explained that the academy team did occasionally take bus trips and agreed that those trips have a way of bringing the team together.:

Sometimes we take a bus, like the whole team, or sometimes players go individual. Like sometimes...we get to pick how we want to go, sometimes they're just like no, everybody meet this time in front of the bus and we're leaving...On bus trips, well usually most of us go to sleep. But, when like for a good three hours we go just socialize and we play music.

Coaches come back. They just come to the back of the bus. They talk. We talk.

Sometimes we talk about the games. Sometimes we talk about life in general, like joke around and stuff. But we maybe take like two, three trips a season. I like that more.

Frank stated that he preferred the bus trips because of the interaction that he was able to have with his coaches and teammates. His description of playing music and joking around implied that the bus trip could replace some of the locker room feel that he earlier stated he was missing. However, two to three bus trips a season is a lot different than the SBP soccer team which took between fifteen and twenty bus trips per season. This difference was even more pronounced when you consider that the academy season is ten months of the year while the high school soccer season is four months of the year. The time together and the bonding that occurred by spending so much time together over short time span was a lot greater for the high school team than for the club team.

Frank, Aiden and Leon – high school and club swimmers – were the only ones who described bus trips with their club teams. Aiden offered:

I remember when we were younger, we would get on the bus and everybody would be playing their PS and playing Mario Kart. We'll be screaming where our parents would tell us to shut up and stuff.

Leon added:

I think a high school team bus is probably the equivalent of a club bus. If you want to have an experience like that, it's the equivalent. But (club is) more, I just want to say it's more fun. Because you know you guys are going to have that long trip and you don't have nothing to do...I don't know how to explain it actually. It's just different. It's really different.

Leon was never able to come up with a way to describe the differences in any more detail. His impression that the club bus trips were more fun could stem from the differing levels of seriousness between club teams and high school teams. Still, Aiden and Leon agreed that the bus trips were important shared experiences for them and their teammates.

In contrast to Alex and Leon's comments about club bus trips, William and Noel – both high school and club wrestlers – as well as all four coaches and all parents except Mr. Rios, described bus trips for club teams as being extremely rare. William summed it up saying, "I've never been on a club team bus."

If the opinions stated thus far are correct and team bonding comes from travelling together then it would follow that club athletes miss out on this bonding experience when they do not travel together. However, this does not seem to be the case. The participants in this study who were on club teams seemed to think that club teams do bond, just differently.

Part of the benefit of travelling was that it provided more time for athletes, and coaches, to spend together. Of course, this was the benefit of teams travelling together on the same bus, or even plane. However, according to participants in this study, regardless of how teams assembled in a location, the amount of time spent together led to teams forming a tighter bond. Aiden, the high school and club swimmer, discussed this:

I mean it also comes with off time we have. Like in swimming at these high school meets, it takes like 2 hours. But in a swim meet, like in a club meet, you have to dedicate the whole day or half a day to be doing swimming. And you have a lot of downtime in between your events and stuff. So sometimes, you might hear something and you just like all of a sudden start talking to somebody, like if you're waiting for your event to be called or something. (You) suddenly start like joking around with somebody and then if you

could just start creating that bond that you don't (already have)...the waiting aspect creates the bonds more than the actual swimming, I guess.

Aiden's assessment that time together was what led to greater bonds, strengthened the understanding of why travelling would be so important to bonding. Time spent together in any context would likely lead people to come together more. Curiously, while Aiden's assessment was that club swimming allowed for more bonding because of the longer club meets, the general feeling amongst the participants in the study was that the high school teams bonded more.

If togetherness was that important then the ideal situation for teams to come together would be to combine the efforts of high school and club. While this is rare, a situation in which members of the high school team compete on the same club team would give the team the most time together, strengthen their ability to play together, and allow the teammates to become like family.

Mr. Cruz – father of Johnny, the high school and club soccer player – thought that the time Johnny and the soccer players spent together over years made them a tighter knit group and led to their success as a team:

I watched them grow up. They've been together. I've watched them since 7th grade, a lot of them. They've been over my house, 8 at a time and slept over. I fed them, I watched them...You can just see it because of the bond. They were special...They were like a brotherhood. I mean it was special to watch...I think it was the time they had together. I think it was. They knew each other.

Mr. Cruz referred to the specialness of a group of athletes that were able to bond together over many years. Because this group of guys defied the trend of individualism on the club team and participated together on the high school team, they were able to maximize their bonding. The

group of players that Mr. Cruz was referring to were part of the SBP team that won a national championship and part of the Cedar Stars team that also won the national championship. It seems that the togetherness of this group of athletes had an impact on their success as a team. This group of athletes also defied the individualistic nature of the club teams by staying on the same team for several years and by having a team goal which seemed to supercede any individual goals. High school athletic directors would be wise to consider merging or creating some sort of articulation agreement with club coaches to be able to compete for athletes and continue their traditions.

Frank, the club only soccer player, had similar thoughts about the amount of time his academy team has been together.

Now this team it's important to me because we've been playing together for a long time and I feel like after we go our separate ways later on in the year we're still going to have that special connection no matter what.

Similar to Mr. Cruz, Frank was not expressing time in terms of a particular year or season, but in terms of playing together over the course of a few years. However, Frank's team was only a club team, so their togetherness, never extended into the high school season. This difference might help to better understand Frank's response when asked whether soccer or the team was more important to him.

Soccer because the team, I know eventually, I'm out. And a lot of us know, like some of us maybe after this year we'll downgrade and go to a less quality of a team. And some of us are going to upgrade and go to a better team. So I feel like we all know deep down inside that this is probably our last year. Like this spring season is probably the last time we are all going to play together. So we know like now is where people – we are still

playing for the team. But at the same time, we want to play for ourselves. So we want to get better ourselves because we know that later on in the year, it's done.

Despite the tight bond that Frank felt to his teammates, his bigger interest was in his own future. Frank's individual mindset came through immediately. Again, this was a contrast to the "play for the badge" mentality that Johnny, the high school and club soccer player, discussed when talking about the SBP team.

Josue, who used to play for the same academy team of which Frank was a part during this study, and who only played club soccer, agreed with Frank's assessment of that team, but also described a significantly different feel on his new team.

In Bergen, (bonding) was (a big issue). We had a really good team. We went to restaurants together. We did everything. We ate. Sometimes (we) just sat...We used to just do like the weirdest things together. We went to movies together. We went to Disney at one point...we went to all those places as a team. In Monmouth, not really. We don't do anything. Maybe, because some kids went from Bergen, they came with me to Monmouth. I hang out with those kids, but I don't hang out the (the other kids). Maybe they do bond, but not as a whole team.

Josue's assessment of the lack of bonding with his new team seemed to stem from a lack of time together. The team starts at age fifteen. Therefore, Josue had only been with the team for a few months, as had many of the other players. However, he also indicated that it was more than just the time together. There had to be a genuine effort made to build the connections on the team.

Coach Denis, the swimming coach, described this more:

(In high school) you feel a little bit more cohesion. I'm not saying that club doesn't have cohesion. The cohesion is just different. I think one of my favorite moments is swimming

in counties, and swimming in states. It was a highlight of my season – at least my swimming career – because it was just the concept of, we as a team worked hard because that time. We had the long Christmas practices. So we worked so hard to get the results we had for counties. And so we worked that hard with a group of young men to all try to get out best times and then achieve that goal and to see it come to fruition is just like, this was worth it. I mean I spent five hours in the pool because this five second time drop was worth it. I'm glad I did work this hard.

In a club environment, if I said we go on five hours, you're going to look at me a little crazy. 'Oh, I don't think we can go 5 hours.' But that shared experience in high school just feels different. I'm not going to say one is a little bit better than the other. There's a different feeling you get from the camaraderie you get in club and the camaraderie you get in high school.

I do know a lot of clubs who try their best to emulate the camaraderie that you get in high school...But the way the high school is set up, that cohesion, that naturally happens.

Whereas in the club environment, the club has to take it upon itself to create the cohesion. Coach Denis described the idea that the high school team was set up to promote cohesion, while the club team was not. Club teams, in his explanation, had "to create the cohesion" that happened more naturally for the high school teams. Coach Denis's explanation of the cohesion on high school teams was consistent with other participants in the study who also stated that high school teams were more of a unit – reinforcing again the difference between the team approach in high school and the individual approach in clubs. Returning to Josue's earlier comment, the difference in closeness that Josue experienced between his old team and his new team could be explained by his length of time on the new team, but it could also be explained by Coach Denis's

assessment that the club team had to work harder and be more deliberate about creating the cohesion between athletes. Josue's old team seemed to have made those efforts to create a cohesion, whereas his new team did not seem to make those same efforts.

Josue went on to explain more the closer nature of high school athletes than club athletes. Despite not having ever played high school soccer, Josue's beliefs about high school bonds may have helped to explain coach Denis's ideas about cohesion:

I think it's because you're with your friends, that's why. You go to school with them for like six hours and a half a day. So I mean you play bad and they make fun of you or something, I'm not sure. So you're more connected to them than you are to like academy soccer where you only see them probably an hour and a half a day...a few hours every week, compared to high school.

There were two critical pieces to Josue's comment. The first was the use of the word friends. The fact that Josue referred to schoolmates as friends, calls into question what Josue considered his teammates.. We know from his earlier statement that he did not really feel a connection to his club teammates. It is this statement of friendship that could help to explain what coach Denis meant when he said that in high school the cohesion was built in. The second critical piece of Josue's comment was the importance of time together, which was a recurring theme throughout the interviews for this study. If time together is truly important, as has been repeatedly stated, then the fact that high school athletes spend all day together would have a direct impact on the ability of students to bond.

Coach Jackson also believed that the time together was important:.

You know the high school experience is an everyday experience. So the adults in charge of those programs can really impact the kid's life because they can be consistent in the

habits that they are trying to get the kids to pick up on. Whereas in the club environment, you're only meeting two or three days a week and it doesn't allow you the consistency that you really need to be able to impact the kids life in a major way...In the high school season, you're together everyday for four months. So you're cramming, but because it's everyday, you can impact the kid in a big way in a short period of time. – where the club season that takes up a much larger portion of the year, eight or nine months, and you're meeting two or three days, so it's much more of a casual approach.

Coach Jackson's statement about coaches' impact on athletes reflected a much broader theme than one of team bonding or shared experiences. His quote began to highlight a disconnect in the team versus individual approach. Most participants in this study believed that while club teams did a better job of preparing the individual for future success in the sport, high school teams did more to develop character and discipline in young athletes. This topic will be addressed more in a later chapter on the role of and relationship with coaches.

The difference in the importance of shared experiences demonstrates another divergence in the approach of the high school team and the club teams. The high school teams were designed to bring athletes together and have a level of cohesion amongst the team. The club teams did not have the same focus in their design.

Together everyone achieves more. Along with playing for the badge and sharing experiences, there was a sense of uniformity in many aspects of the high school teams – from dress to drills. Uniformity was not as obvious when observing the club teams. There was less formality to drills, the players were not always wearing the same uniforms, and there was less of an expectation that athletes would be present for all workouts.

Coach Jackson began his pregame speech for the SBP soccer team by going around the room and counting. He called out a number as he pointed to each individual.

One, two, three...twenty-six, twenty-seven. Twenty-seven players, including Nick (a recently added extra player from the junior varsity team), two managers, four coaches.

We are 100% today.

At the beginning of the SBP soccer practice, Coach Jackson did the same thing, taking into account players that were not present.

One, two, three...twenty-three, twenty-four. Igor and Diogo make twenty-six. Najarro went home sick – makes twenty-seven. So that's twenty-seven players, okay? Two injured, one sick. Anything else we need to be aware of?

Coach Jackson's practice of counting the team helped to stress that being together was necessary for the team's success. Moreover, by accounting for those who were missing and checking for any other injuries, Coach Jackson continued to send a message that the team needed and cared for each and every member.

When it was time to go to the field, the team lined up in three lines and made their way out to the center of the field in a very organized and disciplined manner. The team all wore the same maroon and white *Capelli* uniforms. The team captain ran warm up drills with a sense of precision. It seemed that everyone knew just what was expected of them. When the time came to switch drills, the captain or one of the coaches, called out a new drill and the players started to act on it immediately. Following the few minutes of general warm up, the captain called the team to the side where they formed five lines and began running more warm up drills from the sideline to the middle of the field and back. The organization of the practice and the togetherness of the team was easily noted.

At the start of the Cedar Stars Academy soccer practice, there was no obvious accounting of individuals that were missing. If there was an attendance taken, it was not done in any overt manner. At no time was there any implication of the importance of having each and every player present or being able to account for each and every player. Unlike the very organized lines of SBP, players made their way onto the field individually as they arrived and either light-heartedly talked while getting ready, or began kicking around a soccer ball – alone or with other players. There was no pre-practice speech, no motivational effort. When the time came to begin practice, there was a brief call to a huddle by one of the coaches, followed by an instruction to begin practice. While all of the players wore some form of Cedar Stars uniform, there were many different variations with some wearing white, some green, others black. The unity that was apparent at the SBP practice was not apparent at the Cedar Stars practice.

Similarly, at Total Force Wrestling practice, Coach Owen noted that wrestlers come on their own schedule. Coach Owen's coaching partner summed it up, "We're here five days a week. (Whether or not they come) depends on how quickly they get their homework done or how serious they are." This casual approach to practice was one that would never be accepted on the SBP wrestling team. The policy at SBP was that athletes were expected to attend all practices. Most teams had practice five or six days per week. There were usually consequences for athletes that missed practice. From the statement of the Total Force club coach, there was no similar expectation. Instead, the onus was on the athlete to recognize the importance of attending practice and to keep practice as one of the factors that should fit into their schedule during the week.

At St. Benedict's, there were clear attempts made to ensure the unity of the team. At the club practices, no such efforts were made. The difference in approaches at the start of practice

also highlighted where the emphasis lies for each kind of team. As was demonstrated by the participants in this study, the high school team was more focused on the team, while the club was more focused on the individual.

It has generally been taught that a winning team requires teamwork. It requires people to marry their individual goals with the goals of the team. High school teams at SBP continued to teach this approach and focused on winning as the primary goal of the team. Club teams maintained a focus on individual achievement. This focus on individual achievement required club teams to redefine their measure of success. Success in the club world was not measured in wins and losses, it was measured in individual improvement and the attainment of future goals.

Intensity

Intensity refers to level of physical and emotional energy and investment involved in participating on a team. While a couple of the parents disagreed, all other athletes and coaches in this study agreed that there was more intensity felt on high school teams than on club teams.

Noel, a high school and club wrestler, said succinctly, “I think high school is just way more like, I guess, what’s the word, like upbeat and more, what’s that word, like when the practice is hard – INTENSE! It’s like way more intense.” Noel indicated that there was a sense of urgency and importance that was more prevalent on high school teams. Noel went on to describe what this intensity looked like when he said:

I have a good idea on or a good experience...because I have the same coach (for high school and club)...I guess my coach here is more like – more uptight and more strict like always on you – like just go, go, go. And if you do any little thing wrong, he’s like why did you do that wrong? In club, it’s more like if I do something wrong, it’s like ‘Alright, here’s how to fix it, blah, blah, blah. It’s like contradicting in a way. I guess he’s more of

a human being, I call it. And then here, he has to be like a drill sergeant because he just wants the program to be good at all costs. But at club, it's more like he knows what it is.

Like how to transition. That's my experience from it.

Noel's description of his coach as a "drill sergeant" in high school but a "human being" at club was an indication of the different feelings that were present during each type of practice or competition. He described his coach as more strict and more forceful in high school. He indicated a sense of urgency and less tolerance for error. Participants in this study had different opinions on the reason for the intensity.

Johnny, the high school and club soccer player, thought that some of this intensity comes from the fact that you play in front of more fans:

High school is always more intense, because high school the fans go for their high school... I mean I remember a couple of years ago, when we had Salesianum over here, people from Kearny, Harrison, Ironbound, North Arlington, they were all texting me, 'tell me what time is the game, where is the address?' Everybody comes through.

Fans certainly proved to be a major factor in the St. Benedict's win in the state soccer semi-finals. Half way through the first half, a school bus of approximately 30 students from St. Benedict's, who had made the 70 minute trip from the school, arrived with loud cheers and energy for their team. On the opposite side of the field approximately 70 students from the opposing school stood behind their team's bench cheering on their team. While the fans from both schools were cheering for their team, the Benedict's fans were louder and more organized in their cheers. The sense of pride in the victory was evident among the players, coaches, and fans. The look of defeat was obvious on the same groups across the field.

Noel believed that part of this intensity and push to win came from the fact that a high school coach's job was associated with his wins and losses, "If we lose, we lose – it actually means something and also it means something to his job." Noel did not identify a similar requirement for the club coach.

Coach Denis, a high school and club swimming coach, also noted that the coach's and school's reputation were directly related to the team's success.

In high school, literally kind of – I'm stealing the phrase 'you're just as strong as your weakest link.' People are looking at that weak link, like oh, you've got the slow guy here.

So the slowest person's success in high school swimming is a reflection of how the team is doing overall.

In Coach Denis's assessment, the intensity and seriousness of the high school season was attributed to the judgement of others. How the individuals on the team were performing was a reflection of the school and/or the coach of the team. Therefore, any deviation from the successful models was seen as a failure or underperformance. Coach Denis would later imply that this under or poor-performance could lead to the end of a coach's career or at least his job at that school. As a result of this greater pressure on the coach to have a winning or successful team, the atmosphere created for the athletes was more intense and the desire to win was heightened.

Noel and William, both high school and club wrestlers, explained this from their perspective:

Interviewer: Talk to me about your worst experience, high school or club.

Noel: Losing to your rival team and then the practice after. That's the worst.

William: If you have a bad loss to a team, you practice afterwards.

Noel:...We lost when we should have won and then like, get absolutely obliterated in practice, like crazy practice – make you run sprints and more cardio and just mentally and physically brutal. Let's say Seton Hall – like if we lose to Seton Hall like our practice would be insanely difficult.

Noel and William indicated that there was an obvious and dramatic consequence for losing to a rival competitor in high school. Not one of those interviewed expressed a similar consequence for losing a club competition. Their description indicated that there were swift repercussions for all members of a high school team after a loss or poor play. Given Coach Denis's comments, we can infer that these repercussions stemmed from the fact that the reputation of the school and the coach were on the line. The repercussions on a club team would be more long-term and individualized, as will be discussed later.

