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**Soccer and the American Dream**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, and that it embodies the results of my own research. Where appropriate, I have acknowledged the nature and extent of work carried out in collaboration and/by others included in this research

**Signed:**

**Date:**

## ABSTRACT

The American Dream is founded upon the ideological belief that 'you can be anything you want to be, regardless of your current class position.' This belief is contained within the dominant prevailing notion that the U.S. is a meritocracy where power and success are associated with determination and failure with laziness. This thesis challenges whether the American Dream is a relevant, attainable and viable concept for higher education students via the avenue of a soccer scholarship. In so doing, the research presented challenges the perceived wisdom of 'American exceptionalism' from a critical theoretical perspective. The research question at the heart of this study is 'what are the motives of American university students for undertaking a soccer scholarship?' The adoption of an interpretive paradigm for this study aims to provide an explanation of student decision-making. In the final analysis, this approach reveals what soccer means to the lives of the student-athletes.

The central themes of the study were established via a pilot study and categorised as: family, social class, social mobility and career development. Questionnaires were completed by 154 students from two separate Division One universities. Twelve students were then purposively sampled and interviewed using a semi-structured format. To supplement these opinions, interviews were then conducted with a selection of coaches and athletic directors at the respective institutions. Analysis of the responses was contextualised using the framework provided by Csikszentmihayli and Schneider's (2000) 'Support/Challenge Questionnaire'.

The findings support a common hypothesis that the family is a significant agent in socialising of their children to the cultural values of the American Dream. The findings additionally reveal evidence that supports for the perception that families are central influences on their child's sport mobility orientations within the context of soccer aspirations. An alternative explanation proposed here is that the process is actually a two-way dialogue in which children socialised their parents and vice versa. The family in this study represent a potentially problematic social process for the inculcation of values related to the maintenance of social life.

The conclusions presented clearly reveal that the majority of students embarking on a soccer scholarship are motivated by the need to firstly finance their higher education and secondly to take part in a sport they have played since childhood. Students were aware of the fragility of the employment market and the limitations of their own technical ability. As such their participation in the scholarship could be considered to be a pragmatic adaptation of a 'labour of love.'

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## **GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>AFCA</b>	<b>American Football Coaches Association</b>
<b>FIFA</b>	<b>Fédération Internationale de Football Association</b>
<b>MLB</b>	<b>Major League Baseball</b>
<b>MLS</b>	<b>Major League Soccer</b>
<b>NBA</b>	<b>National Basketball Association</b>
<b>NCAA</b>	<b>National Collegiate Athletic Association</b>
<b>NFL</b>	<b>National Football League</b>
<b>ODP</b>	<b>Olympic Development Program</b>
<b>SGMA</b>	<b>Sports Goods Manufacturers Association</b>
<b>USFF</b>	<b>United States Soccer Federation</b>
<b>USISL</b>	<b>United States Interregional Soccer League</b>
<b>WUSA</b>	<b>Women's United Soccer Association</b>

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of the 'American Dream' has historically maintained a captivating hold over the psyche of the U.S. public. Inspired by the popular storytelling of 19<sup>th</sup> century American author Horatio Alger's 'rags to riches' books, the nation has embraced the narrative that identifies perseverance and commitment as factors for financial success. Consequently, it disputes theories that suggest genealogy and environment could shape one's social standing (Appleton, 2002; Huber, 1971).

This study adopts an unconventional approach to testing the validity of such ideological claims in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. The thesis challenges whether the American Dream is a relevant, attainable and viable concept for higher education students via the avenue of a soccer scholarship. In so doing, the research presented will challenge the perceived wisdom of 'American exceptionalism' from a critical theoretical perspective. American exceptionalism in this context refers to the popular view that the U.S. differs from other developed nations, because of its historical development or distinctive political institutions. The distinction is frequently expressed as some uncompromising pre-eminence, to which is usually attached a degree of rationalization, validation or explanation that may vary according to the historical period and the political context (Abowitz, 2005). In this precise context exceptionalists would argue that soccer has failed to enter the psyche of America due to its association with ethnic minorities and latterly with the middle class strata of society.

The departure from previous studies is provided by the context within which the research is focused: 'soccer' or association football as it is known

more commonly in the U.K. To date no previous research has been conducted which presents the opinions of American students undertaking a soccer scholarship. The term 'soccer' will be adopted for this thesis in order to avoid confusing it with American Football (grid iron). As such, soccer offers a valuable insight as to perceptions of how the American Dream is evolving in response to changes both from a 'macro' and 'micro' level.

From a macro perspective the study will consider those societal forces which are the result of the complex interactions of individuals and groups which, in turn, are the templates that shape the cultural dimensions of society (Stempel, 2005). One, therefore, cannot study the actions of individuals without some consideration to the broader socio-cultural environments, their educational experiences and value structures which impact upon their social lives (Giardina and McCarthy, 2005). These factors are consistent and are inclined to be closely linked in presenting an overall 'feel' of the culture. From a micro perspective, the study seeks to analyse the potentially broad spectrum of individual needs for undertaking a scholarship. As the term suggests, 'micro' is the smallest, most intimate level of society and represent groupings that the majority of humans will automatically identify with first (Couldry and Markham, 2007). The micro level deals with the daily actions and interactions of people in society. The study therefore will examine the collective roles that the subjects take on within society and how such roles are interpreted. At this more intimate stage the focus is on how participants reflect and act within the concept of the American Dream.

The foundation for soccer to enter the consciousness of the American people has been clearly demonstrated by its traditional popularity amongst

'grass roots' participants of both genders. However, the increasing number of spectators and subsequent commercial interest in the professional game now allows it to 'challenge for acceptance' within the broader lexicon of American sporting culture.

The tenets of American Dream and thus the central drama of U.S. culture appear to be the dynamics of status advancement (Gorn, 2004). This belief may have its roots within the motives of its immigrants in aspiring to realise the American Dream. Much of American ancestry can be traced to generations of impoverished workers seeking opportunity and entering the labour market at the base forming a hierarchical or tiered layer cake. As each ethnic group mobilised up the social ladder a new impoverished cohort filled the vacuum. This upward flow, expectation to climb and sense of mobility is central to American culture and the doctrine of the 'Dream.' Universal public education within this creed was a revolutionary concept according to Goldschmidt (1999) that gave migrants a 'highway to success' (p. 66) facilitating an opportunity to climb the economic ladder to status and thus achieve the Dream. Many sports sociologists have argued that that there is an established and recognisable relationship between obtaining an elevated level of education and increasing and one's own level of financial mobility (Appleton, 2002; Chenoweth, 1974; Riess, 1994, 1999).

The education system in the United States has consistently been identified as the most efficient, non-discriminatory and successful mechanism for all citizens to advance their financial status (McMurrer and Sawhill, 1998; Sack, 1987; Stempel, 2005). By undertaking a degree, individuals with low socio-economic status are encouraged to believe that they can boost their

income potential. The challenge of the American Dream is then to exceed the achievements of their parents and challenge those individuals who occupy the upper income echelons. Generally speaking, each supplementary stage of education any individual achieves is pre-supposed to add greatly to income levels (Barnett and Belfield, 2006). Education could therefore be regarded as a ritual affirmation of American social mobility and arguably a conduit for status advancement. It is supported by a salary and in contemporary society often by two salaries. A salary in simple terms could be considered a measure of social standing, a finely calibrated status ladder which facilitates the purchase of 'status markers' defining both cultural taste and social standing. Children who have internalised these values from their parents find they have high status in school; those who have not often become disillusioned and alienated (McMurrer and Sawhill, 1998). This is the motor that drives the American pattern of status dynamics (Sugden and Tomlinson, 2000).

Within the context of higher education the subjects of this study were questioned in order to discover the importance of a soccer scholarship in facilitating their dreams. Previous discussions within this context frequently refer to the widespread belief that the financial support offered by universities is a valuable mobility vehicle for young adults (Abowitz, 2005; Coakley, 2007; Eitzen, 2000; Sack, 1987). In order to contextualise the myriad of factors which may have a bearing upon student decision-making or motives for undertaking an athletic scholarship it is firstly necessary to present a broad synopsis of sport and status from a macro perspective within U.S. society.