The level of intensity was evident in observing Coach Jackson before the state semi-final game and at practice the following day. On the day of the game, as the team was gathered in the locker room a few hours before game time, Coach Jackson was pacing back and forth. At times, out of nowhere, he would begin yelling "Let's Go!" loudly through the hallways. His energy and intensity level was extremely high. Before the practice following the semi-final win, Jackson was again pacing the hallway while the team gathered in the locker room. This time Jackson verbalized to his coaches "I have to blow off some steam because I'm too pumped. Can't bring this level kids today; need to wait until tomorrow." His assistant coaches followed those statements up with jokes about his craziness. However, Coach Owen, the high school and club wrestling coach, repeated a similar sentiment in his interview:

Coaching a high school team, I think, involves a lot more mental energy, because it's more of a team aspect. You want your team to be good and there's really one goal for the team, for the whole team, and that's to be the best.

Coach Owen's assessment of the overall team goal was indicative of a common feeling amongst the participants – the goal of high school play was winning. This stressed the importance of winning on the high school level. Johnny and Coach Jackson both referred to the importance of being perfect in high school if they wanted to win the state or national championship. There is no room for mistakes. Coach Jackson reminded his team during practice, "We only play for one trophy every year. That's tomorrow."

Several people indicated that, in addition to the desire to win championships, the intensity in high schools came from the relatively short season. Alex, a high school and club swimmer, stated:

I feel as though that mentality can also be complemented by – what you call it – time. If you think, Jose (the swimming coach) brought this up. My coach brought this up earlier. He only has like 16 weeks or so with us. And he's starting with guys not only talented, but he's also starting with guys who are still doing doggy-style in the pool. So he has to shove so much into 16 weeks that he has no time to like step back and just fix those small delicate parts.

Alex's feeling was that the intensity of high school participation stemmed directly from the relatively short season. Since club teams had all year to work with athletes, they did not have to be as intense. High school coaches had a very short time frame during which they could produce successful teams and athletes. The result of this was that high school coaches had to be more focused and more strict in their approach to practices and competitions.

Coach Denis, a high school and club swimming coach, had similar thoughts:

There's so many factors that kind of go into what you do as a high school coach versus a club coach. A high school coach is looking at like a 12-16 week window whereas club coaches are looking at an annual timeframe.

Coach Denis echoed Alex. The short high school season made coaching difficult. There were many things that play into the short season – teaching individual skills, building up a team, managing a packed schedule of competitions, monitoring academic and behavioral issues of team members, etc. These things made the job complicated and therefore, more intense. Most of these same components existed for club coaches, but they had all year to work on them.

Likewise Coach Jackson, the high school and club soccer coach, said:

In the high school season, you're together everyday for four months. So you're cramming. But because it's every day, you can impact the kid in a big way in a short period of time...The mentality that I carry as a high school coach, I could not approach the academy game in the same frame of mind...It's too long and spread out for you to maintain that type of intensity throughout the whole season.

Coach Jackson, specifically, spoke of the importance of being together every day which was different from the club approach of 3-4 days per week. Being together everyday but only for four months allowed coaches to bring more energy to their team and be more demanding. In Coach Jackson's assessment, the level of intensity commonly associated with high school sports would be impossible to maintain for the entire year.

This point was reinforced when Coach Jackson addressed his team at the practice before the state final game:

We have put roughly 100 sessions in on this field since late July up to today. 100 sessions, okay? It's not possible to train more than we have, not possible. So we need to rely on all of that preparation and all of that training You need to tap into all of the hard work that you have laid out on this lower field over the last 100 days – 100 plus days. Coach Jackson's reference to 100 practices over 100 plus days strengthened the point about the intensity of the season. 100 practices on the club level would take about thirty-four weeks to complete. In the high school game, the same number of practices happen in about sixteen weeks. Obviously, this felt much different.

The importance of winning could also be seen however, when teams lost. When the St. Benedict's wrestling team entered the county tournament for the first time in many years, there was an expectation, amongst the coaches, that the team would perform well. After the first day of wrestling all of the wrestlers were out of medal contention. As the last remaining wrestlers lost towards the end of the night, the coaches and wrestlers were visibly upset. More than that, the coaches verbally – briefly but forcefully – scolded wrestlers whom they believed did not work hard enough or who made too many mistakes in their matches. This signified the seriousness of the losses..

There was some disagreement about the intensity on the club level. Parents who were interviewed were all of the belief that club practices were high intensity. Mr. Rios – father of Frank, a club only soccer player - stated, "The intensity on the club level is high." Mr. Gomez – father of William, a high school and club wrestler – agreed, "The intensity is so much higher at a private level, so much higher, you're demanded more, you're paying, you're paying. You get what you pay for." Mr. Rios and Mr. Gomez repeatedly demonstrated how pleased they were with club athletic programs. Mr. Rios confidently believed that if an athlete wanted to be

successful in his sport he needed to be involved in an academy or club program. Mr. Gomez was even more specific when he said “Club is the most expensive way to go, but if you have that potential, and you can afford it, it’s the only way to go.”.

While the parents thought club intensity was high, the students and coaches did not describe things the same way. Noel, a high school and club wrestler, responding to another member of the focus group who indicated that because of sports there is no ‘me time’ explained:

Club is like a part of your me time...it’s like you’re just there just to like work on simple things and like – you’re communicating and stuff, like not somebody breathing down your neck the whole time. It’s structured, but it’s not like – it’s something you do because you want to get better. It’s not because it’s obligated.

Noel indicated, as did the wrestling coach earlier, that club practices were not obligated. As a result, Noel, who earlier identified high school practices as being more intense because they felt more urgent and were harder, now described club as being some sort of easier experience. The belief that club was somehow less intense or even some sort of relaxing environment was not universally shared.

Frank, the club only soccer player, modified that by adding:

I mean our intensity in our practices depends. Because sometimes based on what coach, like the drills that we do – maybe it’s like a three. We just ping the ball around – just play. But if it’s before a big game, that we know we need to get ready for, I’ll say ten.

Sometimes even practice is longer. We would just go all out to prepare. If we’re going on a trip, like on a road trip, it’s always a ten. The whole week is ten.

Frank made a distinction between the typical practice and the practices just before competitions. For him, the intensity of the average practice was a three. The intensity of the practice in the

week before competitions was much higher. The fluctuation in intensity was consistent with what Coach Denis and Coach Jackson earlier discussed about the length of the club season. As was stated above, it should also be noted that these practices were only three days per week. Unlike the high school practice schedule of five or six days a week. Therefore, when Frank described practices as being a ten for an entire week, he was referring to the three days of practice for that week.

Coach Olla, a high school and club soccer coach, discussed the challenge of trying to bring intensity to the club world. “I try to be tough on them. But sometimes they look at me like – ‘this is Cedar Stars, not Benedict’s.’” Coach Olla’s experience of trying to increase the intensity on the club team was met with resistance from players and parents who were not looking for that type of environment from their club. Players who were there to work on “simple things”, as Noel said above, were not interested in being pushed or driven in the same way that high school athletes expected to be. Furthermore, since individual improvement, not winning, was the ultimate goal, the intensity with which a player practiced or played had more impact on him than the team. Therefore, playing with less intensity did not hurt anyone else.

How did the fans impact this intensity at a club level? Johnny, a high school and club soccer player, indicated there are not many, “Club, academy, the only fans you’ve got is your parents who drove you in that’s it.” Coach Olla also stated, “For club games, you don’t get friends there. Friends don’t come out. Only whoever gave you the ride there comes out and college coaches, that’s it.” Coach Jackson, the high school and club soccer coach, felt the same way, “When you go to the academy games, the only people standing on the sidelines are parents and college coaches. That’s it, so boring.”

However, on the swimming side of things Alex and Leon, both high school and club swimmers, made positive comments about the crowds. Leon started:

When it comes on swimming for club, all the bleachers, all the seating arrangements are filled. You even have people outside of the door looking through the glass...It's like so much support. That's why I think it brings that arena feeling, like you're a pro.

Aiden added:

I think it's a lot because clubs usually have their meets, games, whatever you want to call it during the weekend... So it's easier for them to get out there and to get to you because they're able to, because they don't have work and stuff and other priorities; versus in high school where most of the events are during the weekday. As parents have to still work and it's kind of hard for them to pull out of their work day to come and see you.

Leon and Aiden acknowledged that the fans filling the seats are primarily family members, but they described a different environment from the "boring" one that Coach Jackson described. It was clear from these statements that there were some very different feelings about the impact of fans on the intensity of the team. Alex went on to describe how the fans at a club meet could be just as important as the fans at a high school game:

Our coach comes out here all excited like 'guys, let's get started. This is the event. Win the whole thing. And if we do this, we're undefeated for our whole season. You guys got this.' And then I was the anchor...we were pretty close. Third leg was not as strong. We actually kind of left the lead. Everybody was around the pool and everything screaming, let's go, let's go... this is actually the first time out of all my years swimming before, I actually heard people in the pool. While I was swimming, I was sprinting so hard to catch up to them. And I actually heard people which actually encouraged me and pushed me

harder to go faster and faster...eventually I just barely touch the person (out) and everybody was in – it was just an uproar and everybody was screaming, everybody was laughing, jumping around and everything. And just like – it felt heartwarming to me to be in that situation to win. To be able to win it for my team.

Alex's statement summed up two important concepts. First, even if the fans were only your parents and teammates, they were an important part of your success. Second, there were times when wins matter on the club level. It should be noted, though, that Alex's story was referring to his participation on a summer recreation team, not his year-round club team.

The strictness, urgency, physical and emotional investment, the desire to win, presence of fans, and shorter season all contributed to a sense of intensity. While club teams certainly had a level of intensity expected from athletes, participants in this study generally reported that the intensity was greater on the high school level. This finding was consistent with the observation of both high school and club team practices and competitions during which the atmosphere at high school events seemed to involve a much greater amount of energy.

Discussion

The coaches and athletes agreed that winning and losing have different meanings on the high school and club levels. It should be no surprise that the approaches to the respective seasons, the attitude of the athletes and coaches, and the intensity of practices and games, reflected the amount of importance athletes and coaches ascribed to winning and losing.

Freidman (2013) identified five reasons that parents enroll their elementary-age children in competitive after school activities.

(1) internalizing the importance of winning, (2) bouncing back from a loss to win in the future, (3) learning how to perform within time limits, (4) learning how to succeed in stressful situations, and (5) being able to perform under the gaze of others. (p.17)

Friedman combined these five motivations to describe a form of capital that parents hope their children will develop as a result of their participation which she called “competitive kid capital” (p.17) Friedman went on to say that, “Internalizing the importance of winning is a primary goal in acquiring Competitive Kid Capital.”(p.17)

The findings of this study were not consistent with Friedman’s findings. It is important to note that while Friedman was focused on elementary age children, this study was focused on high school age youth. Nevertheless, there was a discrepancy between Friedman’s assessment that internalizing the importance of winning is a primary goal of participation and the finding here that winning was not the primary goal of most club teams. Therefore, we are left with two possibilities. Either there is a disconnect between what parents expect or believe their children are gaining as a result of their participation or it is possible that there is some age at which the goals of participation change.

In this study, no parent indicated learning the importance of winning as a primary goal of their son’s participation. Parents discussed personal improvement in the sport, wanting their child to be proficient at swimming, the need to stay in shape, keeping their child away from negative influences, and school requirements as the motivators for making sure their sons participate in sports.

It may be that learning the importance of winning was not the goal of many parents. Coakley (2010b) posits that the goal of participation may be more tied to the parents’ ability to claim that they provided all of the right opportunities for their child. In this scenario, children

who improve and succeed individually allow parents to more “legitimately claim parental moral worth, and others especially other parents – would likely grant it to them.” (p. 17) If this is true, then it further calls into question Friedman’s (2013) findings.

It is important for parents and athletes to have a better understanding of the approaches that each type of team employs. If parents or athletes are looking to have more of the traditional team experience, focusing on winning championships, positive shared experiences, and learning accountability to others, then the high school team is likely to better meet their expectations.

However, in the current climate of youth sports, high school sports alone seem unlikely to lead to further advancement in the sport. In this case, parents and athletes would be well-served to find a club team to supplement their participation. The challenge of this joint participation is that the different types of teams will likely be teaching different values about how to approach the sport. Parents and athletes must learn how to navigate these differences in an effort to best meet their expectations and needs.

Chapter 5: Social Capital

“So it becomes like two separate issues. You know, school and soccer.”

- Mr. Rios

Getting a better understanding of the academic and social supports provided to students who participate in either high school, club teams, or both was a key component of this study. Students, parents, and coaches in this study consistently indicated that academic and social supports were primarily provided by high school teams. They also indicated that club teams were generally not expected to provide such supports. Any academic or social supports that were provided by club teams were cursory at best.

However, participants indicated that club teams provided experiences that were generally not seen on high school teams. Club teams, generally, involved more travel, provided opportunities for more interaction with people from different teams, and had more challenges to overcome. The factors of academic support, social support, opportunities, and ability to network all contributed Coleman's (1987) idea of social capital. Bowen and Green (2002) identify this social capital as “the strength of social networks and connections in helping people to achieve their goals” (p.5). With regards to social capital four findings emerged from this study: 1) Student athletes, regardless of team, faced serious challenges to academic success but overcame those challenges through the development of skills in discipline, time management, and perseverance. 2) Because of the level of academic support, there was an academic benefit to high school participation. 3) Relationships between athletes and coaches were of extreme importance for both high schools and coaches, although the nature of those relationships was quite different. 4) For youth participating on club teams, parents took on a much greater role in the development of social capital for their children.

Academics and Sports

As discussed earlier, a significant body of research suggests that athletic participation in school is correlated with positive academic performance (Boatright, 2009; Camp, 1990; Holland and Andre, 1987; Jordan, 1999; Marsh and Kleitman, 2002; Shulruf, Tumen and Tolley, 2008; Siliker and Quirk, 1997, Lipscomb, 2007; Gerber, 1996). There has been no research on the correlation of participation in private clubs and academic performance. As a result, we know little of what to expect from this group of athletes. Part of the purpose of this study was to better understand how high school and club athletes are supported academically. Common understandings would suggest that more support would lead to higher overall academic achievement, while less support would lead to lower achievement. While it is complicated greatly by the purposefully selected subjects of the study, the academic success of the subjects in this study lends support for the commonly held notions.

Before moving forward, it must be noted that all of the subjects attend a private, Catholic school for boys. All of the subjects were selected based on the recommendation of coaches or the researcher's personal knowledge of the athlete's participation. Therefore, it can be argued that academic success is more a function of the sampling and their backgrounds than a result of their athletic participation. Holland and Andre (1987) suggest that all research regarding extracurricular, and more specifically, athletic participation, is flawed due to similar sampling limitations. Additionally, as this was not a quantitative study, any numbers presented here are based off of raw numbers and participant statements. No quantitative analysis of this data was performed.

The Student Athlete

Douglas woke up in the middle of the night to complete his homework. Jared did what he could before falling asleep and then woke up at four in the morning to finish. Devon also worked until he fell asleep, but he found time in school the next day to complete what he missed. Johnny was sometimes up until two in the morning completing his work, while Josue did homework in the car on the way to and from practice.

All of these stories demonstrate the difficulty of being an athlete during the high school years and being academically successful. The stories above reflect athletes who participated in different ways. Some only participated in high school, some in both high school and club, and one only in club. Time was a factor for academic success for all of the student athletes participating in this study.

Douglas, a high school only swimmer, found it difficult to do any work when he got home from his practice in the evening.

Take the bus home...(Get home) around 8:00..and then straight to sleep. Take a shower; wash the chlorine off; eat. You go to sleep and then wake up in the middle of the night and try to finish the homework...Like around 1 or 2:00 and then go back to sleep and wake up. And the cycle just keeps going...I don't go to school without doing my homework. So, I have to find a way to do it since I'm not able to do it as soon as I go home...because I'm too tired.

Douglas's statements about his energy levels were consistent with other students in the study who also indicated that they did not have enough energy when arriving home to complete their studies. However, Douglas's commitment to completing his work before going to school implied a great amount of self-discipline which was likely a contributing factor to his honor roll grades. Indeed, discipline is one trait that many proponents cite as a benefit of participation in athletics.

Consistent with the concerns of Holland and Andre (1987) it is unclear whether or not Douglas's commitment to completing his homework was a byproduct of the discipline that he learned through sports, or if the drive that caused him to complete homework everyday was the same drive that pushed him to participate and succeed in sports in the first place..

Similar to Douglas, Jared and Devon developed ways to complete their work each night, despite their level of exhaustion. Jared, a high school only wrestler, stated:

I get home like 8/8:30. So what I plan to do is eat, go to sleep, and then wake up at four, finish my last piece of homework and then go to school. You know I don't feel like doing that everyday, but I just have to.

Devon, another high school only wrestler, added:

After practice, I actually – I'd go to the lobby, sit down for like 30 minutes and just like to sit there and okay, I'll have a conversation with somebody. Then I'll start walking home and I go inside. Based on (what) my weight looks like, you know, I have a little something to eat. For a straight hour, I listen to a lot of music just to wake me back up to do my homework. So that will probably be around 8 / 8:30. I'll start my homework and typically I'll do my first, second and third block and do my fourth block when I get to school.

Douglas, Jared and Devon all pointed to an important aspect of any busy person – time management. An aspect of this important skill for life was being sown at the high school level by sheer demands on time. Each of the above quotes indicated that these students were not getting home until about 8:00 each night. Each of these students indicated a level of fatigue upon arriving home, while acknowledging the need to complete their required work before the next

day. Each found strategies to complete that work. This could only happen through effective time management.

Johnny, a high school and club soccer player, tried to make time to complete his homework wherever he could fit it into his day:

Free period helps me out a lot. Then like there's time where I get to practice early. So, I'll do the homework – whatever I could in the car. The moment I get home – the other night me and (two teammates) were up til like two in the morning doing homework on the laptop.

Johnny's strategy of making use of his free period seemed to work for him that semester. However, at SBP most students did not have free periods. These were granted to seniors in an effort to help with the college application process. Johnny's use of the free period for homework worked for him, but was not available to most students in the school. Even with the free period, Johnny still found himself completing work in his car and staying up until late hours. Johnny's participation on the club soccer team had him frequently getting home after 10:00 at night, making time management even more critical. Because of a limited amount of recreation space, club team practices frequently ran until late in the evening.

Josue, a club only soccer player, had a different approach.

Right after (I get out of school), I just start homework because I don't have a lot of time. My dad picks me up at 5:30, so I have two hours to do all my homework. Most of the time I finish it. I am able to finish it with time and then I study, if I have any time...I get home which is like 10 or 9:30, yeah. And then I eat, and then I'm done with the day, like 11:30 or 11. Because I have to shower, eat, and then if I didn't finish homework or anything I still have to do, if I need to study for anything, I do it at night...so sometimes I

end the day like midnight, which isn't easy because I wake up in the morning then next day, but that's fine, I can do it.

Because Josue did not play for a school-based team, his practice was later at night. Therefore, Josue was able to take advantage of the time right after school to conduct his own study hall. Josue's discipline and ability to manage time was evident as he took advantage of what would otherwise be wasted time to complete his work. Josue's discipline was rewarded with his honor roll grade average. Josue demonstrated the healthiest approach to completing homework out of all interviewees.

Coleman's (1961) resource trade-off theory, also known as the zero-sum model (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002) suggests that "the amounts of time devoted to academic, social, and athletic pursuits are in competition with each other." (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002, p. 471) This theory assumes that humans are working with a finite set of resources that cannot be stretched or adjusted. Therefore, more time on non-academic pursuits would automatically come at the expense of academic success.

As the stories above demonstrate, there is certainly a time conflict that was created by the busy schedules that student-athletes were following. Noel, a high school and club wrestler, discussed this challenge in more detail while also explaining that there were other challenges to being academically successful besides time.

It's really difficult to manage the time, especially with wrestling. It's like, exhausting – especially cutting weight and stuff. It's hard to focus on school and coming home and doing homework and stuff.

Noel highlighted the fact that the commitment to wrestling goes far beyond the practice or competition. Wrestlers are expected to maintain a weight which may or may not have resulted in

students being required to minimize their food intake. When maintaining or cutting weight wrestler's energy levels would be even lower than other athletes because of the lack of proper nutrition.

One would expect that a student who lacks time and energy, not to mention nutrition, would have a lower academic performance. However, a review of the grades of the participants in this study revealed that all but one of the twelve students had grade averages of B or higher. While these students were finding the resources of time and energy to be at a premium, their academics were not hurting as a result of their athletic participation. Sleep, social lives, and other recreation time, were being sacrificed before academic performance. Alex, a high school and club swimmer, stressed this point when he asked "What's a break?" Noel, a high school and club wrestler, clarified his point when he said "You have absolutely no me time." Students in this study sacrificed their personal time to be able to compete athletically and be academically successful.

This finding lends support to the notion that athletic participation provides a discipline that allows students to focus their energies on things which will lead to their future success as an individual – such as academics. This findings of this study are consistent with other research that suggest the zero-sum model is not accurate if applied to academic success being at odds with athletic participation. This finding does, however, lend credence to the zero-sum model in that in order to maintain academics and athletics, other things must be sacrificed.

Despite their overall success, several students in this study found themselves struggling academically at some point in their high school career. All of them drew connections between their athletic participation and the drop in their grades.

Douglas, the high school only swimmer, discussed reasons for his grade drop in his tenth grade year.

I would say late in my sophomore year there was a huge drop in my grades. Freshman year, since I just started this sport and everything, it wasn't really affecting me like that. But then, as time progressed, I got more and more minutes and had to do more and more events, it started to carry on throughout the next day. So there would be times in class when I would go to sleep and miss the whole lesson. Then I'd have to do even more work so I can catch up and everything.

Devon added:

Sports...definitely conflicted with me last year. Sophomore year for me was like the hardest year ever. I've been wrestling with varsity since seventh grade. But like freshman year is just like, you know, no one really pays attention to what you do. They'll allow you to get away with things because, you know, you're a freshmen. Sophomore year, when you're like one of the guys who are on the team now, and you're wrestling for varsity – like going to all of these matches – it's like they pull you...And then it's like when you're wrestling, you're thinking about so much and it's hard to focus on your academics and the sport at the same time. And for me. That was like one of my biggest downfalls. I took my focus away from the academics and just put it strictly into wrestling and, you know, it didn't turn out good for me because I didn't do well in sophomore year. And I reflect that after, you know, me failing, and I told myself – no, I can't do this again. I have to prioritize and I came back and I got better grades.

Interestingly, Douglas and Devon both identified sophomore year as the year of struggle. They both identified this as the year that their athletic participation increased and attributed their lower

academic performance to that change. Increased athletic participation did not mean more time, though. It meant more expectation. The length of practices and number of practices remained the same. Devon did mention that he found himself getting pulled out of class more for wrestling matches, but the overall implication from both him and Douglas was that it was the increased expectations placed on them that had an impact on their grades. This should be cause for coaches and school officials to determine the threshold at which athletic pressures become a detriment to academic success.

Both Devon's and Douglas's lower than normal academic performance was temporary and their overall grades remained high. This suggests that St. Benedict's was providing some sort of support to help athletes overcome these pressures or that the school recognized that threshold of pressure. It also suggests, as stated above, that it was the participation in the athletic team itself that was providing certain lessons about how to recover from adversity and how to persevere that allowed the students to maintain a high overall average even if they experienced trouble along the way.

The idea that athletic participation leads to the development of skills that are non-academic is consistent with the model put forth by Holland and Andre (1987). They suggested that there are non-academic benefits to participation that may indirectly lead to academic success. They referred to this as the developmental model. Discipline, time management, and perseverance were lessons that these student athletes learned. These skills allowed the students to develop strategies for completing their work and maintaining their grades while dealing with rigorous schedules. Without these skills, the students would not have consistently woken up in the middle of the night, taken advantage of the dead time between school and practice, or constructively made use of their free periods in the school day.

Mrs. Smith – mother of Simon, a high school only swimmer – was specific about the lessons that Simon has learned:

He's disciplined. He's committed. He learns how to work through difficult times where – and I can only compare that to my interactions with children in public education – difficulty comes, they quit...I do believe that the discipline, the commitment and just the perseverance to keep going (are the lessons he's learned).

Mrs. Smith, a public school educator, believed that it was participating in swimming that helped Simon learn this skill. In another part of the interview, she described how Simon frequently fell asleep while doing his homework, but always found a way to complete it. Nevertheless, the strategies that he employed to complete his work were working. Simon was a student on highest honors at the school.

Mr. Gomez – father of William, a high school and club wrestler – also cited discipline as a skill developed through his athletic participation:

Obviously, discipline, tremendous discipline, dedication, devotion, hardships and it lets you deal. You begin to understand what expectations could be, but sometimes are unreachable. But it doesn't matter, you're still reaching. It's the idea that you could do it, not necessarily get it done, but you have that drive that feeds you. That drive that pushes you.

Mr. Gomez and Mrs. Smith indicated that their sons learned to push themselves even when things seemed tough or unreachable. The perseverance to keep working hard, even when the work seemed incredibly difficult combined with the discipline to make sure that work was completed would be one way of explaining why athletes experienced athletic success. As has been stated repeatedly, it is unclear whether or not the athletes were learning these skills from

their athletic participation or if they participated in athletics because of these skills that they learned from other places – including home. It was clear that these parents believed discipline and perseverance were learned through athletics.

The High School Benefit

The identification-commitment model (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002) suggests that commitment to an extracurricular activity supports an espousal of school values and therefore leads to higher academic achievement. If this is true, then students who participated only in club athletics should have found it more difficult to espouse the values of their high school and, therefore, also have had a negative correlation with academic performance. Those students who participated in school-based sports, even if they participated on club teams, should have had a positive correlation.

A review of the grade point averages (GPA) of the students in this study revealed a linear trend which would seem to support this model. Students who participated only in high school had an aggregate GPA of 3.25. Those who participated in both high school and club had a GPA of 2.85. Those who competed in club only had a GPA of 2.32. As this was not a quantitative study, no tests for statistical significance were conducted. Additionally, the non-random participant sample makes these numbers lack validity. It should also be noted that while there were four high school only subjects and five high school and club subjects, there were only two club only subjects. That means that club only GPA is based off of only two averages. Nevertheless, Frank, one of the club-only students, had the lowest GPA of any student in the study.

On the surface, these numbers support a claim for the identification-commitment model. Students who participated on school-based teams had a higher aggregate GPA than those who

participated only on club teams. Furthermore, students who participated in both high school and club had an aggregate GPA in between the other groups. This suggests that the connection to the high school had an influence on academic success. However, the fact that the athletes who competed in both high school and club had a lower GPA than the high school only athletes might be explained by the threshold model (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002) which suggests that there is a limit at which any further participation will lead to diminishing returns.

William, a high school and club wrestler, explained this:

It would be so much easier if I didn't go to club. I make sure I have like really good grades before the season starts because I know, when it starts, my grades are going to go down a little bit. But yeah, if I didn't go to club, my grades would stay high all year round.

William supported the idea that participating in both high school and club may be too overwhelming to maintain GPAs as high as the high school only group. Saying that his grades would be high all year if he did not do club, indicated the struggle that he felt to find the proper amount of time. Curiously, William opted to say that he would stop his club team to raise his grades. Perhaps this is because high school is associated with grades or because we were sitting in a high school for the interview. When asked, he did acknowledge that quitting high school would have the same effect.

Aiden, a high school and club swimmer, faced the same time challenges of participating in both high school and club. According to his mother, Ms. Parker, by 11th grade, this challenge became overwhelming and Aiden had to make a choice as to whether he would continue with his high school team or continue to swim year-round. Aiden chose to continue with his high school. This decision was curious considering that Aiden indicated he would choose club, if put in the

position. Similarly, Leon, a high school and club swimmer, indicated that he would choose high school.

William and Leon's comments and Aiden's actions imply that high school sports seemed to hold a special place in the minds and hearts of these student-athletes. While all of the participants expressed fondness for their club teams, when put in the position to choose, high school was made a priority. The affinity for and prioritizing of the high school team may in fact be explained by the identification-commitment model. Through their sports commitment these student athletes have developed a connection to their high school that is stronger than that of their club teams.

The identification-commitment model is based on Coleman's (1987) version of social capital. This capital, Coleman posited, was developed by the community network that forms around students who attend Catholic schools. As a result of the student being in an environment where teachers and parents espoused the same values, and were in regular communication, the student was more likely to be successful and to absorb those values. The identification-commitment model suggests that competing in high school sports provides the same sort of access to the network of community resources since coaches, teachers, and parents are all working together for common goals. When it comes to academic success, Coach Sylvers, who coaches both high school and club soccer, explained why this model might hold true as he described his own experience as a student-athlete:

I felt like my high school coaches were (supporting me academically) only because they were having lunch with my teachers. So, if something wasn't going right, they'll mention it...Where at (my club team), I think they're not different from high school coaches, it's just that they don't have the resources to talk to the teachers. They had no idea who (my)

teachers were in high school...(In high school) my teachers had my coaches' cell phone number or email addresses and things like that.

Coach Sylvers comment was in line with the identification-commitment model. The network of community resources became more available to him as a result of participating on a high school team. He acknowledged in another comment that it was very difficult for a club coach to follow up on their players' academic success. As athletes on club teams came from many different schools, most of the time academic information was obtained completely by word of mouth. Coach Sylvers went on to explain that this may be even more difficult if parents were not focused on academics in the same way.

When it gets to the club side of things, it gets very difficult to check up on the kid....you just go about word of mouth...Most of the time (we don't see report cards). I just talk to the parents and I see – If the parent cares more about the kid playing the soccer game than him getting good grades – most parents in the soccer world in America cares about that more than getting good grades. So that's where it becomes very tricky.

What coach Sylvers described is the opposite of Coleman's (1961) social capital. If the parent and coach did not hold the same expectations when it comes to academic performance, then the student would not benefit from a unified network of resources. Furthermore, the student, the coach, and the parent may come to see athletics and academics as being completely separate. Mr. Rios – father of Frank, a club only soccer player – clearly felt this way when he said, “So it becomes like two separate issues. You know, school and soccer. So that's how I see it.” Josue, another club only soccer player, agreed: “Yeah, soccer and high school or academics – they don't mix.” It should be noted that the only people who made statements of this sort were not involved in high school athletics at all, again suggesting that participating only in clubs may not

have a positive influence on attitudes towards academics. How that attitude translates into grades would be the subject of another study.

Coach Jackson, a high school and club soccer coach, discussed the challenge of blending academics with club soccer as he described how he would work with an athlete who was doing poorly academically.

If a kid's not doing what he's supposed to do and the parents are having a hard time getting the kid to meet expectations, I can partner with the parent and have a conversation with the kid...So you can partner with the parents in that way. But if the parents aren't on board, there's nothing you can do. Because they're not paying you to be their guidance counselor. They're paying you to be their soccer coach. So, like I said, it's a bit more difficult on that end, and that's why it's probably not treated as seriously as it needs to be treated.

Coach Jackson explained that, as a club coach, even if he wanted to support a student academically, it would be extremely difficult to do so. Parents were paying for their children to learn soccer. His comment implied that most parents did not expect club coaches to participate in academics. As is discussed in another chapter, parents invested a lot of time and money into ensuring that their child had the best athletic opportunity available to them. In this regard, academics were completely separate. Coach Jackson's experience seemed to confirm this separation.

Coach Jackson's comment helped to explain why Coleman's (1987) social capital theory works when applied to school-based athletics. Parents expected their children to do well in school and they expected school-based coaches to be an extension of the school in helping to prepare their children academically and athletically. Parents attitudes were, therefore, in line with

teachers and coaches about the importance of academics. If parents, teachers, and coaches were all working together and communicating with one another, the student-athlete would be surrounded by these values and would be more likely to adopt them as his own.

This is not to say that club coaches did not make some efforts to support academic progress. Coach Owen, the high school and club wrestling coach, uses some of the same tactics as SBP administrators to follow up on his club wrestlers:

Club wise is funny. With club wise, I'd take our weekly (academic) reports here and I bring them to club and have the boys fill them out for like a month or so and kind of use the same kind of idea. If you know if everything is (okay), then you know you can back off of it. But I do ask for reports cards at club...I think (families) think it's cool. Like it's different because you – I don't know many clubs that do that if any. I think they find it kind of a little bit of a relief, like they're not the only ones checking up on them. So it's kind of like another hub or another voice and like 'okay, you gotta do this'...I don't think many (other club coaches) do that, if any...I wouldn't say (academics) is not important, but I don't know if (other club coaches) go to the same length that I would.

Coach Owen's approach provided a contrast to the approach presented by Coach Jackson and Coach Olla. Coach Owen believed it was possible to take a more proactive approach to supporting his club wrestlers. However, when taking into account Coach Owen's earlier comments that the club wrestlers come to practice on their own schedule, it seems that it would be difficult to consistently follow up on academics. Furthermore, Coach Owen offered no examples of resistance to these efforts in the way that Coach Jackson and Coach Olla did. Therefore, it is unclear how Coach Owen would deal with that situation and what the potential consequences would be for students (and parents) who either refused to participate in these

efforts or who were doing poorly academically. During the observation of a Total Force Wrestling Club practice, there was no mention of academics whatsoever.

Coach Denis, the high school and club swimming coach, actually did have consequences for poor academics.

I think on the high school level, there is a connection between academics and athletics.

Whereas on the club level, I think it depends on the leadership of that club...Even me, I even I have a clause in my team policy where, if I feel that an athlete is not doing well academically, I can suspend them. Now I've been blessed not to actually use that too often. I think I've only used it once or twice...In a club, you could be getting straight F's and I can keep swimming if I want to. But that becomes more of an ethical decision on my end. Do I want this kid to be swimming when I know they have F's?

Coach Denis provided the most comprehensive plan for academic follow up of all of the interviewed. Furthermore, while all the coaches indicated that it was easier to follow up on the academics of their high school athletes and all indicated that there were consequences for poor academics, Coach Denis's policy was the most detailed plan presented for high school or club teams, describing the question of whether to have consequences for poor academic performances as an "ethical issue." No other coach or parent mentioned ethics at all. The data suggests that while high school coaches were expected to be involved with the academics of their athletes, there was no such expectation placed on club coaches.

Despite his clear description of consequences, Coach Denis acknowledged that it was not easy to provide academic support for club athletes:

In high school it's kind of easier for me because I have a head coach that keeps an eye on (grades)...On the club level, I'm more reliant on parent feedback. So if the parent is

telling me the kid is doing better or if the athlete tells me they're doing better, then I have the information. If no one informs me, I have no information. At one point, I was trying to collect – get copies of kids' report cards and that was just so time consuming...So I try to have more of a connection with the athletes so they let me know what's going on with them academically.

Despite his tough policies, or maybe because of them – as Coach Olla implied – the collecting of report cards or getting access to grades was difficult and time consuming. Coach Denis's found that the best way to support his athletes academically was to forge deeper relationships of trust with them. Through the building of these relationships, Coach Denis eliminated the need to collect report cards or other information. Instead, he was able to rely on the students to share their academic progress with him directly.

The relationship between athlete and coach is important for athletic success. If that same trusting relationship with athletes leads to higher academic success on the club level, this could imply that Coleman's (1987) version of social capital can exist on club teams that have no attachment to schools. If social capital can exist from participating on club teams, it requires us to question whether or not the success of student-athletes in school is the result of their commitment to a sport or if there should be a new model developed and tested that is more focused on the relationship of coach and athlete. In other words, there may be two separate forces at work. First is the commitment to the school and therefore the espousal of school values and traditions. This is known as the identification-commitment model. The second is the relationship with a particular coach, regardless of the institution or agency represented. This we will call the relationship aspect.

The Relationship Aspect

The students and parents in this study routinely discussed the importance of relationships with coaches, while coaches mentioned the importance of trusting relationships with students. However, like most other aspects of the study, there was a clear sense that that the relationship between high school coach and athlete was different from the relationship between club coach and athlete. Mr. Gomez – father of William, a high school and club wrestler – stated:

Coaches have a very important responsibility...I've seen coaches which are very, very good – I don't like naming names – and I've seen coaches that have no business being around kids...It's very important to motivate the kids and believe in themselves...Coaches are very supportive. But again, has to be – it has a lot to say about the individual.

When asked how much the coaches got involved academically, Mr. Gomez said:

Verbally, not really with the, you know, you pretty much have to – everybody has a lot on their plates, but verbally, they always did say, and I remember they always said, do good in school, school comes first...The high school coach was very, very, very important. You got to do good at school first.

Mr. Gomez's comments stressed the importance of the role of the relationship with a coach, high school or club. His impression reinforced the points made by some of the coaches that club coaches give only cursory attention to academics. They may mention the importance of academics, but they are not really expected to do more than that. High school coaches seem to put forth a greater effort in ensuring that satisfactory grades are maintained.