Sports in American society are commonly regarded as both the social glue, bonding the 50 states together and a vehicle for the transmission of

ideals and concepts such as fair play, justice and sacrifice (Dyreson, 2001; Szymanski and Zimbalist, 2005). The concepts intrinsic to sport have consistently been argued to have made a positive contribution to social and racial integration and concomitantly to the development of language, as sports terms and expressions are integrated within everyday usage (Adams, 1931; Alba and Nee, 2003; Cornbleth, 2002). Evidently, however not without its critics as historians and cultural critics have reiterated:

... the mythology that sport provides the only kind of social capital which translates into social mobility for African Americans has been and continues to be a pernicious fiction (Dyreson, 2001, p. 25).

It is important therefore to reflect upon the impact that professional sport has had in reinforcing the ideology of the American Dream. One mechanism historically has been by the creation of a sporting narrative. The act of creating stories out of sport has led to a communal immersion in acceptance of athletic celebrity (McDonald, 2005). The consequence of this narrativization of sport is that it extends beyond any single athlete to collectively bind society in ideologies of status (Giardina and McCarthy, 2005). A detailed analysis of the concept of social mobility and its association with the American Dream will be provided in Chapter One; however, it is appropriate at this point to touch upon the mainstream perspective within which sport is viewed. According to Gorn, sport has become 'a sort of idealized version of the American social structure, offering equality of opportunity purely on the basis of merit' (2004, p. 4). The cultural logic of such observations asserts that an athlete is the personification of the ordinary



American citizen who uses hard work and talent to socially reposition themselves (McDonald, 2005).

Soccer in this study provides a context within which a theoretical analysis of achieving social mobility can be developed. This however, should come as no surprise given that historically it is located behind the established 'Big Three' church of American football, basketball and baseball. Traditionally, American football and baseball are perceived as invoking an exacting embodiment of the American Dream, one that bestows collective adulation and devotion (McDonald, 2005). Robert Frost, arguably one of America's most respected poets and social historians, reiterated the country's absorption with professional sports when he observed, 'Nothing flatters me more than to have it assumed that I could write prose-unless it be to have it assumed that I once pitched a baseball with distinction' (in Oriard, 1993, p. 57). Americans from all walks of life self-evidently share an enduring and emotional passion for sporting contests which extends across real or perceived socio-economic class and racial boundaries (Gorn, 2004; Kuper, 2006).

In America, since the beginning of the twentieth century, intercollegiate sports competition has been a fundamental element in perpetuating the supply of sporting narrative and has fuelled support for both public and private universities (Denison, 1996; Troutman and Dufur, 2007) and been simultaneously perpetuated by the media (Gerdy, 2006). The steady rise in intercollegiate athletics' popularity and subsequent revenue can be traced to the televising of college sporting contests, which facilitated the creation and expansion of fan bases beyond the geographical boundaries of any individual university (Sack, 2001). In the early 1950s, television stations began to

broadcast a small number of elite university sporting contests to a national audience and in doing so established what became known as 'big time' athletic programmes (Zimbalist, 1999). Consequently, the public and media enthusiasm for sports has made intercollegiate athletics a focus for the discussion of societal issues at large such as gender, race and class along with philosophical concerns regarding values of morality and ethics (Boyle, 2004; Gerdy, 2006). As such higher education is perceived as having a leadership role by establishing societal attitude towards athletics (Coakley, 2007). Given this perception it is appropriate that this study positions itself within higher education in order to reflect upon the ideological claims of the American Dream. Specifically, this study focuses upon two universities that are classified as 'Division One'. In order to better understand the nature of athletic scholarships and the environment in which student athletes participate it is necessary to provide an overview of the structure of the National College Athletic Association (NCAA).

Intercollegiate athletic programs have always operated within the framework of a sponsoring university (Gerdy, 2002). Throughout the previous century, the organizational structure continued to become more formalized (Eitzen and Sage, 2003). As national championship contests were expanded from grid-iron football to track and field, basketball, and soccer in the 1940's, the 'professional model' as it appears today began to emerge (Gerdy, 2002; McDonald, 2005).

Although research about Division One programs is extensive (Coakley, 2007; Tucker and Amato, 1993; McDonald, 2005; Chu et al, 1995); the

literature which investigates the motivation of student athletes to participate in such programs is limited and forms the focus of the study.

The motivation for this investigation is partly based upon a personal interest; as a former student at a Division One university and teacher in the U.S, I have observed a groundswell of enthusiasm for the game from both a spectator and participant basis challenging the status quo of more traditional sports. The hosting the FIFA World Cup in 1994 proved to be a catalyst for the foundation of both women's (WUSA) and men's (MLS) domestic professional leagues. Subsequently, spectator attendance within MLS has grown to the point where crowd size average is within the parameters of elite professional leagues in Europe and South America where it is an integral part of the sporting culture (Brown, 2005; Collins, 2006; Southall and Nagel, 2003). Given the extent of previous research highlighting the perceived American apathy towards soccer (Andrews, 1999; Markovits and Hellerman, 2001, 2003a; Mason, 1986; Sugden, 1994), this thesis analyses the views of soccer scholarship students and seeks to provide conclusions as to the viability of a soccer scholarship as a mechanism through which to pursue the American Dream. A detailed analysis of soccer and mainstream U.S. culture is provided in Chapter One.

Soccer, according to its critics is considered traditionally as an afterthought amongst most U.S. sports fans (Delgado, 1997; Markovits and Hellerman, 2001, 2003a). Within the financial indicators of success i.e. television ratings and sponsorship income, it is clearly behind the established professional sports franchises of the NFL, NBA, and MLB. Furthermore, in terms of culture, soccer according to its critics lags behind these three sports.

Proponents of the American exceptionalism thesis, as previously discussed, such as Markovits and Hellerman (2001, 2003a) critique the sporting culture of the U.S., observing that ‘a sporting culture revolves around what people follow as spectators rather than the sports they participate in as athletes’ (2003, p. 1535). Thus the argument predicts that the professional game of soccer, has and is unlikely to ever gain a foundation in the sporting culture of the United States (Brown, 2005). It is in essence not, in the opinion of its detractors, a sport that the majority of American’s would identify with (as sports fans as they have historically demonstrated towards football, basketball and baseball). The development of both the men’s and women’s professional games will be considered in Chapter Two and with it the viability of soccer as a potential career for students with the prerequisite experience.

There is clearly an abundance of theories which attempt to explain or hypothesise the impact (real or perceived) of soccer in America. The interactionist research framework adopted for this study acknowledges the myriad of theories which contribute to an understanding of the American Dream. Therefore, in order to analyse student motives for undertaking a soccer scholarship, this study employed an interpretive research paradigm; details of the research design are provided in Chapter Three. The primary focus of the paradigm is to understand the human experience at a holistic level and facilitate an accurate interpretation of the complexities embedded in those subjective experiences. The research question central to this study is ‘what are the motives of American university students for undertaking a soccer scholarship?’ The thesis will therefore consider the macro dynamics of the student decision-making process from the context of how such decisions

reflect the broader conceptual issues of the American Dream. As a result, any conclusions will inevitably challenge notions of how soccer is perceived within contemporary society.

In order to investigate the reasons why individuals undertake a soccer scholarship, a sample of students from two separate universities were studied; a detailed discussion of the subjects involved in the study is presented in Chapter Three, however an overview of the study is provided below in order to facilitate an appreciation of the research context.