His son's take on his coaches was actually somewhat different:

Most club coaches definitely support academics first. Like if you have a lot of homework, they say take off from practice and do the homework. But I think it's different for high

school. They won't let you do that. Like you can't stop from practice to do homework unless you're failing in class or your grades are really low.

William's understanding was that club coaches seemed to put academics ahead of high school coaches. However, William's experience of more freedom for academics from club coaches was probably more about the larger philosophy about teams and individuals than it was about academics. As has already been discussed, club coaches focused far more on individual development. Therefore, telling an athlete to take time off to complete academic work, did not have any larger impact on the team or the coach. Since on high school teams, coaches were more focused on the team as a whole, allowing individual athletes to miss practice for academic work would take away from the team's ability to be and work together. This should not be interpreted as lack of interest in academic success among that high school coaches. In fact, interviewees overwhelmingly believed that high school coaches had more involvement with academics than club coaches.

Leon, a high school and club swimmer, discovered this conflict as captain of the high school swimming team this year:

Guys were skipping practice. They'd go study for finals. And I was like – I was in your shoes before (when) I was a freshman, a sophomore. Needed to study for finals, but I was also balancing club and high school and my academics too...So then I thought...I just need to let them take off a day...or just need to ask the coach can you cut odd practice or something. So I asked the coach and the coach was like, 'yeah, we should think about academics first.'

Leon went on to explain that his coach shortened practice for the next two days to allow students more time to study. In doing this, Leon realized something that William did not; namely, that

while for high school coaches it was necessary to allow people time to complete work, but it was also necessary to keep the team together. As such, Leon was able to use his role as a captain on the team to talk the coach into making adjustments to practice. Leon also said: “I always thought that it depends on the coach and...the athlete’s relationship.” This is the heart of the relationship aspect.

Josue, the club only soccer player, also highlighted the importance of the relationship with his coaches. He discussed the fact that he had more of a personal connection to the coaches he had on a previous team than his current team.

Personal connection, in Bergen, I did...I’m not sure (what the difference is)...Sometimes I would get together with (the coach), the other coaches in Bergen, I would, when the game is over, I’ll go with them to eat, to a restaurant or something. I would just hang out with them. In Monmouth (the new team), it’s like after they discipline or after they do that it’s like they’re done. Like it’s a 9 to 5 shift, They’re over. Like they just leave...Yeah, yeah, (they cared) about like everyone individually on the team..They don’t (take interest in school work)...In Bergen they didn’t talk about it at all...they don’t care about grades or anything.

Josue observed that he did have a very good relationship with his previous coaches, but academics were not part of that relationship. Josue was disappointed with the lack of relationship on his new team, demonstrating the relative importance of the relationship with coaches. Indeed on the club level the coach is the point of attachment. Coach Olla explained this:

Yeah, it depends on the coach. It’s not just the name because a lot of kids can go to Red Bull and then after a month or two they leave because they don’t like the coach...(In high school) you’re representing your school – to help your school win. And a lot of kids have

pride to talk about their high school, if especially they had a great year with the high school than talking about their club.

The relationship with the coach bred a loyalty in clubs that is different from high schools. As coach Olla explained, high school athletes tended to be loyal to their school; club athletes tended to be loyal to their coach. This sentiment, or a version of it, was repeated by many participants in the study. There did not seem to be much loyalty to clubs. Much of this sentiment likely goes back to the idea that the mission of clubs is to focus on individuals, not teams, and to focus on improvement, not winning – as has been discussed in other chapters. High schools focus on winning and tradition as goals of participation. In so doing, athletes feel as if they are part of something bigger and develop a loyalty to their school and program. Obviously, this was not the case for all students, but this was the feeling presented by students in this study. Clubs were focused on individual improvement with a stated goal of preparing youth for the next level of play – typically college or professional. No team or club is going to prepare an individual – a coach will do this. Therefore, as Mr. Gomez said, “You know, it’s basically, it’s not the club. It’s the individual that’s running the club.”

Coach Jackson, the soccer coach, explained this further when speaking about the “revolving door of players”:

In club soccer, players come and go every year...so that’s what I mean by the revolving door of players coming to the club, playing for a year or two, then maybe not liking the coach, not liking their playing time, they move to another club. Whereas in the high school, you kind of get them as freshmen, and they grow into the team. But along the way, they’re learning the traditions and then carry them on. You don’t get that in club soccer.

It would be extremely difficult to produce any loyalty to a team that has a “revolving door of players” as Coach Jackson indicated. Coach Jackson offered two main reasons for athletes to switch club teams: the coach and playing time. Other participants offered distance and time of practice as other reasons for changing teams. However, the coach issue took precedence over any other.

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that a club coach must accomplish two things to be successful. First, they must be able to show that they are capable of helping athletes (and parents) reach their individual, long-term goals. Second, they must create trusting working relationships with their athletes and parents.

For Simon, a high school only swimmer, the relationship was more important than the quality of the coaching. Mrs. Smith, Simon’s mother, indicated that Simon left a club team as a result of the poor relationship with his coaches, “I don’t even know if they knew his name...He didn’t care how much or how good the coach was at something until he knew that they cared about (him).” The feelings that Simon projected about club teams during his interview indicated that this experience was so negative that he never had a desire to try another club. “I think that it’s the lack of connection with the players like with the coach and players”, Simon said as he discussed his feeling about club teams.

Of course, Simon’s poor experience was not everyone’s experience. Many athletes and parents were perfectly content with their club teams and coaches. William, Noel, Aiden, and Leon all expressed fondness for their club teams and the relationships that they built through those teams. Leon, the high school and club swimmer, explained:

I always thought that it depends on the coach and – what to say – the athletes relationship. At club me and my coach have great relationship or like that’s family to me

and the same thing (at school). Even with my new coach, we're gaining that new relationship that we could – it's like we're a father and son. It's cool. In the pool, both my coaches are always on me about technique and whatever. But then out of the pool, they're like, oh yeah, how was your day? It was good. You need money for food or anything, such and such. So it's like – it depends on where you're at and the quality of your relationship.

Leon defined an entirely different level of relationship with his coaches. He explained that the relationships extended far beyond coaching. They were interpersonal. From Leon's tone, we can infer the importance of these relationships in his experience. For Leon, "The support was really equal" between his high school team and his club team. Because of the importance of these relationships, when asked, Aiden, William, and Noel all admitted they would not want to have to choose between participating in club and participating in high school.

Yet choose is exactly what some soccer players have to do if they want to play the highest level of soccer in the US – the academy. In general, academy soccer does not allow its players to participate in high school. This means that if high school sports has academic or social benefits, then academy soccer players will be deprived of these benefits or must find another way to obtain them. In other words, if the identification-commitment model holds true, then to what do those who only compete in non-school sports connect that will build their social capital? The answer to this question may be grounded in Coleman's (1987) original premise of Social capital, namely the important role of parents in the world of club teams.

Parental Role

The suggestion that social capital exists within the school, does not necessarily mean that athletes on club teams are without it. Teachers may not be in communication with coaches on the

club level, but parents routinely speak with their children's club coaches. Coach Owen, the wrestling coach, offered that parents are critical to club participation. "For the most part parents know, kids don't know anything at club. Parents know everything," he said while describing how young athletes end up attending weekend tournaments. This statement came right after he spent approximately ten minutes telling his high school team all of the information that they needed to know for the two tournaments that were coming up that weekend. He went on to reinforce the point even more, "So it's like, 'okay, you're waking up today. Let's go to the tournament.' That's pretty much what happens." The parental role seems to usurp the individual responsibility of the athlete. Curiously, this also seems to negate the importance of proper preparation for competition that was stressed so heavily at both the high school wrestling and soccer practices.

The parental role is critical to the success of club teams and, therefore, the athletes themselves. As described by the participants in this study, there were rarely team buses; athletes needed to get to competitions somehow. There was no team funding; someone had to pay for the airfares, hotel rooms, tournament fees, and other expenses. There was no community support of a club team; parents provided the cheering in the stands and on the sidelines. If parents were not involved in the process, clubs would not survive and athletes would have no support.

When asked who came to watch club competitions, all participants had a version of the same answer: parents. Noel, a high school and club wrestler, indicated bluntly: "For club, it's definitely, almost everyone's parents." Johnny, a high school and club soccer player, added that he made attempts to invite others, but it still mostly came back to parents, "We'll invite a few girls and we'll see like seven. And then the parents, that's it." Leon, a high school and club swimmer said, "It's a support system based off your family. Sometimes, some of your friends

come over if they have time. But mostly it's your parents." Leon, however, went on to explain that the parental support is tremendous, Leon explained:

When it comes on swimming for club, all the bleachers, all the seating arrangements are filled. You even have people outside of the door looking through the glass or have people video taping and then have it live streamed on the TV somewhere in the pool or on a website. It's like so much support. That's why I think it brings that arena feeling, like you're a pro.

Leon's sense of support in club competitions may have been clouded by the particular sport. Certainly, soccer coaches and players did not share this sense of excitement about the parental crowd. Coach Jackson said, "When you go to the academy games, the only people standing on the sidelines are parents and college coaches. That's it, so it's boring."

What is important here, though, was not the quality of the crowd, but the constitution of it. Alex, a high school and club swimmer, offered one explanation for the difference in crowds.

I think it's a lot because clubs usually have their meets, games, whatever you want to call it during the weekend. So not a lot of people will – while people work, but like more people don't work during the weekends than they do during the weekdays. So it's easier for them to get out there and to get to you because they're able to – because they don't have work and stuff and other priorities, versus in high school where most of the events are during the weekday. As parents have to still work and it's kind of hard for them to pull out of their work day to come and see you.

Aiden's theory was that time did not allow for parents to make it to support high school events in the way that they were able to support club events. It could also be argued, as Mr. Rios

suggested, that since high school competitions were held at a convenient time and location for other students, there were more spectators.

However, convenience was not the only theory presented. Noel, the high school and club wrestler, thought::

I feel like you're in club because you're dedicated and you're influenced by your parents to be dedicated, so they're also dedicated to watching you. And they're always going to be supportive of your matches – you can ask William and whoever else does club wrestling, we drive hours – like 5 hours, 4 hours, 6 hours to like other states, other parts of the country as far as Colorado. And we all come – it's like all – club is like all one big family, like the parents talk their BS and like – within ourselves, it's just – think there's just a better support system in club...even the parents because they're paying for it too mostly.

On the surface, this family idea that Noel discussed is critical to the idea of building up of social capital. Coleman's (1987) theory was that Catholic schools were more successful because religious services were bringing parents together to form a community. Club sports seem to have a similar effect. Parents are sitting together as they watch their children – or wait for their children to finish – practice. Parents were relating to one another as they sat in the stands cheering for their children during competitions. Parents were even setting up carpools and other arrangements to move children back and forth. Therefore, a community of parents was being formed that could lead to greater overall support of children.

However, parents on club teams may not necessarily have been interested in developing a community. They were interested in the development of their child as an athlete. Therefore, they may have been physically present, they may have interacted with one another, but it did not seem

like was much collaborating taking place that would lead to a supportive community regarding academic or social development.

Mr. Cruz – father of Johnny, a high school and club soccer player – discussed his beliefs about the role of parents::

I think my role is to watch, support him, be happy for him, encourage him. And if I see something that's negative, not to make a scene. If it's with him, I deal with him in the car...If he tells me about an issue...try to let him handle the situation himself. So I give him the two paths...If something goes wrong and I don't like it, I'm not going to make a scene. I'm just going to say listen, it just didn't work out...So really more to teach him, support him. I enjoy it...(The teams) expected us – we signed stuff where they expected us to behave...You'll see me in a corner by myself. I'm not antisocial.

Prior to this comment, Mr. Cruz indicated that he sat off to the side as a reaction to the negative behavior of some other parents, which he had seen too often. Mr. Cruz stressed the importance of being of supportive of his son, while allowing Johnny to find his own path. At the same time, Mr. Cruz did not indicate any connection with other parents of athletes on the team that would enhance his son's experiences or abilities.

Mr. Rios, father of club only soccer player Frank, provided an interesting case study for this. Mr. Rios agreed with Coach Owen that:

In a club or academy everything is the parents – everything...So I mean he is where he is because of him. But I got to tell him, I said 'you know what, I take this like I'm your manager now' and it's helped me a lot because I talk to people. I talk to coaches. You know, I was able to find out what is the best school; what's the best club; you know,

that's why he ended up here because combination of the academics and you know the best soccer team in the nation. So I feel like that's my job.

Mr. Rios viewed his role as more of a manager than a parent. In other parts of his interview, Mr. Rios discussed the importance of the parent watching for growth on each team and moving the young athlete as soon as a better opportunity opened up. Mr. Rios' approach, confirmed Coach Jackson's revolving door theory. For Mr. Rios, there was no such thing as loyalty to a team. It was purely about the best opportunity for his son. He went on to explain his role a little further:

I think my support gave him the edge...What I've always seen is there's the players and then there's the parent side. And I think the parent side is actually more important than the player, because the players are having fun while he's playing. The parent is not...it's like a second job for us...The sacrifice definitely comes from the parents and you see more on an academy level versus a high school level because a high school – he's already in the high school. So, from there, you know, he gets transported to wherever the game is or so. In a club or academy everything is on the parents, everything.

As Mr. Rios stated, the onus was on the parent to make sure that the young athlete did what he needed to do, had what he needed to have, and got where he needed to go. Mr. Rios discussed the tremendous sacrifice and money that was necessary to have an athlete participate on a high level club team.

This sacrifice can have serious consequences for individuals and families as Mr. Gomez revealed:

My wife and I were separated for about three years because it got really, really ugly to that point and I said you can't take this away from him...but he's showing the potential. Why should I limit him to that?

The sacrifice that Mr. Rios described was financial, but it could be much deeper than that – as exemplified by Mr. Gomez’s separation from his wife. Mr. Gomez’s willingness to place his son’s wrestling ahead of his own marriage demonstrated the seriousness with which many parents approach their children’s athletic careers. As a result of societal changes over the last several decades, American parents have come to the understanding that their moral worth as a parent can be tied to the success of their child. Consistent with Coakley’s (2010b) explanation, Mr. Rios and Mr. Gomez went far beyond the supportive parent role. They took on the role of sponsor and manager. In so doing, the pressure was on their children to succeed. Interestingly, Mr. Cruz, Mr. Rios, and Mr. Gomez each had different definitions and expectations regarding this success. Mr. Cruz stated:

Every kid has a dream of playing pro...I mean, it’s just – he wanted to be a pro and I said you’ve got to work hard at it...Main thing for me was seeing him have fun. He had a lot of fun and made a lot of friends...If soccer can help him get into a better school, even if I have to pay for it, that’s (a plus)...It really was that, the enjoyment and anything above that was a cherry on top.

For Mr. Cruz, the goal was to have him involved. This was consistent with his more laid-back approach to Johnny’s soccer career. Unlike Mr. Rios, who viewed himself as a manager for his son, Mr. Cruz previously stated that he was there to be of support for his son. However, Mr. Cruz, like Mr. Rios, did reinforce the need to move the child for better opportunities as they presented themselves. Therefore, Mr. Cruz’s lack of a future goal for his son in the sport of soccer was consistent. He did go on to explain that he believed Johnny would go into coaching in the future. Johnny stated this same intention in his interview.

Mr. Gomez’s motives were different:

I reached—there was a cut off, I think five years ago, I reached that, I said, I’ve already exceeded what I wanted with him, my goal with him was to him to have, not to be ruffraff, not to be, to be a respectable human being on this earth and to contribute...to find his way and weed away from rats and stray, have a good judgment of character, persevere himself as an individual, as a man, as a human being, and he has shown that. So I’ve already accomplished that. Now, on the other side, it was a Catch-22. I wanted him to wrestle D3. He always wanted to wrestle D1. He got what he wanted. I didn’t get what I want. He could focus more in education, now I’m kind of worried for him.

Despite Mr. Gomez’s tremendous interest in his son’s wrestling career and making all efforts to make sure that he had the best opportunities, he was not looking for a long-term pay off in the sport. His stated intentions were about developing values in his son. He was not looking for college scholarships or other forms of money as a payoff. In fact, his views on this subject were very clear:

You should never ever think you’re going to put your kids through school, through a sport. You should always follow through on your academic first, and I’m a strong believer of that...Don’t ever think, don’t ever use sports, and I’m a strong believer of this—don’t ever use sports as to getting your kid into a school on a free ride. You should use it to keep your son focused, and weed him away from bad choices in life. Keep him focused, give him a vision, and keep him away from other kids that don’t have the same vision that he does. And kids attract each other. When the leaders, leaders seem to want to attract each other, they’re magnets, rats will always stray away because they don’t have that kind of discipline. So again, I’m a strong believer of that to. I believe that wrestling did this all for my son. Yes. Will I do it again? Yes. Do I believe that this is the

future for every child? Absolutely not, because sports is only as –you only get out of sports what you put into it.

Mr. Gomez’s actions and his stated beliefs did not seem to be in concert with each other. He spent tens of thousands of dollars, sacrificed his marriage, devoted countless hours of time, and denied himself and his family of vacations and trips for years. Despite all of this, he was not seeking a college scholarship or even college admission. He was not seeking a professional contract. According to him, all he was seeking was a means of teaching values to his son. Some could argue that teaching values is a job for parents to complete at home. Mr. Gomez, and many others, seemed to believe that the best way to teach these values was through sport participation, even if that came at a major cost.

Coach Jackson, the soccer coach, believed that parental involvement is greater on the club side because the parents were paying for a service and had bigger dreams for which they expected the coach’s help.

Nowadays parents are way too involved in their kids’ athletic endeavors. They’re living through their kids. Whether they’re trying to create professionals from the time kids are seven or eight or they can’t get themselves to accept that somebody else’s kid might be better than their kid in a particular area. It creates a very demanding and competitive environment in youth sports.

This statement demonstrated the potential dangers of this intense focus on sport participation from a young age. Over-involved parents made the environment “demanding and competitive” to the point at which the purposes of having fun, learning values, or many of the other stated intentions were lost in the quest for greatness or high achievement.

Coach Jackson's belief in parent over-involvement would stand in contrast to the social capital theory. Social capital would say that parental involvement was benefitting the student because of the collaboration with the coach. Coach Jackson implied that parental over-involvement was not in collaboration with the coach. It was likely to be in opposition thus breaking down any social capital which might have developed.