The study is positioned within what is known as 'Division One' or the elite level of university athletic competition in the U.S, which is overseen at the national level by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Founded in 1906, the NCAA has 1027 member institutions which are categorized into three divisions of athletic competition. The highest level of athletic competition is Division One in which there are currently 326 participating universities. Division Two has 282 and Division Three has 419 competing universities (Coakley, 2007). Student-athletes within Division One and Two are offered athletic scholarships in 23 different sports; no athletic scholarships are available to those students in Division Three. According to the most recent figures this equates to over 380,000 students receiving athletic 'grant in aid' to compete in sports which have the 'dual objective' of 'promoting both the university and the general community' (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2007a, p. 351). Division One is vastly different from the lower leagues of Division Two or Three. The university commitment to winning at the Division One level is considerable and predicated upon income generation (Eitzen, 2000; Sack, 1987). Previous research has clearly

identified that there is a common perception amongst athletes that taking part in elite university competition acts as a springboard to a professional career and or upward financial mobility (Sack, 1987; Sirin, 2005; Tucker, 2004). The implication of examining the experiences of soccer scholarship students from a Division One context is that they represent the elite pool of university athletic ability in the U.S. By analysing their decision making strategy the study will inevitably challenge previous notions of soccer and American exceptionalism. The core premise of such criticism is that soccer has failed to gain a foothold in the American psyche and thus failed to be incorporated within the wider concepts of the Dream and perceptions of how upward mobility is facilitated.

Two separate universities were selected for the study. The names of the universities and the players and staff interviewed within the study have been changed in order to ensure their anonymity. This ethical obligation was deemed necessary in order to encourage participants to talk openly and frankly. For clarification, the universities selected are henceforth referred to as West University and East University. A detailed summary of the criteria used for selection of the two sample universities can be found in Chapter Three. However, both were selected due to their declared values and commitment towards athletic competition. In particular, both universities had achieved comparable state, regional and national success within their respective soccer programmes. Finally, both institutions offered similar 'grant in aid' scholarship packages to their students averaging at approximately \$8,000 per recipient. This figure represents the average amount that all scholarship recipients are believed to receive nationally within soccer (NCAA, May, 2008).

The sample group of 154 students represented the entire soccer scholarship cohort for both of the Division One universities. The subjects were selected on the basis that they represented a range of student experience within the context of the investigation. A combination of primary and secondary data collection methodological techniques were employed within the study in order to illuminate the main theme of participants' motives for undertaking a scholarship. In total 160 students (80 from each university) received a questionnaire which contained a selection of 'closed' questions (Appendix 1). The aim of the questionnaire was to provide biographical detail regarding the student and the variety of factors which may have potentially impacted upon their decision making. The questions were designed to obtain quantitative data and were likely to require simple responses which were presented within a range of options (Gratton and Jones, 2003). In addition to the questionnaire, a sample of students and coaches and administrators from each university were then interviewed in order to establish their perspective regarding students' motives for undertaking a scholarship at their university. The aim of the interviews was to provide qualitative data which would provide insight to the complex decision making process at work in electing to undertake a scholarship. The importance of using the subjects' own words to illuminate decision making is key to providing an interpretive analysis. Details of the research design of this study are provided in Chapter Three.

The way in which sports have been perceived as a path to mobility has been recognized by numerous authors. What is not known is whether or not scholarship students have come to value soccer as a valid occupational path to pursue (Oliver, 1980). Chapter Four presents the study results which are

categorised into the themes of family, social class, social mobility and career development. The themes of the study were established via a combination of an extensive literature review of the context in the U.S. and a pilot study. To facilitate 'thick' and 'rich' descriptions of their world an interpretive approach was adopted to analyse the data produced. This approach examines meanings that have been socially constructed and consequently accepts that individual values and views may differ. The interpretive paradigm adopted aims to elicit interviewees' views of their world and the events they have experienced. Analysis of the responses was contextualised using the 'Support/Challenge Questionnaire' (SCQ) devised by Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000). Originally formulated by Csikszentmihalyi et al (1993) to study talented teenagers, the thirty-two item questionnaire is employed in this research to evaluate the player's perception of their family dynamics.

The results of the study in Chapter Four reveal how the students interpreted the meanings, identities and the culture of the American class system. Essentially, how they define the reality of their own lives. This chapter challenges the hypothesis that the family is a functional and unproblematic agent in socializing children to the cultural values of the American Dream. An alternative explanation proposed in this study is that the process of transmission is actually a two-way phenomenon in which children socialized their parents and vice versa.

The discussion that follows in Chapter Five links in to a critical theoretical placement of the themes from a micro and macro perspective. The chapter will provide an interpretive discussion of the results, in doing so it will address the central research question of what are the motives of students for



undertaking a soccer scholarship. The adoption of an interpretive framework within this chapter provides an explanation and understanding of student decision-making. The approach is primarily concerned with the way in which the social world is not just something to be confronted by individuals, but is continually reinvented by its participants. To facilitate an understanding of the players' point of view it was necessary to understand the subjects' definition of the situation and hang flesh upon the skeletons of the primary data generated. In the final analysis, interpretive sociology provides a framework for understanding what soccer means to the lives of the subjects.

Chapter Six provides the conclusions of the study detailing the cultural implications of inter-collegiate athletics and the social mobility of student athletes. The economic reality of funding a four year undergraduate degree in modern America is not lost on the students sampled in this study. Clear evidence is provided that success in higher education requires individual effort both on and off the field of play for the student-athletes. In closing, the study challenges the notion of American exceptionalism and with it presents arguments for a reconfiguration of the American Dream in contemporary U.S. society.

## **CHAPTER ONE - WHAT IS THE AMERICAN DREAM?**

The aim of this chapter and the one that follows is to provide a review of previous literature which serves to frame the research question and prepare the way for subsequent theoretical analyses. In order to achieve this it is first necessary to contextualise the origins of the term (American Dream) and how it subsequently entered into American cultural and social ideals.

The American Dream is something that is inculcated into every citizen of the United States as ideological principles. As children, individuals are socialized to accept as true that the prerequisites of success and upward mobility are hard work and education. Exemplars of this ideology abound in U.S. folklore and storytelling. The destitute immigrant who builds a financial empire and the boy from the ghetto who fights his way to fame and stardom all exemplify the potential to achieve success in American culture. Such concepts are encapsulated in the work of popular authors such as Horatio Alger in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and James Truslow Adams in the 20<sup>th</sup>. Each character within the 'rags to riches' stories has achieved by their own hard work and initiative, a level of financial upward mobility and personal security

which further fuels the notion of a 'meritocracy' (Abowitz, 2005; Adams, 1931). The delineation between America and other nations is reinforced through such tropes. The key emphasis from such authors is that America is a 'classless' society in which merit is understood to be the defining dynamic in dictating who gets what in American culture (Alba and Nee, 2003).

Many commentators on socialisation agree that the dominant cultural values are learned initially in the context of family relations (Smart, 2000). A conclusion often reached in studies of socialization has been that the family is the major vehicle for the transmission of the values of larger society (Rathunde, 2001; Sirin, 2005). Moreover, theoretical and conceptual work in the sociology of sport has attempted to place the family in a pivotal position in the study of societal values (Abowitz, 2005; Alba and Nee, 2003). Given the complexity of what defines the family in the context of these reports the thesis will investigate the degree to which families nurture the optimal environment for inculcating the ethos of the American Dream.

It has been well documented that considerable modifications have occurred within contemporary American family life (Popenoe, 1993; Sirin, 2005). Changes include the increased rate of cohabitation, single parents and the phenomenon of openly gay and lesbian households (Smart, 2000). The subsequent growth in new dynamic patterns of family practices are construed negatively rather than positively or neutrally (Morgan, 1995; Smart, 2000). How this impacts upon the career orientation of the students will be explored within the interviews and subsequent analysis.

A review of research indicates that families are constructed in a variety of ways, but despite their dynamic composition remain a highly influential

factor in establishing the merit of higher education (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000; Rathunde, 2001). The next section provides a summary of how parental challenge and support can influence their child's career aspirations.

According to research the family has potentially a key role in guiding the career orientation and success of its members (Csikszentmihayli and Schneider, 2000; Frank and McPhail, 2005; Jamieson, 2005; Rathunde, 2001). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has previously stated that:

there is ample evidence to suggest that how parents interact with a child will have a lasting effect on the kind of person that child grows up to be (p.88).