Discussion

Social capital can be defined as the "norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child's growing up." (Coleman, 1987, p.36) Bowen and Green (2012) expanded this definition by saying that "social capital refers to the strength of social networks and connections in helping people to achieve their collective goals." (p. 5) Coleman (1987) never really considered the role of athletics in developing his theories of social capital, which is interesting considering the idea of collective goals is an athletic concept. Coleman (1987) developed this idea based on the ways that students in religious schools built social capital by attending religious events with their parents and other adults, Bowen and Green (2012) considered how the same phenomenon exists around sports. Bowen and Green (2012) found evidence to support the notion that academics and participation in high school sports have a positive relationship to one another. "Winning on the field and winning in the classroom tend to go hand in hand...it is very unlikely that high school sports are a major detriment to academic success." (p.15)

As stated above, the data presented in this chapter support the conclusion that those academic and social supports mostly existed for athletes on high school teams. Clubs athletes and parents generally did not expect such supports. Any academic or social supports that were provided by club teams were cursory at best.

However, clubs provided opportunities that high school teams did not seem to match. Clubs, in general, seemed to involve more travel, greater interaction with people on other teams, and challenges to learn from. As Mr. Rios – father of Frank, a club-only soccer player – stated:

The high school advantage is that high school is kind of like easy. Why? Because you're already going there, you know, get dressed and then you go onto the field. So I think it's convenient for the players. If they're playing for a great high school, then, you know, it's a bonus.

In discussing the relative ease of playing for a high school team, Mr. Rios introduced us to some of the other challenges that face club athletes. Club athletes had to be more concerned with managing their time, arranging for transportation, and finding funds to be able to participate on these teams. It would be better stated to say that the parents of club athletes had to do these things. This parent involvement allowed youth and parents to interact on a regular basis. The travel associated with club teams allowed youth and parents to spend large amounts of time together in confined spaces. This travel was both in the form of travelling to competitions and in the more routine travel to and from practices. Both Johnny, a high school and club soccer player, and Josue, a club-only soccer player, indicated that they routinely travelled an hour or more just to get to their club practices. Youth and parents alike indicated that this travel time together allowed for bonding and discussions to take place. The act of carpooling with other families allowed for even more parental supports along the lines of the social capital that Coleman (1987) described. As such, participating in club athletics encouraged youth and parents to spend time together and to be in communication with one another. This held true for both those who only participated in club and for those who participated in both high school and club.

The same could not be said about high school sports participation. SBP provided transportation to and from athletic events and the school. There was little or no money needed to participate. Parental involvement was purely optional and at the discretion of the parent. Based on participant comments, it seemed that at SBP parental involvement was sport specific. Soccer players and coaches indicated that there was a strong sense of parental support. Wrestlers and wrestling parents indicated a moderate involvement from parents. Swimmers and their parents indicated that parental support was very low. One possible explanation for the low parental support from Aiden, a high school and club swimmer, was that the timing and location of high school competitions did not easily allow working parents to attend. While plausible, if this were true then we would expect to see the same low parental involvement across the board.

There does not seem to be a favored form of participation among athletes. Those involved in this study indicated that they were content with their participation and would not want to choose one form over the other. Those who were only involved in one form of athletics were more mixed on their level of satisfaction with some indicating that they liked only competing for their high school or club and others indicating that they felt like they might be missing out by not participating in both high school and club. Although some writers have indicated concerns that athletes and parents are unduly pressured to join clubs (Hyman, 2012; Ripley, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2013) or otherwise find a way to train and compete throughout the year, athletes and parents did not seem to be complaining (Matz, 2014).

The models through which extracurricular activities have been studied lend some insight into the experiences found here. The identification-commitment model (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002) seems to be the best explanation for the academic success of those who participate only in high school athletics. Students and parents alike believed that participating in high school

athletics provided academic and social supports that were beneficial. This same benefit was not extended to those who participate only on club teams.

The threshold model (Marsh and Kleitman, 2002) explains why students who participated in both high school and club athletics fell in between the other two groups in terms of academic success. While participating in high school athletics provided certain supports and benefits (identification-commitment), participating in both high school and club required so much time and energy that the academic benefits of high school participation begin to weaken. In other words, there was a threshold at which students were over-participating and therefore counteracting the benefits. It was not clear where that threshold lied.

Despite all of this, students, parents, and coaches in all categories indicated that athletes were learning skills such as discipline, time management, persistence, and how to overcome or work through hardships as a result of their participation. Consistent with Holland and Andre's (1987) development model, participants believed that the acquisition of these skills was of equal importance to any academic benefit. Therefore, when measuring the benefits of participation, the development of non-academic skills should be taken into account.

Another important aspect of participation was developing relationships with coaches and athletes. Relationships were critical to success in any category of sport. The relationship between athlete and coach seemed most important in club sports. Unlike high schools, club athletes were not generally loyal to a club, they were loyal to a coach. So while it was unlike a high school athlete to transfer schools because a coach leaves, it was common that a club athlete would follow his coach to a different club. If the club athlete did not feel a solid relationship with the coach of his club, he was likely to look for another club as well.

The data here support the conclusion that social capital (Coleman, 1987) can be developed through participation in high school or club programs. While the high school provided more opportunities and support for academic and social success, club teams provided more opportunities for interacting with parents, travelling, interacting with more diverse groupings of people and overcoming challenges. Student-athletes seemed to be able to develop social capital (Coleman, 1987) through different forms of participation.

Chapter 6: Pay to Play

“Your kids all go to club! Our kids can’t afford club.”

- SBP Wrestling Coach

Horace Mann was well known for saying that “Education is the great equalizer.” His quote implied that once people are educated opportunities of our society will open up to them. Once opportunities become available, there should be no more distinctions between classes of people as everyone should have the same opportunities. This theory, while sound on the surface, ignored many of the other challenges of our society that deny opportunities to particular groups of people, including the obstacles of time and money.

It could be said that the world of high school sports has opened doors for students of various backgrounds. High school sports has been an avenue for many lower income and lower academic performing students to be able to attend college. While there is no data available to indicate the number of students for whom high school sports was their only route, this story has been told countless times. As the world of youth sports starts to shift, it is important to note how this shift may impact the opportunities for students from all backgrounds to achieve at the next level.

This chapter will focus on the role that finances and time play in the world of youth sports. In these areas, three findings emerged from this study. 1) Participating in any kind of youth sports required an investment of time and money. However, the investment required for club participation was beyond that of high school sports. 2) These sacrifices of time and money created stress on families. 3) Financial assistance for participation in youth sports, or the process by which it was granted, was not well known or understood.

Investing In Youth Sports

Investing time. The investment of time was significant for participants on both high school and club teams. Both SBP and clubs expected their athletes to practice for about two to three hours at a time. SBP practices typically ran about five to six days per week, while the club coaches generally expected athletes to attend three to four practices per week. Athletes on both SBP and clubs attended weekend competitions. However, while SBP practices and competitions were within the time frame of a three month season, club teams had competitions that ran most of the year. The main differences in the time investment between high school and club teams involved the commuting time to and from team functions, the time that parents needed to be directly involved, and the amount of time absorbed by weekend, and other competitions.

All teams had a stated time commitment related to actual practices and competitions. However, the investment of time into sports must take into account the tremendous travel time involved as well. For youth participating in high schools, this time can be minimized. For youth participating in many club teams the amount of time devoted to travel alone is an investment.

Mr. Rios - father of Frank, a club-only soccer player - explained this, "The advantage is that high school is kind of like easy. Why? Because you're already going there, you know, get dressed and then you go onto the field. So I think it's convenient for the players." Through various statements during the interview, Mr. Rios indicated that he saw no benefit to participating in high school soccer. When pushed, he acknowledged that the only benefit he saw in high school sports is that it was convenient for the players to get to practices and games. He made references in other parts of the interview to the burden for the parents to ensure travel to and from club practices and games on a weekly basis. At SBP all of the transportation needs

were eliminated either by the fact that practices are held at the school or the fact that the school provided transportation to any practices or competitions which may be located elsewhere.

The factor of commuting time to club practices came up repeatedly in interviews. Johnny, a high school and club soccer player, indicated that he travels over an hour to attend his club practices three times per week. Josue, a club only soccer player, travelled an hour everyday to attend his practice. William, a high school and club wrestler, indicated that one of his clubs was as close as twenty minutes away, but another club team was an hour and a half away from his home. Devon, a high school only wrestler, wanted to participate in club but the time and cost of travel to and from a wrestling club, in addition to the team fees, made it impossible for him to do so.

The time investment went beyond the routine commute to practice. There was also a significant investment of time needed to attend competitions. Ms. Parker - mother of Aiden, a high school and club swimmer - described this:

Oh my goodness! Club meets say if we went to DC or North Carolina, we would have to be at the pool. We would leave the hotel at 6:00 in the morning. Oh no, well yeah quarter to six in the morning...So you get there to save spaces for your -- you know your parents. We would be there anywhere from, like I said, 6:00 in the morning till 6:00 at night. I mean they swam -- from boys and girls, soup to nuts, straight through and they would have a break maybe an hour, hour and a half, two in the middle. But, oh no, and it was it would (be) a weekend, so we would drive down sometimes on a Thursday because you want to swim as fresh on Friday. But some swimmers swam on Friday...For the long course - long course were on Friday nights, Saturday all day Sunday till maybe five, but yeah, and then the drive back.

Ms. Parker indicated that she enjoyed the trips for the camaraderie that the youth and parents experienced, however, she also expressed a bit of exasperation at the amount of time that was required for the club tournaments. Josue, a club only soccer player, likewise indicated that most of his weekends were absorbed with tournaments - mostly out of state. Mr. Gomez - father of William, a high school and club wrestler, also acknowledged that club wrestling meant competing just about every weekend and consuming most of the time.

However, Mr. and Mrs. Smith - parents of Simon, a high school only swimmer - indicated that the time commitment in high school was also significant:

Mrs. Smith: I would agree with him that would be the drawback, is that it takes additional time. And he is working to try and figure out how do I do that practice and then get all my work done too...We haven't had a vacation in I don't know how long, we could—and we won't go, not together as a family...breaks are not breaks...

Mr. Smith: (the last vacation) was about five years ago.

Even though Simon did not participate on a club team, his parents still found the time commitment to be intrusive in family life. Mrs. Smith expanded upon her comment about not travelling together as a family when she said, in another part of the interview, that Simon had not been to see his grandfather in months. While the Smith' were very clear about this challenge, they were the only ones to raise the time commitment as an issue among high school only athletes.

Given the time investment needed to participate in high schools and in clubs, it stands to reason that participating in both high school and club would require a greater time commitment. The students and adults who participate for both high school and club teams confirmed this to be true. This was exemplified in the following exchange:

Alex: I forgot what a break was.

Noel: Yeah, you think you have a break and you think it's all good, but you're waking at the same time...every day and then you go home and then the days just fly by...It's just frustrating. You've got no alone time, no time to yourself. Like sometimes, it's hard because - I don't know - It's hard to spend time with my family because I don't even get enough to time to myself. The only time we could really spend time with each other is like after matches and I'm just too tired to do anything.

Leon: I think on the days that I really get off, if I do take off any day, like Christmas, Thanksgiving, New Year

William: Yeah, holidays.

Leon: Yeah, it would be like the main holidays, not even like the subpar holidays...Every other day I'm in the pool going crazy...

William: I always take a break like after the big tournament. I take like a month break.

Noel: You just need it. We could make our body recover, mentally recover - like start hanging out with your friends that you haven't seen, stuff like that.

As this exchange demonstrated, the investment of time for those who participated in club and high school sports required sacrificing personal and social opportunities. The students in this exchange all indicated that they found the experiences rewarding but tiring and they wondered what social opportunities they might have missed as a result of their participation. They all also agreed that dropping one of their teams would free up time for them, but none of them wanted to make a choice as to which to give up. This idea of sacrificing for the sake of participation will be described more below.

Investing money. Parents and coaches indicated that the costs to participate on a club team ranged from \$700 to \$2100 per year. These fees covered the cost of being on the team. They did not include uniforms, tournament fees, travel expenses, equipment, and the like. Parents had different strategies for paying these fees. Some paid monthly others paid a lump sum at the beginning of the year to cover all of the fees at once.

The costs of youth sports has grown dramatically over the years (Hyman, 2012). However, the cost that is passed on to the parent has only risen as dramatically in the club world. St. Benedict's, like many other high schools did not pass the costs of conducting athletic programs onto its families. Mrs. Smith - mother of Simon, a high school only swimmer - explained it this way:

I don't see a cost. I haven't seen really for the sport, I have not seen like a hard cost of things. There's something you're doing here at St. Benedict's...If any, like really small. Where with rec and all the rest of it, it was like every time we turned around you needed \$75 for this or you know - it was a cost.

Mrs. Smith believed that having Simon participate in high school sports was affordable. She also differentiated between the affordability of the high school team and the cost factors associated with non-school based teams. She went on to indicate that at times parents were asked to provide snacks for the team, but expressed these as minor costs.

This approach to high school athletics was not unusual. Other coaches and parents in the study indicated the same thing. Mr. Gomez - father of William, a high school and club wrestler - had a unique perspective to offer as his son, before transferring to St. Benedict's, wrestled for a public high school:

There's nothing. The (high school) program is nothing. \$45 for the wrestling pants, maybe another 50 bucks for the rest of the uniform. So, all together maybe \$145, the most. And, they're really good uniforms, really cool...Everything (else) is covered. The schools, travels, everything. They have their own personal trainer and everything.

Mr. Gomez later described the overwhelming cost of participating in club teams and the impact that it can carry. This will be discussed later. Here, he reinforced the fact that high school teams are affordable to just about everyone because of their minimal expenses.

The same message was not heard about club teams. Parents, coaches, and athletes all described the world of club sports as being very expensive. Coach Jackson, a high school and club soccer coach, felt that the fees are significant:

It could be anywhere between 2500 and 3500 dollars a year, just the fees. You're not talking about hotels, you're not talking about travel. You're just talking about the fees that pay for your training expenses, which ultimately goes into the pockets of the club and the coaches.

The paying of team fees was a significant expense. However, as Coach Jackson indicated, this expense was only the beginning. There were many other expenses associated with participating on a club team. Coach Olla, also a high school and club soccer coach, outlined some of these:

Ref fees, tournament fees, you have to pay for your jerseys, practice uniforms, insurance, what else...Cleats...Flats and the hotels - travel...So for Cedar Stars Academy an ideal price for a jersey would be probably at a discounted price, I would say \$60. But the whole kit, like your warm up, everything, your home and away jerseys, everything combined, it's roughly, when I was at (another club), it was roughly about \$700 easily. But here at Cedar Stars, they charge them about \$350. ...Pair of cleats - it depends. If you

want a really good cleats, about \$180. But it goes from \$100 all the way to \$300...I would say most players have about three pairs of cleats...They don't have to worry about paying for tournament fee because it's built into the team fees. The only thing they have to worry is transportation to far games and then hotels if we go to a tournament...Some people pay probably \$10,000 a year. The ones that can afford it.

Coach Olla's description of the hidden costs associated with playing on a travelling club soccer team demonstrated how the expenses can suddenly add up. His assessment of \$10,000 per year as a cost to the families was reinforced by Mr. Gomez who stated:

I'm talking about spending \$12, \$13, \$14, \$15,000 a year following the son. You register for a tournament it will cost you \$35, \$45, \$55, \$60 bucks, and that's per bracket, per division that you wrestle. Gas, hotel, food, USA wrestling card, background check. I did run a background check that is good for two years. I got a coach's card, because I can't go in the pit without a coach's card. So it's his card, my card, do the math. It adds up...Yeah, (team fees) absolutely. Oh, get ready for this one - equipment. The equipment is very expensive.

As was the case with Mr. Gomez, each interviewee, who participated on club teams, added more incidentals to the list of costs associated with being on a club team. Mr. Gomez's description of his own commitment to his son's participation included spending up to \$15,000 per year on these expenses and going through a background check in order to obtain a coach's certificate so that he could be closer to the mat when his son wrestled. Mr. Gomez had earlier indicated that his son had been wrestling club since he was ten years old. Given the fact that William had been wrestling for eight years, if Mr. Gomez's figures of \$12,000 - \$15,000 per year were correct, this means that Mr. Gomez spent upwards of \$96,000 over the course of eight years on wrestling

associated expenses.

This large figure was not beyond the norm of participation fees. As was described earlier, many researchers have discussed the high costs of being involved in club athletics and the potential impacts on the families (Wiggins, 2014; Sagas & Cunningham, 2104; Hyman, 2012; Friedman, 2013). Most striking about Mr. Gomez's commitment was his goal for having William participate in club wrestling:

I've pretty much accomplished what I wanted out of the sport. I already got what I wanted out of the sport. And what I wanted the sport is my son to find his way and weed away from the rats and stray; have good judgement of character, persevere himself as an individual, as a man, as a human being, and he has shown that. So I've already accomplished that...I think I've done what I needed to do. Am I satisfied? Yes. Will I do it again? Absolutely. Would I do it the same way? Yes.

Unlike the common beliefs that youth are involved in club teams to earn college scholarships or become a professional athlete, Mr. Gomez indicated that his motivation for investing money and time to William's wrestling career was to teach his son character lessons. For Mr. Gomez, club wrestling was a \$100,000 character education school. His motivation was to keep William out of trouble and away from negative influences. As will be discussed later, Mr. Gomez indicated he is also aware of youth who were unable to participate on club teams, because of the expense, who have become involved with drugs or other social ills. Mr. Gomez's desire to keep William out of trouble provides another possible explanation for parents' willingness to pay such exorbitant fees.

Mr. Gomez continued to demonstrate how his motivation was different from other parents when he said:

You should never ever think you're going to put your kids through school through a sport. You should always follow through on you academics first and I'm a strong believer of this...Don't ever think, don't ever use sports, and I'm a strong believer of this, don't ever use sports as to getting your kid into a school on a free ride. You should use it to keep your son focused and weed him away from bad choices in life; keep him focused, give him a vision, and keep him away from other kids that don't have the same vision that he does.

Mr. Gomez was the only parent or coach to describe teaching character and morals as the motivation for participation and investment in club athletics. In fact, almost all other coaches and parents believed that high school sports provided more character development than clubs and that advancement in the sport was their motivation for club. Mr. Rios - father of Frank, a club only soccer player - stated, "The scholarship is our original plan, anything above that is just gravy." His interest had nothing to do with character education. Mr. Rios' focus was on his son improving in the sport and being able to move forward with a college scholarship as a result.

Mr. Rios was not alone. Coach Jackson, coach Olla, and coach Owen, a high school and club wrestling coach, all indicated that obtaining a college scholarship was among the top reasons that youth participate in club athletics. Coach Jackson clarified this point:

Parents will pay any number you put in front of them if it has anything to do with helping their kids find themselves in a position to secure a scholarship or a professional contract down the road. The funny thing is that parents will pay astronomical numbers to support their kid in the development of the sport and if they just saved all that money, the can pay for their kid's college education on their own.

Coach Jackson's understanding of parental motivations for making this investment are consistent with what Mr. Rios stated. This is in contrast to Mr. Gomez's push that sports not be used for scholarship purposes. Nevertheless, the idea of obtaining a college scholarship or a professional contract is what stands out to many parents. Coakley (2010b) noted that these very carrots are dangled in front of parents by coaches and club owners who, once youth sports became privatized, began using these teams as their primary source of income. Therefore, coaches needed a way to convince parents to make the large investment. College and professional opportunities appear lucrative to parents and, therefore, became the marketing plan.

Sacrifice and Stress

But the sacrifice definitely comes from the parents and you see it more on an academy level versus a high school. Because a high school—he's already in the high school, so from there, you know, he gets transported to whatever the game is or so in a club or academy everything is the parents, everything...But when the parent is making that sacrifice because they want to do it versus because they have to do it-- so I guess because I want to do it and I love to do it, it's easy for me because not every parent...could do the same.

Mr. Rios - father of Frank, the club only soccer player - stated that being a club parent was about sacrifice. The sacrifice was both temporal and financial. Mr. Rios described his commitment as being "300%" behind his son and whatever his son needed. Mr. Rios summed all of this up by saying "everything is the parents" and described his role as being more of a manager than a parent. In line with Coakley's (2010b) assessment that "parents are now seen as the architects of a child's success" (p.18), Mr. Rios saw Frank's success or failure and whether or not he progresses to a college scholarship or professional career as a reflection of the parent's

investment of time and money. Mr. Rios was also extremely critical of parents who did not make the same kind of sacrifices for their children.

It would be impossible to overlook the impact that all of this sacrifice had on family relationships. For working class families, the time commitment required of parents may not be feasible. For average families, the financial investment described above is not possible. For families that do find a way to make the investment, the family resources can be stretched beyond a healthy point (Coakley, 2010b). Mr. Rios, did not see this as an issue, “The stress to the family is, I think is limited because we’re all on the same page-- so it's the usual.” Mr. Rios indicated that he and his wife were in agreement over the investments and sacrifices they were making to ensure that their children had the best opportunities in soccer. Since, everyone was in agreement, he did not believe that it caused much stress.

However, not all families were on the same page. Mr. Gomez described how club wrestling nearly destroyed his marriage.

My wife and I fought. We almost got divorced behind, behind this...my wife and I were separated for about three years because it got really, really ugly to that point and I said, you can’t take this away from (him).

Based on Mr. Gomez’s perception of things the question has to be asked, what was more important to William’s overall development, a properly functioning - intact - family unit, or a career in wrestling? Mr. Gomez chose the career in wrestling. Similar to Mr. Rios, the belief in sacrificing for his son’s athletics was so great, that he was even willing to sacrifice his marriage. Mr. Gomez did follow up to say that he and his wife have reconciled, but indicated that the stress was still there. As another example of the sacrifice, Mr. Gomez stated:

We don't go on vacations, that's very important, that came up a lot—we didn't do a vacation. So the last time we went on vacation, (William) was in my wife's belly, that's it....It had to be sacrificed, exactly. So what we did - a family vacation was going to watch (William) wrestle even though when we went to Virginia Beach, they didn't go watch (William) wrestle. It was me. They were on the beach--and that came up a lot. So that's a tremendous sacrifice. It does bring a lot of pressure within the family...But now we're talking and things are a little bit better, and I promised them that we will go on a vacation this year. So I'm going to put something aside, and we're going to drive down.

Mr. Gomez's willingness to sacrifice everything for his son's wrestling career only makes sense if he believed that the benefits were worth the investment. Clearly from his actions and quotes, he did believe that the outcomes have justified the sacrifices. He is content with the lessons that William learned as a result of his club wrestling participation. Nevertheless, the significant toll on the family should not be overlooked.

Mr. Gomez was the only one to describe such a dire situation, but he was not the only one to indicate that sports is creating tension within the family. Josue, the club only soccer player, described that his parents were not in agreement about which team(s) he should be on.

The thing is I'm not—I don't talk that much to my mom, or my sister...not like that...I don't have time, I literally get home (at) 10:30. They're probably asleep when I open the door...So (during the off season) that's when I tell my dad, because he likes to practice when there's off season, I'm like I can't go to practice that's when I have to (be) with my family, so - yeah. But when the season is on, I don't - it's hard to talk to them - it still happens, it's weird...My mom doesn't like it, she doesn't want me to play academy soccer, she wants me to play at Benedict's because she thinks I'll be at home earlier. And

then my sister, I don't know, I don't talk to her, she's eight, but I never asked her, because when I do that, when I'm on my sister, I just want to like make her happy. I don't ask about all these things like I'm not at home what do you do.

In another part of the interview, Josue described how his parents were divorced when he was young. Here he described the fact that his participation on the academy soccer team created stress for him, in that he was unable to spend as much time with his mother and sister as he would like. He did spend a lot of time with his father commuting to and from club practices and games. Josue also described the ongoing tension between mom and dad over the role of soccer in his life and the teams on which he participated. The disagreement left Josue in the uncomfortable position of being in the middle. The fact that Josue had to tell his father that he needed to spend time with his mother and sister was another indicator of the stress that the family unit was under.

The investment of time and money required sacrifice and had the potential to create stress for all participants regardless of the form of participation. Like any traditional investment, the participants in this study seemed to be willing to deal with the sacrifices and stresses with the hopes of long-term payoffs, even though the long-term goals were different for each family.

Financial Assistance

Participating in high school carries very few expenses. As Mrs. Smith - mother of Simon, a high school only swimmer - indicated, "I don't see a cost...I would say very nominal." This was reinforced by Mr. Gomez - father of William, a high school and club wrestler - who when asked about the cost of participating in high school replied, "Nothing!".

By contrast, participating in club sports can cost thousands of dollars, as was described above. The high cost of club teams made participating on these teams impossible for families who cannot afford it. Mr. Gomez discussed this issue in more detail:

I don't know how family and the person that makes \$30,000 a year is actually going to do this. They can't. It's feasibly—it's unaffordable what you make gross compared to net, it's unaffordable...They wouldn't be able to go (to competitions) but they have potential. And their friends, they are good together, it's is a social event for them. Besides just being a competitor, but it's a social event and it's part of the building of characters. And I can tell you, they're still friends today, and they're--even if they stop wrestling, they're still friends today. They still talk. They still have some cell numbers. And the ones that didn't have the money and didn't have the growth potential, gotten involved with drugs, and I know that for a fact, because I still keep in touch with some of the kids, especially some of the parents that I know. Girls pregnant, lost their ways.

Mr. Gomez outlined that it would be impossible for a family to afford to participate in anything more than a recreation league which requires minimal fees. Participating in a club team, especially the higher level teams, cost more than the average person can afford. Moreover, Mr. Gomez described the potentially painful consequences - drugs and teen pregnancy - of youth who were denied this opportunity because of money. Although other coaches and parents did not discuss the character and social education aspect of club participation, Mr. Gomez believed that these are very important.

Mr. Gomez was not the only parent to feel that some youth may be missing out on the club experience because of money. Mr. Cruz - father of Johnny, a high school and club soccer player - staying more sport centered, not only considered the consequences to the individual but also the consequences to the sport as a whole.

So when you get a family that can't afford that, God blessed my family that we can do it, it holds back the real talent, if there's a kid that's really good that can't (afford it). You

see a lot of kids are really good that can play, but they can't get into a club to get seen. I didn't think about it. The U.S. teams, where did they say who the clubs are pushing up? And they're pushing up a kid that had the money or a big kid. They're not pushing up the kid that has the talent. Maybe he's small, but doesn't have the money to go there. I think the reason why this sport struggles is because of that.

Mr. Cruz, like Mr. Gomez, explained that the costs of the sport are overwhelming for the average family. His statement "God blessed my family that we can do it" highlighted the idea that in order to participate on a club team a family had to be "blessed". Mr. Cruz outlined a two-fold concern regarding the lack of affordability. First, youth with the potential to succeed in the sport did not have the opportunity to be seen. Second, the sport, as a whole, suffered because good talent may be denied the opportunity to play.

This leads to the question of whether or not there was financial assistance available for club teams and if so, what was the process by which it was distributed. Coach Denis, a high school and club swimming coach, explained:

Publicly they won't tell you they give financial assistance. Some teams do. Generally, they do it for athletes that they know are extremely fast. So if they know they have the kid -- this kid has sectional times at a certain event or whatever and they're like okay, we really want this kid. They'll cut a deal with that. I've talked to some coaches where their program actually does have kids they're fully sponsoring. It's just that it's not publicly known. It's not mentioned. It's not advertised. It's kind of like something they do internally within their team. And the head coaching staff knows it, maybe 1 or 2 people in the board knows it. But no one else outside of that -- so like group knows it. And it's not

something that's advertised publically -- we'll help you. In most cases, it's -- this kid has talent. Their parents are in financial need, we're going to help them out.

Coach Denis described a secretive financial assistance process. Financial assistance might have been available, but only if the athlete was talented enough to be of direct benefit to the club. Even in those situations, the existence of assistance was not made known publicly.

Coach Jackson, a high school and club soccer coach, explained this further:

At Cedar Stars, we offer financial aid. But the average club doesn't have the resources that Cedar Stars has. So a lot of clubs -- unless you're a special player, you're not getting financial aid. If they're going to spend their money on players, they're going to spend it on the best players; they're not going to spend (money) on people who are average and just have family need. It just becomes a very competitive environment like that.

Coach Jackson indicated that while his team did offer financial aid, most clubs did not have the resources to be able to do so. Therefore, these teams offered no financial aid or very little. If they did offer aid, as Coach Denis said, it was only for the most talented players. However, since the assistance was not made public, it may be that even talented players were unaware of the possibility of receiving aid.

This finding was consistent with available literature about the emergence of private club teams. When club teams began to come into more prominent positions in the 1990's and beyond, for the first time "youth sports became a career track and the primary source of income for some adults." (Coakley, 2010b) If the team was now the primary source of income for individuals, it stands to reason that financial assistance would not be a priority. The priority was making money, which would be jeopardized by widely and publicly offering financial assistance.

Coaches with the best of intentions of bringing their sport to everyone, might be moved to provide assistance of forgiveness of fees for an individual to participate. However, providing secretive financial assistance to cover team fees may not be enough. As Coach Olla described:

You've got to come up with the money. And then if you're not really talented...they will -
- you will make you decision to leave on your own because they're not going to take you to games. For example, because they know you cannot afford the hotel fees and all those things because then you're not good enough to play. So that's where it gets -- you get left out and then you end up leaving that club. It's played out like that. Is it fair? No. But it's just how it ends up getting played.

Coach Olla explained, again, the fact that there are many expenses beyond the team fees which must be factored into the cost of a team. Teams providing financial assistance were likely not offering assistance to afford the travel, uniforms, food, and other related expenses. As a result, even if the athlete found a way to afford the team fees, he would continue to struggle to be able to afford the actual costs of being on the team. If the athlete could not afford to pay these other expenses, he was likely to leave the team once he realized that he would not be able to participate in many of the larger competitions. If the team was aware that the athlete could not afford to pay the other expenses, the coaches might allow the athlete to attend practices, but might not add that athlete to the competition roster which would also likely lead to the departure of the individual athlete..

Coach Owen believed that most coaches are willing to work with the athletes about team fees, but agreed that that it is all the ancillary expenses that cause problems:

I mean they still would have to come up with tournament money which would run them a hundred bucks, entry fee, food, 50 to 70 bucks on a weekend. And how many weekends

can they do that for? And then they have to find a ride. What if they don't have a ride?

So it starts becoming -- when you think about all the obstacles that they have to overcome just to get to a tournament on a weekend and that same obstacle occurs every other weekend, it becomes really difficult. The training part of it, I don't think, is the problem, because you do have some people that work with them. But the other side, the weekend part of it becomes an issue.

Therefore, in order for any financial assistance program to be effective, it would need to address all of these issues. Not one participant in this study was aware of any program which provides financial assistance for all of the related expenses. Even in the academy soccer program, where athletes were not charged to be on the team, the athlete was still responsible for travel expenses.

Mr. Rios - father of Frank, a club only soccer player - explained:

But when you travel, no it's not covered as far as the hotels...So the costs that are involved here for traveling comes out of our pocket. Tournaments are covered. Covers the facilities for the whole year-round, and when I say that is because he played for a club, one soccer club where you had to pay lights or you had a pay field.

Mr. Rios explained that, in his opinion, paying for the hotels and other related travel expenses was a reasonable expectation since there was no fee to be on the team. He, and others, added that the expenses added up quickly, but they were a necessary part of the experience. Mr. Rios also explained that there were teams that had additional hidden fees such as field and light fees.

Josue, a club only soccer player, also believed that families were responsible for their own travel expenses. Josue believed that the team owner helped to offset the cost of his trips. He was not able to explain why or how he received this assistance, but he believed that out of a potential \$9,000 in travel expenses one year, his father paid approximately \$3500.

Josue's confusion over the way that financial assistance is provided was not unique. Indeed, beliefs, among parents and youth, about the existence of financial assistance and the ways in which it was obtained, were very mixed and, in some cases, inaccurate.

Noel and William, both high school and club wrestlers, believed that there was no financial assistance available for their club teams. However, both indicated that they did not think their parents were paying team fees because of the long relationship they had with their coaches.

Noel: It's weird because I think William too -- his main club coach like -- we built like some good relationships that we usually don't pay.

William: Yeah, usually don't pay.

Noel: Like, we don't pay like because-

William: I've been going there since I was-

Noel: Yeah, since we were little. So it just became a point that -- I stopped paying for club and like it's no big deal, especially-

William: Yeah, I still pay him though. Every 2 months I give him a month worth of payment, yeah.

Mr. Gomez, William's father, did not indicate any such arrangement. In fact, Mr. Gomez, as was discussed earlier, expressed that he was spending large amounts of money per month and per year for William to attend the club. It is unclear why William would believe that he was getting a break on team fees, but it was one example of the misconception about financial assistance or forgiveness.

In soccer, the academy teams were designed to be free of charge. Coach Olla, a high school and club soccer coach, explained this as:

Academies don't charge. Academies -- when you're in the first team, the rules are -- it depends on which academy. Like Red Bull Academy, it's free. It's free to play in. But what they do is on the club side, there you pay. But if you make the academy team, it's free.

Coach Olla explained that academy teams had associated club teams. Club teams charged higher amounts to offset the cost of running the academy team at no charge to the participants. While this plan worked well for those talented enough to make the academy team, it became prohibitive to athletes who had to pay the higher fees for the lower-tiered club teams. Coach Jackson, a high school and club soccer coach, furthered this explanation:

Correct (academies do not charge). So what you're seeing now is academies driving up the prices of girls' programs and their club team programs to be able to fund the academy programs, and the academy environment is intended to be free. They want the academy environment to be free for players, so that way, there are no players that are being left out because they can't afford it. So now, it gives us an opportunity to find the most talented players from inner cities that typically wouldn't play academy, because they couldn't pay for it. Now, we can go find those kids, because the academies are free. So that's -- the intent is for them to be free, and they generate the money to carry those teams by raising the prices, like I said, of the other programs in their clubs.

Coach Jackson's explanation of the ideology of the academy offered some hope for creating opportunities for athletes from lower-income families. The academy was designed to remove the financial obstacle. Coach Jackson and coach Olla stated that there was no charge for academy programs. Both indicated that the funding for these teams came from the higher charges for the club teams of the same organization. This means that if a young athlete knew about and tried out

for an academy team, he might have been able to participate regardless of his family's net worth. However, if the under-funded athlete was unaware of the academy program, and therefore, approached clubs looking to play or if the athlete did not know that the academy program was free, he would likely still miss this opportunity believing that his family could not afford it.

The understanding that academy programs were free did not seem to have made its way to the academy players and their parents. Mr. Rios - father of Frank, an academy only player - discussed how his son was recruited and granted money based on his talent:

The cost—the cost of an academy year because they play all year around, it's about \$2800...since we're on that topic, he was recruited. And he was recruited again because of, you know, he was a goalie and there wasn't much goalies. He was the average goalie at that time. So he was brought over with certain conditions financially. So he hasn't paid anything. He's gotten full scholarships since 2012...So the cost is there. What I like about the academy is that they don't look at if you're paying or not, they just look at the talent.

Mr. Rios was correct that his son was receiving financial assistance because of his talent.

However, according to Coach Jackson and coach Olla, Frank was not receiving financial assistance individually. Frank's talent earned him a spot on the academy team for which there was no charge. This was a very different understanding. The implication from Mr. Rios' perspective was that his son was receiving an unusual or unique benefit. It was unclear why Mr. Rios would have this understanding or why he would think that the cost of the academy team was \$2800 when no such cost existed. (It should be noted that Coach Jackson and Coach Olla are coaches for the same Cedar Stars Academy organization which sponsors Frank's academy team. Therefore, the perspectives are not likely to be due to operational procedures which differ on

other teams.) This very lack of understanding about the funding of academy teams was what would lead other youth to avoid seeking the opportunity to play for an academy.

Josue, also an academy only soccer player, in addition to stating that he was receiving travel assistance, as was described above, also believed that he was getting an individual scholarship to participate on the academy team.

(It costs) \$3000 (per year to participate on the academy team). Yeah, it's a lot. I don't think I pay that much. I don't think I pay at all to be honest. Because George, I know George personally, he just helps me out.

Josue was referring to the owner of Cedar Stars Academy when he made reference to George. It was Josue's belief that his personal relationship with George was what allowed him to participate on the team for no charge. It seemed completely unclear to Josue that he did not pay because he was part of the academy team.