According to Csikszentmihayli and Schneider (2000), there are two concerns for parents when generating opportunities for their children: 'support' and 'challenge.' Challenge can be defined as high expectations and standards, as well as allowing the child autonomy (Wedemyer Moon, 2003). Support is defined as follows: 'the child feels that the family as a whole is interested in every member's welfare' (Scherer, 2002, p. 16). This support protects the child from feelings of anxiety, which can accompany children when they are attempting new tasks. Ideally, when a family displays both of these key ingredients, in relation to education, children will choose more challenging subjects, earn superior grades and attend more prestigious colleges (Wedemyer Moon, 2003). The clear implications of such research for this thesis are in analysing the impact that parents have upon the decision making

strategies of their children. In essence do they influence their child's decision to undertake a soccer scholarship? This notion will be explored within both the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews of Chapters Three and Four by adopting the 'Support/Challenge' Questionnaire framework devised by Csikszentmihayli and Schneider (2000). Details of which are provided in Chapter Three of the study.

In America, education has always been viewed as a mechanism of socio-economic improvement and is incorporated within the wider ideological concepts of equality of opportunity that higher education presents. This would appear to reinforce the belief that all students have equity of educational opportunity (Devine-Eller, 2005). Educational researchers have investigated the perceived correlation of educational achievements and success and consistently found that socio-economic status is a key influence upon educational attainment (Carbonaro, 2005). The process of defining social class in America as noted within the introduction is highly disputed and complex; however according to Cyrus (2000):

... class is a reality in the United States as are the related stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination that provide that basis for U.S. 'classism'. Because of classism the wealthy and the financially better off are privileged and assigned high status, while poor and working-class people and their cultures are stigmatized and disadvantaged simply because of their relative wealth (p. 315).

According to Emmison (2003) an Americans individual social status is habitually recognized by income and occupation; inevitably, such indices are commonly used to determine individual self-worth as well and that of others. The enduring belief that upward social mobility is the basic tenet of the American Dream however remains unquestionable.

Collective discourse advocates that Americans live in a 'meritocracy' (Troutman and Dufur, 2007; Weber, 1976), in which individual success is calculated in terms of one's achievement. This philosophy encapsulates the demands of an athletic scholarship where according to Gerdy (2006) the student is required to produce results both on and off the field; as such the essence of Division One athletics is 'pay for play' (p.60).

This may have in part been facilitated by the apparent increasing financial requirements associated with higher education and lead to the consideration of a soccer scholarship as a viable alternative for upward mobility. Thus this thesis intends to reject the idea that any single factor determines the individual. Weber (1961, 1976) regarded society as a complex set of social variables and interwoven relationships in which individuals can never completely explain society or predict its course. The proposition of this study is that the changing nature of university athletics and the financial implications of funding higher education are expected to affect a tendency toward unconventional routes of social mobility (Semyonov, 1981).

According to several key scholars the American Dream initially developed from what has become known as the 'Protestant Ethic', an ideology of individualism and personal achievement (Frey and Eitzen, 1991; Guttmann, 1994; Nixon, 1984; Weber, 1976). They argue that the principles

that underpin the ethic contain a set of values which tend to reinforce and promote behaviour that confers prestige and status upon self-discipline and hard work. Those individuals who develop such a behavioural profile will inevitably acquire the appropriate level of financial rewards (Tucker, 2004; Zimbaldist, 1999). Conversely, those who fail have only themselves to blame due to a lack of initiative or failure to make the obligatory sacrifices that deferred gratification requires. Contained within the prevailing classification of values is the implication that equality of opportunity is transparent and that interpersonal differences such as ethnicity and gender are neutral in determining achievement outcomes (Barnett and Belfield, 2006).

The above point is explored within the earlier work of Chenoweth (1974) and his discussion of the American Dream. In his book, *The American Dream of Success*, Chenoweth makes reference to 'hope' as being the key element of the concept. He defines 'hope' as a 'willingness to confront problems in order to improve the condition of life for both oneself and one's own contemporaries' (p. 120). Thus to dream is to hope and ultimately this is reflected in the level of success that any individual achieves. Success therefore becomes the gauge by which individuals measure their realization of the American Dream. Chenoweth maintains that 'the success ethic promotes elite interests under the guise of boasting that the average citizen can advance as far as he wishes' (p. 10). In addition, Chenoweth poses the question, 'Why do so many citizens fail to see the elitist orientation of success ideologies?' Within his research he clearly states that the Dream not only provides a template for elevated mobility, but facilitates an essential social control mechanism. Reinforcement of the mainstream cultural values and

norms are in part perpetuated by high profile athletes presented in the media. This pattern is then perpetuated from one generation to the next thus strengthening the veracity of the ideology. For persons who are unsuccessful, individual deficiencies rather than the structure are perceived as being responsible (Couldry and Markham, 2007). Accordingly, the apposite course of action for realising expectations of achievement becomes focused upon developing and enhancing personal agency rather than displaying dissent against perceived inequity. Moreover, even those adults who are unsuccessful evidently continue to believe in the meritocratic ethos at the core of the Dream (Smith, 1993). As a result even the disenfranchised appear obligated to help their children to attain access to its mechanisms. The self-perpetuating cycle of the Dream is thereby created regardless of whether or not individuals are currently recipients of upward mobility and live in accordance with its basic tenets (Giardina and McCarthy, 2005).

President Barack Obama has undoubtedly attempted to sustain the rhetoric of the American Dream in several of his key note speeches. In 2004 at the Democratic National Convention he marked a significant moment in the revival of the rhetoric of the American Dream when he articulated the values of *The Civil Rights Act* (1964) and idioms of compromise and the possibility of racial reconciliation intended to bring his audience into rapprochement (Frank and McPhail, 2005). The post-civil rights rhetoric articulated by Obama in his Presidential campaign clearly attempted to target the fundamental economic issues facing ethnic and racial minorities in contemporary society, a group he has referred to frequently as 'throw-away people.' The core value at the centre of Obama's acclaimed convention speech was and remains the



essential equality of all individuals. In his subsequent book entitled *The Audacity of Hope* published in 2007, Obama called for a different political philosophy embedded in the decency and faith of the American Dream, one which promotes inclusiveness:

we'll need to remind ourselves, despite all our differences, just how much we share: common hopes, common dreams, a bond that will not break (Obama, 2007, p. 157).

Eitzen and Sage (2003) have previously identified that contemporary America is a nation with a diverse population and consequently, a significant level of diversity of ideals held by its varied sub-groups. Within this context, it is perceived as being inevitable that individuals do not inevitably behave in accordance with all of the central tenets of the American Dream (Dyreson, 2001; Sowell, 1981). Both authors assert that the levels of success experienced by racial groups are attributable to the degree of acculturation within the conventional cultural values and norms. A variety of authors have acknowledged that a range of discriminatory practices have contributed to inhibiting the upward mobility of ethnic groups (Alba and Nee, 2003; Dyreson, 2001; Segrave, 2000; Smith, 1993). Clearly for many individuals in contemporary society America's fundamental egalitarian ideology of opportunity is either inaccurate or not accessible.

The political assurances heard within Presidential addresses often eulogise a society in which equal opportunity prevails and rewards are based on merit rather than inherited attributes (Baker and Carroll, 1981; Chenoweth,

1974). Such pronouncements have established and historically provided the impetus for contemporary American society to redress exclusionary practices (Gorn, 2004; Obama, 2007). The explanations offered for failing to succeed in America can be complex and interdependent on a myriad of factors which expand beyond one's personal behaviour. Nevertheless, advocates of sport believe that it facilitates a unique forum for observing the ideology of how the American Dream can become operationalized in real-life (Moor, 2007; Newman, 2007). In principle, sport reflects the same egalitarian values upon which America was founded. It is, according to its protagonists, an endeavour in which individuals participate to achieve a performance based objective outcome (Coakley, 2007). Typically, success is reflective of the level of initiative, skill and effort displayed. Although far from overt, it is inferred by both players and spectators alike that factors such as race, gender and socio-economic status are of little significance to the result.