The confusion over the manner in which teams were funded and financial assistance was granted is important. If athletes and families from lower economic backgrounds are not aware of how financial assistance is provided, they may see these club teams as being unaffordable and out of reach. As has been demonstrated above, there are many examples of this. However, families seemed to be unaware of situations in which financial assistance was available or where the obstacle of finances had been removed (such as academy soccer teams). This lack of understanding could and does serve as a deterrent to participation on club teams.

Ms. Parker - mother of Alex, a high school and club swimmer - discussed how Alex was on a team that was receiving support from the city to offset the cost to families. When the funding from the city was removed and the costs of the team went up:

A lot of the parents are like, they grumbled. And they started pulling their kids out...(A lot of parents left because they couldn't afford it) or didn't want to pay it...We found some supporters that were willing to supplement the fees, the swim fees from outside sources.

It is important to note that Alex was participating on a team designed to serve lower income, inner-city youth. When the supplemental funding for the team was no longer available, Ms. Parker described, many people left the team. Those that did stay behind found themselves responsible for finding supplemental funding to offset the expenses. None of the other participants in the study, who were associated with the higher priced club teams, indicated any efforts to raise money to offset expenses.

Discussion

Marsh and Kleitman (2002) proposed that participating in extracurricular, school-based activities has more positive effects for students who come from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds than it does for students who come from higher SES backgrounds. They proposed their social inequality gap reduction model to explain their findings in these areas. Specifically, they discovered that across a number of factors participating in school based activities had positive benefits for all students. For a few factors though, the positive benefits were greater for lower SES students than for higher SES students. This suggests that participating in school based activities has the potential to reduce the inequality gap between these students. Marsh and Kleitman (2002) did not specifically investigate the relationship between school based and non-school based activities in this regard. Moreover, they did not discuss how the costs of activities might impact students' ability to be participants.

This study specifically addressed the question of cost as it relates to both types of participation. Three findings emerged from this. 1) Investing in youth sports brought about challenges for everyone involved. 2) The athletes and their families had to find ways to sacrifice and deal with the stresses that the investment of time and money created. However, not all were able to make the investment. 3) Financial assistance might have been available in certain circumstances but it was not widely understood how that assistance was granted. These challenges made it likely that athletes from lower economic backgrounds would see club sports as something unaffordable for them.

Many participants in this study - coaches, parents, and athletes - indicated that they were aware of athletes that wanted to or should have participated in club sports, but did not as a result of the financial challenges. Similarly, parents with non-flexible work hours, were not able to commit to transporting their children to and from practices and competitions on a weekly basis.

These factors were seen as obstacles for those participating in club teams, but not those participating in high schools. SBP required very little temporal or financial investment from parents.. Costs were absorbed in the school budget. Teams practiced at the school, immediately after school, or were transported from the school to their practice location. School teams were also provided with transportation to and from their competitions and, if needed, hotel expenses were covered.

Club teams have tremendous potential to provide opportunities for young athletes. However, the affordability question prohibits many young people from being able to take advantage of the opportunities. With financial assistance being rarely available, the only youth able to take advantage of these opportunities are those from families with access to money.

Devon, a high school only wrestler, summed up the challenges of the expensive world of club teams, saying,

I want to do a club team actually. The only problem is, for wrestling...you will not find a legitimate like good wrestling team in Newark, New Jersey...So you have to go like far away to Totowa, New Jersey or some other county just to be on a team, club team, so, usually I just say, you know what, I have to work hard on the team that I'm on, I have to make the most of it because it's hard to travel all the way out at these different counties that I've never been too and join the club...Finances also played an issue. I know I can't afford, or my grandmother can't afford for me to be in another club or wrestling club, so it's just Benedict's basically, you know.

Devon's plight is indicative of the potential problem with the private world of club teams. Youth cannot participate on club teams and will be denied any associated opportunities or benefits if they do not have the financial resources to afford the team fees or afford the travel to and from team events. Parents and coaches alike indicated that they are aware of youth whose families were unable to afford club participation. Youth from these households will be at a greater disadvantage of reaching the next level of their sport (varsity, college, professional) than those who can afford to participate in the club teams. If, as was discussed in an earlier chapter, club teams provide other opportunities for advancing social capital, lower income students will also miss out on these opportunities.

Lower income students, who already face opportunity gaps in our education system are facing a potential widening of that gap. As the push to towards club participation increases, one has to question the future of high school sports and the future of youth for whom high school sports are their only option.

Chapter 7: Overview of Study, Implications, Recommendations, Limitations, Conclusion

Overview of Study

Despite the fact that privately-run club teams have become more prevalent and prominent in recent years (Ripley, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2013), there have been few, if any, studies conducted to better understand the impact that these teams may have on high schools and student-athletes, especially those from low income backgrounds. This qualitative study sought to better understand the potential academic and social opportunities for those youth who participate on school-based and privately-run club athletic teams as well as any potential inequities. A qualitative method was selected as this allows for a better understanding of the human condition (Creswell, 2009).

A mixture of observations, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and website reviews (Creswell, 2007; Patton 1990) were employed with students, coaches, and parents from St. Benedict's Prep school in Newark, NJ or affiliated club teams. Neither gender nor race were used as a prerequisite for participation, however, since St. Benedict's is an all-male institution, all of the participating students and coaches were male. Four coaches were identified for participation based on the fact that they coach both for both the school and a club team, in either swimming, wrestling, or soccer.. Student-athletes were selected based on the recommendation of coaches or the researcher's personal knowledge of the subjects. All of the student-athletes were participants in one of the three sports mentioned. Parents were selected based on the responses of students or the researcher's personal knowledge. The researcher personally conducted all observations, interviews, and focus groups. The researcher also conducted all of the data analysis.

The identification-commitment model and the social inequality gap reduction model guided the research design, data collection, and data analysis. The identification-commitment model indicates that students who participate in school based activities are more likely to espouse the values of the school and are, therefore, more likely to be successful in school (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). The social inequality gap reduction model suggests that participating in extracurricular school activities has the potential to reduce the gap between socioeconomically advantaged students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). Through the use of these two models, the researcher was able to compare the experiences of those who participate in school-based athletics and club athletics. Three major findings emerged.

First, winning was emphasized far more on the high school team than on club teams. Nearly all participants agreed that winning and losing were far more meaningful on high school teams. While won-loss records were important for club teams, those records were much more about the reputation of the team and coach than they were the goal for the teams. Two reasons for this difference were identified. High school teams were more team focused. This meant that, whereas on club teams individuals could succeed without the team, on the high school teams there was no such thing as success without the entire team being successful. Additionally, most participants identified the high school teams as being of higher intensity. Intensity was defined as a seriousness of purpose combined with an overall expectation of a high energy commitment to the team. The team focus combined with the intensity led to the emphasis on winning.

Second, the data support the conclusion that social capital (Coleman, 1987) can be developed through participation in high school or club programs. While the high school provided more opportunities and support for academic and social success, club teams provided more opportunities for interacting with parents, travelling, interacting with more diverse groupings of

people and overcoming challenges. Student-athletes seemed to be able to develop social capital (Coleman, 1987) through different forms of participation.

Furthermore, there were four specific findings related to social capital. 1) Student athletes, regardless of team, faced serious challenges to academic success but overcame those challenges through the development of skills in discipline, time management, and perseverance. 2) Because of the level of academic support, there was an academic benefit to high school participation. 3) Relationships between athletes and coaches were of extreme importance for both high schools and clubs, although the nature of those relationships was quite different. 4) For youth participating on club teams, parents took on a much greater role in the development of social capital for their children.

The third major finding of this study was that participating on club teams required an investment of time and money beyond that of high school teams. This investment of time and money required sacrifices that caused great stress for some families. Financial assistance, or the process by which it was attained, was not well-publicized. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were unlikely to be able to afford the direct and indirect costs of participating on club teams or be able to find the time and transportation to get to and from club practices or events.

Students and parents indicated a level of satisfaction with both high school and club teams. Students who participated on both teams indicated that they would not want to choose between their high school or club team. Students who only participated on high school or club teams indicated that they were generally satisfied with their teams, although club-only participants did express concern that they may be missing experiences by not participating on a high school team.

Implications

Coaches, parents and students in this study indicated different reasons for youths to initially participate in sports. These ranged from physical fitness to character education to passion for a given sport. At SBP, the administration encouraged students to participate in athletics with the belief that athletic participation would lead to greater academic and overall social success. Friedman (2013) identified five goals that elementary school parents have for enrolling their children in athletics which she termed competitive kid capital. All of these different motivations indicate that there is thought that goes into initial athletic participation, regardless of whether that is on a school-based team or a club team.

One of the most important outcomes of this study is the understanding that high school teams and club teams may not necessarily have the same focus or goals in mind. Therefore, parents and athletes need to understand whether the type of team on which they are participating will meet their goals of participation. Those looking for teams that focus more on the team approach, emphasize winning as important, and support their athletes academically and socially would probably be better served to look for a school-based team. Those looking for teams which focus on helping athletes to advance to newer or higher levels of competition, provide more individual attention, and expose youth to more diverse competitors in many different parts of the country and world would probably be better served at a club team.

Of course, in reality, many athletic participants are looking for all of the above. Participants in this study did not seem to lean strongly in favor of club or high school teams. Those that participated on both types of teams expressed a level of satisfaction with both of their teams (Matz, 2014). Therefore, it seems that participants in this study, who were on both high school and club teams, believed that the combined participation was meeting all of their

expectations. This being the case, we must consider whether participation in only one type of team creates a gap in opportunities.

This consideration becomes even more significant when accounting for the differences in cost between high school and club teams. Club team coaches, parents, and athletes in this study indicated that parents were liable for paying exorbitant expenses for participation. This same expense was not experienced by high school participants. Furthermore, there was little if any financial assistance available for those who might not be able to afford the significant team fees and other associated expenses. Indeed, several parents and coaches indicated that they were aware of youth who could not afford to participate on club teams. Athletes whose families are unable to afford the expenses associated with club teams, therefore, will be unable to enjoy the benefits associated with club participation.

At the same time, one of the driving factors of this study was to explore the differences in high school and club participation because of the relatively recent increase in the prevalence of and pressure from privatized club teams. As more youth make the choice to forego their high school teams in order to focus their energy on their club team, all-year long, they will miss out on any benefits associated with high school participation. Additionally, should the trend amongst athletes of favoring club teams over their high school teams grow significantly, high school administrators may begin to reduce the number or size of their athletic teams. This would result in fewer athletic opportunities available to students from lower income backgrounds.

Based on the data presented here, it would seem to be in the best of interests of youth athletes to explore ways to combine the best aspects of the high school approach with the best aspects of the club approach. Rather than develop a system in which schools and clubs are competing for athletes, there must be a system in which both teams can co-exist. This would

appear to be a suggestion to maintain the system of club teams being supplemental to high school teams and high school seasons. However, this may not only be shortsighted but also unrealistic given the tremendous industry that has developed around youth sports - especially those that are privatized.

Therefore, rather than continuing to work within a traditional model of rigid seasons, it may be that youth would be best served by a combined effort of schools and clubs. The partnership of St. Benedict's Prep and Cedar Stars Academy, in soccer, provides a model of how high school teams and club teams can join forces to serve the best interests of youth overall. There would still be significant financial hurdles to overcome. However, recognizing the relative strengths of both types of participation and making them accessible to everyone is the only way to achieve equity of opportunity in the world of youth athletics.

Recommendations for Moving Forward

Based on the results of this study, I propose the following recommendations for parents and athletes, coaches, schools and school athletic leagues, and for club teams and related leagues or associations.

Parents and athletes.

1. Parents must be clear about the reasons for engaging their children in athletics in the first place and about the reasons for the financial and temporal commitments that they are making. Parents who are looking to fulfill lost personal dreams, by living vicariously through their child's athletic career, are not helping their children develop as a unique individual. Parents who spend significant amounts of money, and time, with the hopes that their child will earn a college scholarship would be better off investing the money as the number of college scholarships are few.

2. Parents and athletes must be aware of hard sales pitches from club coaches and evaluate what is truly best for their child. Owners and coaches at privately owned clubs have a vested interest in having more children on their team for longer periods of time.

Therefore, promises of college scholarships, higher levels of training, possibilities for professional play are common. As mentioned with the scholarships, the number of scholarships or opportunities to play professionally has remained mostly unchanged over the years. Therefore, despite the dramatic increase in coaches making promises of these attractive benefits which has led to an increase in the number of youth participating in these activities the likelihood of obtaining the scholarship or pro level has actually decreased.

Coaches.

3. Coaches, high school and club, should recognize the importance of relationships in the overall development of their athletes. Parents and athletes in this study repeatedly stated the importance of the relationship with their coach. Coaches must look beyond the sport development itself and build positive relationships with their athletes.

High school and club officials.

4. State interscholastic athletic leagues as well as high school coaches and athletic departments should strongly reconsider rules that restrict play on a high school team and club team simultaneously, that strictly govern the start and stop of athletic seasons, and that limit access to a high school coach out of season. In most cases these rules were written long before the establishment of private club teams. Strict rules from high school associations which were once intended to promote fairness, are now contributing to the very inequities they were intended to avoid. In other words, as youth whose families can

afford to send them to expensive club programs benefit from all-year training, youth whose families are not able to afford such expenses are limited to the strictly defined high school seasons. If state associations relaxed some of these rules, schools serving lower-income populations may be able to find ways to open up training options for their students over longer periods of the year. This may not match the year-long training of the club teams, but it would be much more beneficial than the three month training currently available for most high school sports.

5. High school officials, especially in low-income areas, should consider the value of extending opportunities for sport specific and general athletic training outside of the regular high school season. Perhaps formally combining efforts with a club team would allow for some separation while still providing a means for lower-income students to participate more of the year.
6. Club team officials and associations must realize the importance of the high school connections for youth. From bonding with teammates, to developing a sense of school pride, to academic and social benefits, high school play seems to be a powerful influence on students' lives. Requiring youth to choose, at an early age, between their high school and their club team puts young people in a very unfortunate and unfair position and may be depriving them of important opportunities and lessons.
7. Club team officials should explore ways to make participation more affordable for all families. Club team officials should work to develop real financial assistance for their teams. They must publicize this assistance. And, they must work to ensure that the assistance covers everything from team fees to uniforms to travel expenses. Without this,

we will likely see a widening gap between those students who can afford to attend training and competition throughout the year and those who cannot.

General.

8. All involved with youth sports must remember that the primary focus should be youth and youth development.

Limitations of Study

While this study identified several important traits about high school and club athletic participation, as well as benefits and drawbacks of each, there were several limitations that should be addressed to improve reliability and expand the findings. First, the motivation for this study was the researcher's personal knowledge of a phenomenon in which club athletes were being encouraged to bypass their high school teams. While there have been some news articles and opinion pieces written about this phenomenon (Ripley, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2013) there have been no studies conducted to better understand the extent of this phenomenon. This study sought to understand what these changes might mean for students in high schools and clubs, but it did not address the number of students impacted by this movement. Therefore, a quantitative study of athletes in different sports and schools should be conducted to determine how many students have been conflicted between participating for their high school or their club.

Second, this study was extremely small in number and geography. A total of twelve students and nine adults were interviewed or participated in focus groups for this study. While these participants were able to verbalize their experiences and their opinions well, the small number of participants makes it impossible to generalize these findings. Additionally, as this study was limited to those who participate in or work with SBP or affiliated club teams, there is no reason to assume that students from all high schools or club teams would have had the same

experiences or feel the same way about the relationships between high school and club athletics. Future research replicating this study should be conducted using more participants and a variety of different schools and club teams. This research should also take be conducted in different parts of the country to account for geographic differences.

Third, this study focused on soccer, swimming, and wrestling only. There are several other sports which were not addressed. Future research should investigate not only the extent of the phenomenon in other sports, it should also replicate this study, or be similar, in determining the benefits and drawbacks of high school and club participation in different sports.

Finally, as SBP is an all-male institution, all of the student and coach participants in this study were boys and men. There was no data collected from or that directly relates to girls and women. Future research needs to be conducted which takes into account the experiences of girls in youth athletics.

Conclusion

Changes in the world of youth athletics are nothing new. As was highlighted in the literature review, youth athletics have undergone major changes since their formal inception early in the twentieth century. However, for many years, it has been widely accepted that high schools were the central place for youth to participate during their adolescent years. As club teams expand their footprint in the world of youth athletics, it is important for us to better understand what that means for students, parents, and schools. This study was an attempt to highlight the differences between the school-based and private teams. The findings of this study should help to call attention to the different approaches and lessons of each type of team.

While each type of team appears to carry important lessons for life, the extent to which they assist students to be more successful in school is a cause for concern. As multiple studies

have shown the benefit of participating in high school, there are no studies to indicate if this success carries over to club team participants. Indeed, in this study, club teams participants were not as academically successful as high school participants. If more athletes opt out of high school sports, we need to determine other means of supporting students to the same type of success.

High school sports have been a low cost way for students to engage with their schools outside of the classroom. A lot of research suggests that this participation is good for students academically. High school sports have been widely praised for teaching students discipline, commitment, team-work, and hard-work. Prior to this study, less was known about club teams. Even with this study, not enough is known about club teams. What we do know is that club teams tend to be very costly. Participants in this study also indicated that club teams do not offer much in terms of academic or social support. While club teams do certainly have other benefits, given their significant expense, their lack of academic support, and the challenges related to location, there is a real question about their accessibility to all students. While high school teams have been accessible to all, with the increased prominence of club teams, there is a real question about the future of high school sports as we have known them. Because of all of this, we are left with this question: In a world where privatized youth sports have taken such a prominent role, are certain youth being left behind?