Loy, McPherson, and Kenyon (1978) identify that the ideals characteristically associated with sport are 'not unlike the great success formula typified by Horatio Alger' (p.381). But just as in wider society, personal attributes and characteristics have been decisive in shaping such decisions as opportunities to take part and develop either as a player or coach. Consequently, the reality is that discipline, hard work and perseverance may only go so far in facilitating upward mobility (Dubois, 1980; Eitzen and Sage, 2003). Such realities are at odds with the philosophies of Horatio Alger and Adams whose storytelling encapsulated the heroic ideals of the American Dream and inspired innumerable millions of its citizens. Sport may therefore be a stronger, tangible and more visible representation of the American

Dream for many people as well as displaying the ambiguities inherent within it.

In the context of this study the meritocratic opportunities perceived within sport when combined with athletic scholarships offers possibilities for social mobility not found elsewhere in society. Therefore by investigating the use of soccer scholarships by university students the study provides insight as to the veracity and currency of the American Dream in contemporary society.

Since the start of the 1800s athletic scholarships and intercollegiate sports competition have been an essential element in perpetuating the supply of sporting narrative (Boorstin, 1962; Troutman and Dufur, 2007). However, it was not until the late 1800s that universities began to assume full control over the administration of athletic programmes specifically for enhanced institutional visibility. Prior to this period university athletics were operated by student-run associations in which the students themselves were responsible for travel arrangements and the general administration of teams (Gerdy, 2006). Athletics, according to Troutman and Dufur (2007) was simply an institutional afterthought, an activity to keep students amused but not critical to the educational mission of the university. It was the ever-constant search for resources, coupled with the rapidly growing public interest in athletics and the resultant capability to generate revenue that enticed university presidents and boards of education to formally incorporate athletics into the structure of their institutions (Coakey, 2007). In the absence of a nationally agreed higher education policy towards income generation, many of America's most prestigious institutions turned to intercollegiate athletic competition as a requirement of establishing a sound financial foundation (Calder, 1999). With the exception of the universities defined as 'Ivy League' almost all American

research institutions developed high profile, athletic programmes as a precondition for adequate institutional financial support (Heck and Takahashi, 2006; Troutman and Dufur, 2007). The general public's enthusiasm for sports has made intercollegiate athletics a forum of debate in which the social and moral issues of class, race and gender are highlighted (Boyle, 2004; Riess, 1999). As a result higher education in the United States has traditionally been viewed as a mirror in which to reflect upon American ideological claims (Baker and Carroll, 1981; Coakley, 2007). At its most basic level it bestows widespread adulation.

According to Riess (1994) all Americans regardless of whether they are a poet, politician, carpenter or cardiologist, share an enduring interest in athletic contests. The opportunity to invent, adapt, and create are regarded as fundamental to the American cultural ideals and are arguably an intrinsic part of the reason for the proliferation and popularity of sports in the United States (Oriard, 1993). Sport is where America most stridently argues to be a meritocracy; a society which rewards and appoints those who demonstrate talent and competence.

### **The Narrative of the American Dream**

A recurring theme of this thesis is that sport as an American institution often attempts to represent narratives of equal opportunity for personal mobility. Yet frequently, sport reveals and, in some cases, reinforces the divided social composition of U.S. society (Appleton, 2002; Baker and Carroll,

1981). Sport, despite the above contentions, manages to perpetuate the narrative of a meritocratic ideology whilst simultaneously suppressing its possible fulfilment. Specifically, the overt spectator culture that developed around sport and the tendency to see it in terms of a story. According to Bale:

... whether at local, regional or national level, sport is probably the principal means of collective identification in modern life. It provides one of the few occasions when large, complex, impersonal and functionally bonded units can unite as a whole (in Cronin, 1999, p. 51).

The cultural activities of the American sports scene, to be precise the gathering at sports stadia, reading or listening to media has helped to cultivate a community of spectatorship (Chenoweth, 1974). Such environments clearly facilitate the ethos of the American Dream and perpetuate the belief that certain people earn status and even wealth through their sporting ability (Davis and Duncan, 2006; Newman, 2007).

The second factor is the tendency to perceive sports in terms of the stories they present (Sparkes, 2004). The record of sporting activity in America is interdisciplinary and range from popular culture periodicals to personal accounts. The common denominator within the myriad of genres is the focus on narrative (Appleton, 2002, Oriard, 1993). Such themes are replicated within this thesis, namely, ambition, challenge, support, success and failure. Each aspect of which has a beginning, middle and end to the story.

According to White (1987), this is an inevitable process. He observes that when looking back on past occurrences:

The events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an ordering of meaning, that they do not possess as a mere sequence (p.54).

In other words, the act of narrativization enforces an artificial structure upon events that operate within an overarching paradigm of belief (Davis and Duncan, 2006). Because the U.S. nation continues to have a propensity for seeing sports in terms of stories, spectatorship becomes a story telling activity in itself (Chenoweth, 1974; Cornbleth, 2002). Spectators thus endow sport not with any sense of reality, but in mythology (Huntington, 2004; Moor, 2007).

Spectator sports according to Newman (2007) create a 'fantasy' in which each competitor possesses similar opportunities and similar environmental advantages; a metaphorical level playing field. Spectator culture thus often presumes that success in athletics is due to an individual's virtuous quality (Cheska, 1979).

Hard work and physical skill appear to be prerequisites of those pursuing the Dream, the ability to articulate how one has overcome the environment or unfair circumstance in order to progress appear to be the foundations of iconic celebrity status (Couldry and Markham, 2007; Weiss, 1996; Stempel, 2005). A contemporary example of such a phenomenon could be argued to be the NBA former player Dennis Rodman. The success

achieved by Rodman has led many observers to argue that he has defied normative convention and redefined representations of gender, race and desire within the American cultural imagination (Coakley, 2007).

The more the stories are retold, the stronger and more credible the illusion becomes. The cultural impact of such notions is evaluated via the lived experience of the students within this research. Myths evidently have power and resonate within the subjects and do not necessarily lend themselves to an empirical paradigm. Generally speaking, the perception of sport as a narrative of social-mobility finds its resonance not in the athletes themselves, but in the ways that others reinforce said narratives (Arbena, 2000; Burgos, 2005). The American public clearly embrace and eulogise those athletes who have achieved success on a national stage. However, state wide success is not a prerequisite for the promotion of career/social mobility of scholarship athletes. This point is insightfully made by H. G. Bissinger in *Friday Night Lights* (1991). The book explores the culture of high school football and its dominant impact upon a small community from a variety of perspectives including: parents, teachers, coaches and students.

Athletics lasts for such a short period of time. It ends for people. But while it lasts, it creates this make believe world where normal rules don't apply. We build this false sense atmosphere. When it's over and the harsh reality sets in, that's the real joke we play on people ... Everybody wants to experience that superlative moment and being an athlete can give you that. It's Camelot for them. But there's even life after it (Bissinger, 1991, p. xiv).

The observations of Bissinger reinforce earlier the work of Durkheim, Marx and Bourdieu that involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for the individual and the community. As such the 'social capital' that results for the students taking part in athletics upward mobility via the creation of networks facilitates mutual benefit for both the athlete and the community. In contrast to the UK, the local community, university and its alumni hold their athletes in high esteem and as a result social capital is salient and significant.