References

- 2013-2014 high school athletics participation survey. (2014). Retrieved from http://www.nfhs.org/ParticipationStatics/PDF/2013-14_Participation_Survey_PDF.pdf
- Anderson, K. S. (1990). The effect of athletic participation on the academic aspirations and achievement of African American males in a New York City high school. *Journal of Negro Education*, 507-516.
- Boatwright, T. C. (2009). Comparison of grade point averages and dropout rates of students who participate in extracurricular activities and students who do not participate (Doctoral dissertation, Lindenwood University).
- Bodey, K. J., Judge, L. W., & Hoover, J. V. (2013). Specialization in youth sport: What coaches should tell parents. *Strategies*, 26(1), 3-7.
- Borden, L. M., Perkins, D. F., Villarruel, F. A., & Stone, M. R. (2005). To participate or not to participate: That is the question. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2005(105), 33-49.
- Bowen, D. H., & Greene, J. P. (2012). Does athletic success come at the expense of academic success. *Journal of Research in Education*, 22(2), 2-23.
- Bowen, D. H., & Hitt, C. (2013). High school sports aren't killing academics. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved Dec, 27.
- Broh, B. A. (2002). Linking extracurricular programming to academic achievement: Who benefits and why? *Sociology of Education*, 75(1), 69-95.
- Bruno, B. (2015). New Jersey School Attempts to Rejuvenate the Three-sport Athlete. Retrieved September 13, 2015, from <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/new-jersey-school-attempts-to-rejuvenate-the-three-sport-athlete/>

- Camp, W. G. (1990). Participation in student activities and achievement: A covariance structural analysis. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 272-278.
- Coakley, J. (2010a). Sport Specialization and its effects. in Abrams, D., Coakley, J., Cooky, C., Dionigi, R., Harrison, K., Hattery, A. J., ... & Lapchick, R. (2010). *Learning culture through sports: Perspectives on society and organized sports*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Coakley, J. (2010b). the “logic” of specialization: Using children for adult purposes. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 81(8), 16-25.
- Coakley, J., Sheridan, M. P., Howard, R., Graham, T., & Faigenbaum, A. D. (2010). *Guidelines for Participation in Youth Sport Programs: Specialization Versus Multiple-Sport Participation Position Statement*. National Association for Sport and Physical Education.
- Cohen, D. A., Taylor, S. L., Zonta, M., Vestal, K. D., & Schuster, M. A. (2007). Availability of high school extracurricular sports programs and high-risk behaviors. *Journal of School Health*, 77(2), 80-86.
- Coleman, J. S. (1961). *The adolescent society; the social life of the teenager and its impact on education*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Coleman, J. S. (1987). Families and schools. *Educational researcher*, 16(6), 32-38.
- Cook, B. (2012). Will ‘Pay to Play’ Become a Permanent Part of School Sports?. *Forbes.com*, 22.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

- Creswell, J. W., & Plano-Clark, V. L (2007). Analyzing data in mixed methods research. In J. W. Creswell, & V. L. Plano-Clark. Designing and conducting mixed methods research (128-135). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- DAVIS, S., O'BRIEN, R., BECHTEL, M., & BEECH, M. (2013). The case for ...AAU basketball. Sports Illustrated, 119(4), 28.
- Emmons, L. S. (1995). Athletic participation and academic achievement: Can the two coexist? NASSP Bulletin, 79(574), 107.
- Finn, J. D. (1989). Withdrawing from school. Review of Educational Research, 59, 117-142. doi:10.2307/1170412
- Fitzgerald, T. (2013, October 18). Sports specialization trend costs teens, schools. Retrieved January 16, 2016, from <http://www.sfgate.com/sports/article/Sportsspecializationtrendcoststeensschools4905566.php>
- Fredricks, J. A., & Eccles, J. S. (2006). Is extracurricular participation associated with beneficial outcomes? concurrent and longitudinal relations. Developmental Psychology, 42(4), 698-713. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.42.4.698
- Freeman, W. H. (1978). Controlling athletics in education: History and perspective*
- Friedman, H. L. (2013). Playing to win: Raising children in a competitive culture. Univ of California Press.
- Fritch, W. S. (1999). An Overlooked Role of High School Athletics: The Formation of Social Capital through Parent Involvement.
- Gerber, S. B. (1996). Extracurricular activities and academic achievement. Journal of Research & Development in Education.

- Gilman, R., Meyers, J., & Perez, L. (2004). Structured extracurricular activities among adolescents: Findings and implications for school psychologists. *Psychology in the Schools*, 41(1), 31-41.
- Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (p. 6). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Guèvremont, A., Findlay, L., & Kohen, D. (2014). Organized extracurricular activities: Are in-school and out-of-school activities associated with different outcomes for canadian youth? *Journal of School Health*, 84(5), 317-325.
- Holland, A., & Andre, T. (1987). Participation in extracurricular activities in secondary school: What is known, what needs to be known?. *Review of Educational Research*, 57(4), 437-466.
- Holloway, J. H. (1999). Extracurricular activities: The path to academic success? *Educational Leadership*, 57(4), 87.
- Hyman, M. (2012). *The Most Expensive Game in Town: The Rising Cost of Youth Sports and the Toll on Today's Families*. Beacon Press.
- Jable, J. T. (1979). The public schools athletic league of New York city: Organized athletics for city schoolchildren, 1903-1914. *Sport and American education: History and perspectives*, ed. WM Ladd and A. Lumpkin, ix, 1-18.
- Jayanthi, N., Pinkham, C., Dugas, L., Patrick, B., & LaBella, C. (2013). Sports specialization in young athletes evidence-based recommendations. *Sports Health: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, 5(3), 251-257.
- Jordan, W. J. (1999). Black high school students' participation in school-sponsored sports activities: Effects on school engagement and achievement. *Journal of Negro Education*, 68(1), 54-71.

Kelley, B., & Carchia, C. (2013). Hey, data data-swing!": The hidden demographics of youth sports. ESPN The Magazine.

Killion, A. (2013, October 18). Paying to play is new normal for youth athletes. Retrieved December 28, 2016, from <http://www.sfgate.com/sports/article/Payingtoplayisnewnormalforyouthathletes4902034.php>

Lareau, A. (2011). Unequal Childhoods: Class, race and family life. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lipscomb, S. (2007). Secondary school extracurricular involvement and academic achievement: A fixed effects approach. *Economics of Education Review*, 26(4), 463-472.

Longman, J. (2015, September 18). High School Football Inc. Retrieved January 12, 2016, from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/19/sports/football/high-school-football-inc.html?_r=0

Marsh, H. W., & Kleitman, S. (2002). Extracurricular school activities: The good, the bad, and the nonlinear. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(4), 464-514.

Matz, E. (2014, February 24). The kids are alright. Retrieved December 28, 2015, from http://espn.go.com/espn/story/_/id/10496416/are-youth-sports-ruining-kids-childhoods-espn-magazine

McNeal, Ralph B. Jr. (1995). Extracurricular activities and high school dropouts. *Sociology of Education*, 68(1), 62. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/216485750?accountid=13626>

Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative Interviewing. Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. Sage Publications, Inc.

QuickFacts. (n.d.). Retrieved September 07, 2017, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/newarkcitynewjersey/PST045216>

- Ripley, A. (2013). The case against high-school sports. *The Atlantic*. 312(3), 72-78.
- Sabo, D., & Veliz, P. (2008). *Go Out and Play: Youth Sports in America*. Women's Sports Foundation.
- Sagas, M., & Cunningham, G. B. (2014). Sport Participation Rates among Underserved American Youth. The Aspen Institute's Project Play.
- Shifrer, D., Pearson, J., Muller, C., & Wilkinson, L. (2012). College-going benefits of high school sports participation: Race and gender differences over three decades. *Youth & society*, 0044118X12461656.
- Shulruf, B., Tumen, S., & Tolley, H. (2008). Extracurricular activities in school, do they matter?. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30(4), 418-426.
- Silliker, S. A., & Quirk, J. T. (1997). The effect of extracurricular activity participation on the academic performance of male and female high school students. *School Counselor*, 44(4), 288-93.
- Wiggins, D. K. (2013). A worthwhile effort? History of organized youth sport in the United States. *Kinesiology Review*, 2(1), 65-75.
- Zill, N., Westat, I. M., & And, O. (1995). *Adolescent Time Use, Risky Behavior, and Outcomes: An Analysis of National Data*.

Appendix A: Youth Interview Protocol

I would like to thank you for being willing to meet with me today. As you may know I am a doctoral student at Rutgers University in the Education, Culture, and Society concentration. I'm doing a study that is exploring the increase of privately-run club teams and what effect this may have on high school sports. More specifically, I am looking to get a better understanding of the experiences of students and parents with regards to participation in high school sports and club sports. I will not be using names in my final study. I'm looking for honest answers to really understand what people think and feel. Your responses (positive or negative) will not be associated with you and will not have any consequences. The interview will probably last about 45-60 minutes. I will be recording your responses in my notes, but if it's ok with you, I would also like to audio record our conversation so that I can play it back later. Would that be ok?

1. Please tell me your name, school, and grade?
2. What teams are you on, either at school or someplace else?
3. How long have you been with those teams?
4. How long have you been involved in the sports you're in?
5. What is your current role on the team (position, captain, etc)? How long have you been in that role?
6. What other activities or programs do you participate in, in school? Outside of school?
 - a. How long have you been in those? What got you started?
7. How did you come to attend the school that you do?

Focusing more on Sports:

8. Please tell me about your participation in sports throughout your lifetime?

- a. What sports have you been involved in?
 - b. When did you start (and stop) participating in each sport?
 - c. What teams did you participate on?
 - d. How did you end up on those teams?
 - e. Describe some of the experiences that you had as a player on different teams.
9. What makes participating on your high school team important to you?
10. What makes participating on your club team important to you?
11. Which do you like more? Why?
12. Tell me about a time when you needed help from your club team to improve your academics. What happened? How?
 - a. What did your coaches know about the situation?
 - b. In what ways did your club coach communicate with or work with your high school?
 - c. What challenges or conflicts came up between your club team and your high school?
 - d. How did you overcome these?
13. Why did you choose to participate on your high school and / or club team?
 - a. Why didn't you participate on your high school and / or a club team?
14. What are the membership fees to participate on your club team?
 - a. Is there financial assistance available?
15. What do you hope to get out of sports participation? Is this team specific?
 - a. What is the highest level of competition that you expect to be part of?
16. How are you doing in school?

- a. What are your grades like?
 - b. Do you have any behavioral issues?
17. Tell me about some times that you've had to miss school because of your club team.
18. How much do you or your parents spend on average to be on the team, in addition to membership fees? (including gear, uniforms, travel, food, subscriptions, tournament fees, private lessons, etc.)
- a. High school team?
19. How does your family deal with the time commitments necessary for each of your teams?
- a. How does this impact your family relations?
20. What are your opinions about people specializing in one sport? Should students only play one sport all the time or should they participate in different sports? Why?

Thanks. Finally, I'd like to ask a few questions about you:

21. How do you identify racially / ethnically?
22. How old are you?
23. Where are you from originally?
24. Where do you live now?
25. How would you describe your family's class status?
26. And finally, if necessary, would you be willing to participate in follow up interviews or discussions around this topic?

Thanks for your time.

Appendix B: Coach's Interview Protocol:

I would like to thank you for being willing to meet with me today. As you may know I am a doctoral student at Rutgers University in the Education, Culture, and Society concentration. I'm doing a study that is exploring the increase of privately-run club teams and what effect this may have on high school sports. More specifically, I am looking to get a better understanding of the experiences of students and parents with regards to participation in high school sports and club sports. I will not be using names in my final study. I'm looking for honest answers to really understand what people think and feel. Your responses (positive or negative) will not be associated with you and will not have any consequences. The interview will probably last about 45-60 minutes. I will be recording your responses in my notes, but if it's ok with you, I would also like to audio record our conversation so that I can play it back later. Would that be ok?

1. Please tell me your name and occupation?
2. What teams do you work with, both at St. Benedict's and otherwise?
3. How long have you been with those teams?
4. How long have you been involved in the sport? In what capacities?
5. What is your current role on the team (head coach, assistant coach, etc.)? How long have you been in that role?
6. What is your role at or involvement with St. Benedict's Prep?
7. How long have you been affiliated with SBP? In what capacities?

Focusing more on Sports:

8. Please tell me about your own participation in sports throughout your lifetime?

- a. What sports have you been involved in?
 - b. When did you start (and stop) participating in each sport?
 - c. What teams did you participate on?
 - d. How did you end up on those teams?
 - e. Describe some of the experiences that you had as a player on different teams.
 - f. How did your teams support you academically, socially, or otherwise growing up?
 - g. What challenges did participating on these teams present?
 - h. What would you list as the biggest benefits / drawbacks to participating on each of the teams that you did?
9. What do you think about the current state of youth sports?
 - a. Do you see any trends in the way youth are participating now? If so, what are they?
10. How do you think high school and club sports compare to each other?
 - a. What are some of the benefits of each type of participation?
 - b. What are some of the drawbacks?
 - c. Which do you prefer as a coach? Which do you think youth prefer? Why?
11. How do you think club sports support students academically and socially?
 - a. What high school records of your athletes do you review, if any?
 - b. In what ways do you as a club coach work with the high schools of your athletes to better support them?
 - c. In what ways are you not able to work with high schools of your athletes?

- d. What challenges or conflicts have come up between your club team and the high schools of your athletes?
 - e. How have you overcome these?
- 12. For athletes on your club team, do you recommend that they participate in high school sports?
 - a. Why or why not?
- 13. For athletes on your high school team, do you recommend that they participate in club sports?
 - a. Why or why not?
- 14. How do you recruit youth to participate on your club team?
- 15. Why do you think youth and parents choose to participate on each type of team?
 - a. What are the motivators involved?
- 16. What are the membership fees to participate on your club team?
 - a. Is there financial assistance available?
- 17. What do you think the annual real costs are to families of youth on your club team?
(including gear, uniforms, travel, food, subscriptions, tournament fees, private lessons, etc.)
 - a. High school team?
- 18. Have you had any parents raise concerns over the expense of participation on either team?
 - a. If yes, did those youth continue to participate?
- 19. What are your opinions about the specialization of sport, especially at younger ages?

- a. There's research suggesting specialization at young ages leads to burnout and overuse injuries, as well as inhibiting late bloomers. What has your experience said about this?

Thanks. Finally, I'd like to ask a few questions about you:

20. How do you identify racially / ethnically?
21. How old are you?
22. Where are you from originally?
23. Where do you reside now?
24. How would you classify your socioeconomic status?
25. And finally, if necessary, would you be willing to participate in follow up interviews or discussions around this topic?

Thanks for your time.

Appendix C: Parent Interview Protocol

I would like to thank you for being willing to meet with me today. As you may know I am a doctoral student at Rutgers University in the Education, Culture, and Society concentration. I'm doing a study that is exploring the increase of privately-run club teams and what effect this may have on high school sports. More specifically, I am looking to get a better understanding of the experiences of students and parents with regards to participation in high school sports and club sports. I will not be using names in my final study. I'm looking for honest answers to really understand what people think and feel. Your responses (positive or negative) will not be associated with you and will not have any consequences. The interview will probably last about 45-60 minutes. I will be recording your responses in my notes, but if it's ok with you, I would also like to audio record our conversation so that I can play it back later. Would that be ok?

1. Please state your name and your child's name.
2. What team(s) does your child participate on - high school or club?
3. For how long has your child been part of these teams?
4. Was he ever a part of other teams? What teams were those? When? For how long?
5. What was the initial motivation to get your child involved in sports? Was it his or yours?
6. What goals do you have for your child's participation?
7. What is your involvement in your child's team(s)?
 - a. Is your involvement voluntary or required?
 - b. How often do you attend games or other team events?
8. What are some of the strengths of the team and sport that your child participates in?
9. What are some of the drawbacks?

10. On the average week, how much time is committed to sports (including transportation and overnight travel)?
11. What is the cost of the team itself?
 - a. What other fees are associated with being on the team (parent fees, travel fees, entry fees)? How much are these?
 - b. What other expenses are involved with being on the team (equipment, clothing, magazine/web site subscriptions, etc.)? How much are each of these?
12. Do you expect your child to continue playing this sport after high school?
 - a. If no, what's the highest level of competition you expect of your child?
 - b. If yes, how much important do you feel the team is to future success? Did this have influence on your decision to choose this team?
13. What do you think the difference is between school-based teams and club teams?
14. Which is better? Why?
15. What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of both high school and club participation?
16. In what ways has participating in athletics impacted your child's grades or behavior?
Why?
17. How much and what kind support do you or your child receive from coaches?
 - a. Athletic Support
 - b. Academic Support
 - c. Socioemotional Support
 - d. Other
18. If your child participates on a club team, what kind of challenges have you encountered between your child's club team and his school?

19. Please describe how satisfied you are with your child's team(s) and coaches? Why or why not?

Thanks. Finally, I'd like to ask a few questions about you:

Please feel free to decline to answer any question you are uncomfortable answering.

20. What activities did you participate in growing up?

- a. If sports, were these school based or non-school based teams?
- b. Please describe some of your own experiences on these teams.
- c. How long did you participate on these teams?
- d. What would you say were the greatest benefits of participation?
- e. What were the biggest negatives of participation?

21. How do you identify racially / ethnically?

22. What is your occupation?

23. Where are you from originally?

24. Where do you reside now?

25. How would you classify your socioeconomic status?

26. What is your approximate annual income?

27. Please describe your immediate family structure.

- a. Parents at home?
- b. Siblings?
- c. Other relatives / friends in home?

28. Finally, would you be willing to participate in follow up interviews or discussions around this topic?

Thanks for your time.

Appendix D: Focus Group Guide

I would like to thank you for being willing to meet with me today. As you may know I am a doctoral student at Rutgers University in the Education, Culture, and Society concentration. I'm doing a study that is exploring the increase of privately-run club teams and what effect this may have on high school sports. More specifically, I am looking to get a better understanding of the experiences of students and parents with regards to participation in high school sports and club sports. I will not be using names in my final study. I'm looking for honest answers to really understand what people think and feel. Your responses (positive or negative) will not be associated with you and will not have any consequences. This group will probably last about 60 minutes. I will be recording your responses in my notes, but if it's ok with you, I would also like to audio record our conversation so that I can play it back later. Would that be ok? As much as possible, I would like us to have a conversation here. So while I will ask some questions, please feel free to have a discussion amongst yourselves.

1. Please start by introducing yourself to everyone here.
 - a. Name
 - b. Sport
 - c. Team(s)
 - d. Years played
2. What is it like playing for your high school/club team?
3. Describe for me your typical day after school for you.
4. Describe a typical weekend when you have a game or competition..
5. Describe some of your best experiences of playing for your high school or club team?

6. Describe some of your worst experiences of playing for your high school or club team?
7. Tell me a story that demonstrates the best reasons to compete for a high school?
8. Tell me a story that demonstrates the best reasons to compete for a club?
9. Which would you say is better high school or club? Why?
10. Tell me about a time when your athletic commitments created a pressure or anxiety for you (especially if it relates to school).
11. What are each of your future plans in the sport?
 - a. How do you think you'll accomplish these?
12. Do you know of any other children who have been unable to participate in a team for any reason? If so, please describe the situation without using names.
13. What other things about your participation on these teams would you like to share?
14. If the need should arise, would you be willing to take part in a follow up interview?

Thanks for being willing to participate in this group.