### **Soccer and Mainstream American Culture**

Soccer in the United States has been regarded as an afterthought amongst most traditional sports fans (Alba and Nee, 2003; Satterlee, 2001). In terms of viewership and revenue, it is well behind the hegemonic 'Big Three' of American sporting culture: football, basketball and baseball (Brown, 2007; Collins, 2006). Moreover, in cultural terms, soccer is presented by contemporary research as lagging behind the historically dominant sports. Markovits and Hellerman (2001, 2003b) explore the concept of a nation's sporting culture, observing that a sporting culture revolves around what people follow as spectators rather than the sports they actively engage in as athletes. Thus, soccer, according to its detractors has and will continue to fail to gain a foothold in the sporting culture of America (Szymanski and Zimbalist, 2005). It is not a sport that its critics would argue people traditionally followed



or identified with as fans as they have traditionally connected with basketball, baseball and football (Mandelbaum, 2004). Sceptics of soccer argue that this is illustrated in terms of television ratings. The 2007 Major League Soccer (MLS) Cup Final match obtained a television audience rating of 2.6% of the nation's television households, while the 2007 baseball 'World Series' generated 13.9%, the 2007 basketball 'NBA Finals' series totalled 6.5%, and the football 'Super Bowl' obtained a 41.3% rating (Southall and Nagel, 2003).

However, these statistics fail to acknowledge what may well be a dramatic shift in terms of the acceptance of soccer within mainstream U.S. culture, particularly amongst girls and young women. The U.S. Youth Soccer Association claims that there are over 3.2 million registered players with the world's largest coaching and volunteer network of 800,000 people in 2004 ([www.usyouthsoccer.org](http://www.usyouthsoccer.org)). Even more telling, the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association of America (SGMA) claims that as of 2002, 1.3 million more children played soccer than 'Little League Baseball' (Foer, 2004) provoking Collins to state that 'American youth are choosing soccer over the national pastime' (2006, p. 353). The significant involvement of women challenges the theory of American reluctance toward embracing soccer and in doing so questions notions of American exceptionalism (Henry and Comeaux, 1999). Women's involvement in soccer is statistically impressive; it has been estimated that over half of the 18 million soccer players in America are female (FIFA Big Count, 2007). The enthusiasm with which women have embraced the sport is central to the divergent opinions about whether soccer is a mainstream sport in contemporary U.S. society. Analysis of American exceptionalism theorists such as Markovits (1998) have previously stated that

soccer has been appropriated by the middle-class which has ultimately led to its rejection by a nativistic culture. In agreement, Andrews (1999) has argued that the synergy between soccer, females and the middle-class will leave it as perennially marginalised. This thesis aims to challenge the notion of soccer being perceived solely as a locus of gender equity by interviewing students as to their motives for undertaking a soccer scholarship.

The importance of a soccer scholarship to this thesis is in measuring the impact that it has upon student-decision making at university. A review of the potential 'direct' and 'indirect' benefits of undertaking a soccer scholarship are detailed in Chapter Two of the study. However, it is important to identify at this juncture that according to data revealed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association in 2008 the expectations of athletes and their parents can differ significantly from the financial realities of college athletic participation. Excluding the prestigious sports of the 'Big Three', the average N.C.A.A. athletic scholarship amounts to \$8,707 (Pennington, 2008). This figure becomes particularly of concern for parents and prospective athletes when tuition and accommodation expenses which on average cost between \$20,000 and \$50,000 a year are taken into account (ibid, 2008). However, despite the financial limitations of a soccer scholarship the sport has made significant inroads within American culture.

In the wider context of popular culture, soccer in the United States has gradually gained popularity in terms of its television ratings since the Men's 1994 FIFA World Cup was hosted in America (Collins, 2006). This observation is validated by statistics such as the 2006 FIFA World Cup final that attracted more domestic television viewers than baseball's 2005 World

Series registered on any single night. In addition, the MLS is now the 12th most attended top-flight football league in the world (BBC Sport, 2007). Attendance, while comparing positively to mid-level European leagues with an average 2007 attendance of 16,200 is encouraging when compared to the more established American professional league competitions. In 2007, MLB averaged 27,858 fans per game, the NBA averaged 16,778 fans per game, and the NFL averaged 66,726 fans per game (Southall and Nagel, 2003). Combined with the inequity in television ratings, (a media in which the majority of overall expenditure is reserved for the higher revenue sport), the hierarchy of the American sports culture still perceives soccer to be below the 'Big Three' (ibid, 2007). Despite the level of sports coverage and options available for participants and spectators alike, MLS in 2008 appears to have successfully created a niche for itself. As a consequence of soccer arguably having established itself on the American psyche in a variety of contexts it arguably now presents itself as a viable alternative avenue of social mobility. The significant problem that soccer faces in this context is the lack of a historical narrative with which to bind itself to the concept of the American Dream. The level of cultural acceptance of soccer by the U.S. and the level to which it has been incorporated into the ideology contained within 'the Dream' is presented within the results of Chapter Four.

Over the last century however, a number of changes have altered the perceptions of soccer within the United States (Brown, 2007). Whilst a comprehensive undertaking of these changes would be a Sisyphean task, a more narrow focus upon two particular alterations; one to the sport of soccer

and one to the composition of the United States will serve to illustrate the dynamics at play within contemporary U.S. society.

Soccer has changed dramatically over the course of the last 150 years. No longer simply a British export, soccer has truly become 'the world's game.' A cursory review of the number of nations who are members of FIFA will show that it rivals the list of the United Nations members. One need only look at the current rankings to note the diversity found in the sport. Within the top 20 teams in the world the only continent not represented is Asia (Fifa.com, 2006). At the time of writing in February 2009, the United States men's team was ranked 31<sup>st</sup> and the women's in first place. However, the men's national team was found in the top ten for much of 2006-08. Clearly, soccer cannot be understood as simply a British export, or a European enclave within world sport. It *is* the world's sport. Its origins as a British invention appear to be now largely unimportant.

Conversely, the composition of the United States has also changed dramatically over the last 150 years. Immigration, which reached a low in the 1930s, has now climbed back to levels not seen since the first decade of the twentieth century (Brown, 2007).

## Chapter Summary

The American Dream is founded upon the ideological belief that ‘you can be anything you want to be, regardless of your current class position.’ This belief is contained within the dominant prevailing notion that the U.S. is a meritocracy where power and success are associated with determination and intelligence and failure with poor decision making and laziness. The traditional vehicle for many aspiring sports stars has been via the collegiate ranks and an athletic scholarship. The intrinsic qualities of sport are promoted by society and reinforced by universities to complement and underpin the ideology of the Dream. The themes of character building, physical and mental fitness are imagined to be integral to both U.S. sport and being a patriot, both of which are reflected in the popularity and growth of university sporting competition. These characteristics arguably serve to reinforce a societal commitment to the ideology regardless of whether it is accurate or not. Further analysis of the American Dream within the specific context of this research has revealed that the family plays a crucial role in perpetuating the ideology of the Dream. The level of parental support being categorized according to the level of support or challenge offered to family members.

The foundations for soccer in the U.S. to enter the psyche of the American people have been clearly demonstrated by its high levels of participation at the youth level for both males and females. The popularity of soccer at ‘grass roots’ is felt by several authors to be a key component in helping the game become accepted into the lexicon of American sporting culture and with it the ideology of its values.

In summary, the review of literature has identified the key themes for this research, those of family (Frank and McPhail, 2005; Jamieson, 2005), social class (Eitzen and Sage, 2003; Heck and Takahashi, 2006), social mobility (Abowitz, 2005; Bettie, 2003) and career development (Bourke, 2003; Dubois, 1980). The above themes are tested within the pilot study and subsequently integrated within the questionnaire and interviews conducted with the players, details of which are contained within Chapter Three. These themes will form the basis of subsequent analysis for the player interviews.

The next chapter however aims to provide a more focused discussion of the role and impact of soccer in contemporary American society.

## **CHAPTER TWO – SOCCER AND THE U.S.A**

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of how soccer has evolved from being a recreational activity in which both males and females could play alongside each other in the same team activity (coeducational) to its current position as a franchised professional enterprise.

In order to position the sport in terms of its popularity in America from both a participant and spectator context it is necessary to provide a synopsis of where enthusiasm for the game was first established in the American consciousness. The literature will present the argument for a soccer scholarship as a potential avenue for career advancement, thus demonstrating a reconfiguration or adaptation of the American Dream in which soccer has become an accepted and legitimised avenue with which to pursue the Dream of upward mobility.

Soccer is commonly accepted to be the most popular sport played in the world in relation to the number of people of all ages who play, watch, and coach the game (Dunning, 1999; Kuper, 2006). The popularity of the sport

from a global perspective is reflected within America, particularly amongst the youth of the nation. A survey of participation rates conducted in 2004 by the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association (SGMA) of America identified that 1.3 million more children played soccer than 'Little League Baseball' (Collins, 2006, p. 354). In addition, the SGMA report notes that in 2004 over 19 million Americans were playing soccer, a 23.8 % increase from 1987 (SGMA, p.4). Of the approximate 19 million Americans who participate in soccer, 8,775,000 are aged from 6–11yrs old; 197,000 from 12–17yrs old; 1,640,000 from 18–24 yrs old; 911,000 from 25–34 yrs old and 1,519,000 aged 35yrs old and above (ibid). Soccer has, according to a plethora of statistics, now emerged as the second largest participation team sport in the U.S. after basketball, provoking SGMA to declare that soccer has become '... an integral part of America's sports landscape' (ibid, p.5). Such views clearly represent a challenge to those who argue that soccer has and will continue to fail to be integrated within the lexicon of U.S. culture. The following is a discussion of the issues related to notions of soccer and 'American exceptionalism.'

### **'American Exceptionalism' and 'Sports Space'**

In order to facilitate a detailed consideration of the term 'American exceptionalism,' it first necessary to conceptualise the origins of the phrase. The themes of insularity and exceptionalism have for over a century been positioned at the core of previous explanations regarding the development of America (Dyreson, 2005) and relate to the view that America's history and its



structure of government has given the nation a unique role to play in the world (Foer, 2004). Dyreson (2005) has persuasively argued that social historians and in particular, Turner's (1920) landmark thesis, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, have had a greater impact on views regarding American identity than any other written on the subject. In constructing his argument, Turner has persuasively argued that American isolationism and insularity from European culture has facilitated a unique environment for growth to take place (Dyreson, 2005). The unique 'frontier' environment posited by Turner and others arguably defined a society that was attempting to differentiate itself from its colonial links with Europe and much of the rest of the world (Dyreson, 2005). This theme is continued by Markovits and Hellerman (2001) in their much heralded book entitled *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism*. According to Markovits and Hellerman, one can look back upon America's unique history and observe how it has affected the growth of soccer. The isolationism of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries combined with a pervading sense of detachment from all things British were crucial to Americans embracing a different style of football than the rest of the world.

Significantly, the decision to 'Americanize' versions of British games, such as 'rounders' and cricket into baseball occurred at a time when the commodification of sports was beginning to occur in the mid 1800s (Foer, 2004; Gorn, 2004). By this it is meant that sports were transformed from leisure activities for the upper classes to games which were played, attended, and embedded into the culture of the middle and lower classes (Markovits and Hellerman, 2001). It is during this time period that baseball, football, and

eventually basketball emerged as 'traditional' American sports, while soccer was consigned to the lowly status of a game for foreigners. Markovits and Hellerman (2003b) compare the weakness of soccer in the United States to another example of American exceptionalism:

the absence of a European-style socialism or social democracy as a systemically dominant political force in American politics throughout much of the twentieth century (p. 14).

In speculating why this may have occurred, political sociologists have referred to America's unique past, such as the lack of a feudal order, the abundance of cheap land, a high degree of geographic mobility, an emphasis on individualism and the overall bourgeois nature of American politics and society. While this comparison is interesting to keep in mind, the implication is that there were historical reasons for soccer's obscurity in America.

The theory of 'sports space' presented latterly by Markovits and Hellerman (2001, 2003b) and previously by Mason (1986) and Sugden (1994) reveals how difficult it would be for soccer to enter into America's sports cultural consciousness. According to this perspective each nation has a 'sports space' in which only a limited number of sports can achieve prominence. Which sports occupy a sports space is determined by a combination of timing, the ability of the sport to modernize, and how this modernization coordinated with the particular society's overall modernization. The most important time period for a sport to enter a country's sports space was during the time period between 1870 and 1930, the decades when, according to Markovits and Hellerman, both industrial proliferation and

modern mass societies were established. Once sports are established within a nation's sports space it becomes increasingly more difficult for them to be displaced by new sports. As baseball was the prominent sport that entered into the American sports space in the time period between 1870 and 1930, and football, basketball and hockey had each successively emerged afterwards, the American sports space was therefore already rather crowded before the 1970s when the first organised professional structure, North American Soccer League (NASL) entered into the sporting landscape.

Advocates of the 'exceptionalist' thesis argue that despite the impact of globalization upon U.S. culture much of the American way of life is categorized by discrete elements that differentiate it from the norms that are established elsewhere (Collins, 2006). According to protagonists of the theory the expected impact of globalization has yet to erase the atypical differences that characterize America as exceptional. It is this distinction that defines the American 'sports space' (Collins, 2006; Tomlinson et al., 2006). This view is contextualised by Collins (2006) as, 'America may be in the World, but the World is not in America' (p. 358). Exceptionalists would argue that the transmission of global culture may originate from the U.S., but seldom has it been receptive to absorbing the cultural practices of others (Brown, 2007; Collins, 2006).

However, the weakness of this belief lies in the failure to appreciate that each nation is inclined to view itself as unique and attempt to differentiate itself from others. The United States regards itself as exceptional by virtue of the universality of their values (Kagan, 2003; Nye, 2007). The foremost component of its exceptionalism according to Kagan has been its

geographically privileged position: the distance from Europe and Asia allows them to feel secure and uninvolved; whilst at the same time strategically placed should they wish to expand. Secondly, its legislative institutions, which according to Kagan, reflect the highest level of public participation of any world democracy. Finally, American principles have evolved from distaste of European colonialism and into guidelines for behaviour which are enshrined in the Constitution. This according to Eitzen and Sage (2003) serves today as the glue that amalgamates all the ingredients of the melting pot and differentiates America from the rest of the world. Sport within this ideological framework has been previously argued to be used as a vehicle to promote, reinforce and reflect said values, in essence the American Dream (Riess, 1999). The promotion of the 'Big Three' sports within the lexicon of U.S. culture intended to reinforce two aspects of the political aims of exceptionalism: the need to defend and to project what made America in their eyes unique: its values and institutions.

A contemporary version of 'new exceptionalism' that Markovits amongst others refer to, can be observed within Presidential epithets. When George W. Bush Jnr became President in 2001 his administration adopted the political philosophy that could be defined as a 'relativistic' approach (Nye, 2007). By focusing on those conflicts that could significantly impact upon important global or regional balances of power the Republican Party was attempting to redefine American politics as inclusionary rather than exceptionalist. However, self-evidently this is not what transpired. Significantly following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, Republican politics embodied suspiciousness and distrust of others. This approach led social commentator

Michalel Ignatieff to observe that 'exceptionalism meant exemptionism' (Ignatieff, 2005, p. 229). Moreover, theoretical perspectives regarding any philosophical isolationist beliefs changed after September 11<sup>th</sup> (Hartmann, 2007). The tragic events of that day have shed considerable doubt over the notion of the United States' unchallenged multidimensional dominance of world affairs, raising question marks over whether the twenty-first century will be (at least) as American as the previous one, let alone more American (Ignatieff, 2005; Nye, 2007). This trend clearly challenges the notion of an American exceptionalism as defined by Markovits and Hellerman. Such sentiments are best encapsulated within Obama's Presidential acceptance speech in which he stated, 'the world is changing and America must change with it.'

One particular dimension of U.S. culture worth considering within the context of this discussion is the ideological and cultural appeal of America. This appeal is defined as its 'soft power' within Nye's (2007) typology of power, and is summarized as its 'ability to get desired outcomes through attraction' (p. 41). 'Hard power' relies on 'economic carrots or the ability to coax or coerce' (p. 42). The impact of globalisation by Americans and upon American culture may be revealed by the changes in the appeal and power of soccer to influence U.S. society. Using Nye's typology, soccer is an example of how its growth is based upon its intrinsic attraction rather than any attempt to coerce the American public. The dynamics of the game of soccer and its fluidity in contrast to football and basketball may be the intrinsic qualities that have led to its growing popularity. Given the receptiveness of the American public

towards a 'foreign' sport, soccer clearly challenges the views of exceptionalists that America is immune to global trends.

A critical analysis of the foundations of American exceptionalism can be traced to before the events of September 11, 2001. Prior to that day, exceptionalism was a doctrine defined by the defence and promotion of its own self-interest. Following September 11, it found its cause; the war on global terrorism and on those states that promoted it. This according to many socio-political observers served to justify and represent the rationale of the Bush presidency (Ignatieff, 2005).

In summary, according to Nye (2007) the Bush political philosophy amounted to a policy of global domination, inspired by the assumption that America's norms and cultural values are universally accepted and acclaimed. Those who reject such principles are ideologically opposed to America and are legitimate targets of distrust and suspiciousness. The design may be according to its critics 'grandiose', but there is something jingoistic and naive about the promotion of America as an example of grand exceptionalism. Immediately following the events of 9/11 professional sport in America has provided a structure for people to regularize and resume their normal lifestyles. However, the long-term impact of the events for sport and specifically soccer are in Collin's (2006) view too early to anticipate. According to Collins Americans are struggling to define their level of engagement with the global community and with it whether there will be a reaction to sports which have been defined as 'foreign.' However, the opportunity for soccer lies in the potential for the MLS to further promote its declared goal to reflect

inclusiveness and diversity and address some of the racial and class stereotypes that are inherent within baseball, basketball and football.

I believe that Markovits and Hellerman's theory and its application to soccer in particular are challenged by two issues. One is the world itself and the other is the U.S. public. Maier (2000) has previously observed that empires have always experienced difficulties with those excluded from its perceived benefits. This thesis demonstrates that the increasing and consistent growth of soccer in the U.S.A (for both players and spectators) has undermined historical and contemporary perceptions of what defines American sport. Evidently soccer participation, attendance and commercial opportunities in America have significantly increased which fundamentally challenge previous views of a limited 'space'.

The rationalization of the thesis presented by Markovits and fellow protagonist Sugden (1994) is founded on an implicit and therefore possibly flawed assumption regarding the extent of available 'space' within societies (Waddington and Roderick, 1996). A superficial analysis of the concept may appear on the surface attractive, but as soon as one begins to examine this implicit hypothesis more closely, its inadequacies become visible.

The complications raised by employing inflexible concepts in this implicit way may be illustrated by reference to Sugden's work (Waddington and Roderick, 1996). In analysing the concepts of 'sport space' and of 'urban industrial recreational space,' Sugden does so without differentiation and explanation. As Waddington and Roderick (1996) highlight, this creates some conceptual confusion as to whether the models refer to the same social processes, or whether the 'space' available for recreation is greater than that

available for sport? If one was to disregard the theoretical concerns and ambiguities related to the notion of a space or 'gap' for sport, there is clearly a gap of the same dimension in all contemporary societies (Waddington and Roderick, 1996). The quantity of leisure time and the level of attachment which people attribute to sport are therefore not fixed but dynamic and fluctuate according to a complex array of variables (Coakley, 2007). Thus according to Waddington and Roderick (1996) the fact that a sport may be well recognized in any specific society does not necessarily exclude the successful integration of other sports. This is evidently the scenario in America, where professional football, baseball, basketball and ice hockey are all popular spectator sports. The explanations of Markovits, Hellerman, Mason and Sugden are therefore not wholly appropriate frameworks within which to analyse the development of soccer in the U.S. as they fail to take into account the 'yuppification process' as a direct result of globalisation and its appeal to a receptive egalitarian, suburban, middle-class market.

This research will therefore deconstruct previous arguments that soccer in America represents a distinct unique and exceptional identity in global terms, either in perceived cultural and or intellectual terms (Collins, 2006). The reality posited in this work is that the U.S.A in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is evolving beyond its perceived inability to develop an affinity for the game of soccer. The purpose of integrating research within the wider context of American collegiate sport is to provide a background within which the primary data can be contextualised.

Arguably, the greatest driver of the increase in American soccer participation, as mentioned in Chapter One, is the development of women



taking part in soccer. Research conducted by the American Sports Data organisation identifies that the number of 'frequent' female players has increased from only 28% in 1987 to 55% in 2004 (in Collins, 2006, p.7). At the college level, soccer is the most popular sport for women on NCAA teams (Martins, 2005 in Collins, 2006). Such figures are surprising given the demise of the women's professional soccer league known previously as the 'Women's United Soccer Association' (WUSA) in September 2003 (Ann-Hall, 2003). The popularity of the game has evidently not been adversely affected despite the absence of a professional women's league. The media's role as an agent of socialisation in the creation and promotion of role models cannot be underestimated (Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983; Duncan and Messner, 1998), despite such observations the game has increased in attraction. Within the context of contemporary intercollegiate sport the student-athlete has become transformed into a nationally recognised figure with television coverage on both national and state run cable operators.

The number of participants, according to the most recent research conducted by the Sports Goods Manufacturing Association (SGMA) and American Sports Data (2008), reveals that participation is approximately around 18-19 million, of which females account for 40% of all soccer players and 47% of all high school players. Whilst it may appear that the sport has always enjoyed a high level of popularity, in reality it has only been relatively recently that broad interest and participation in the game has been demonstrated. The foundation of the development of soccer in the U.S.A arguably has its roots within the collegiate structure.

## **The Early Beginnings: Intercollegiate Soccer**

Intercollegiate sport and subsequently organised soccer for both men and women developed from an ethos of participation within physical education programmes of the U.S. in the late 1800s. However, it took until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century for social approval of female participation in organised athletics to take place and the focus to shift to an acceptance of competition and the formation of club teams (Ladda, 2000). The catalyst for this change was the introduction of Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972.

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance (in Lopiano, 2006, p. 127).

As a result of the above legislation, male dominated education programmes from business, medical and law schools to intercollegiate athletics were required to treat women as equals to men.

In stark contrast, the first intercollegiate men's soccer game (based upon a hybrid of rules adopted from the London Football Association) was held on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1869, between Princeton University and Rutgers University (Leslie, 1992). Despite the early appearance of a version of men's intercollegiate soccer, the game was quickly eclipsed by grid iron football as it is recognised in contemporary US society. The demanding physical and

combative format of grid iron football was a key element in its appeal to nineteenth century Americans according to Waddington and Roderick (1996). The game they believed provided a higher level of congruence with the prevailing and dominant values regarding masculinity in American society. Reflective and responsive to wider cultural trends, American colleges then reacted by helping to codify the game and reinforced concepts of acceptable masculinity. As a result the game incorporated levels of violence in sport which were not always acceptable within the wider society (Guttman, 1994).

The swift rise and dominance of football for men left the game of soccer almost exclusively to women, for whom it was considered a much safer sport (Ladda, 2000). The continuing popularity of soccer for both males and females in contemporary America society however clearly demonstrates a development from grass roots participation into the adult ranks. According to the national governing body for intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. (National Collegiate Athletics Association) women's outdoor track and field had more female student-athletes in the NCAA during the 1990s than any other women's sport (Zimbalist, 1999). But since the 1999-2000 academic year, women's soccer has replaced track and field as the sport with the most female student-athletes with an approximate increase of 200% in the number of female players since 1990-91 (United States General Accounting Office, 2001).

As regards male participation in sport; since 1981-82, American football has statistically demonstrated the highest number of participants in any men's activity; in 2006-07 that trend continued with football having over twice as many participants as baseball (NCAA, 2008). The next highest

participation levels for men are in the sports of track and field, soccer, basketball and cross-country respectively (ibid, 2008). This enthusiasm for taking part can be partly traced to the introduction of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 (Delpy, 1998; Henry and Comeaux, 1999). The federal legislation was targeted at removing the discriminatory practice of institutions allocating lower funding for women's athletic programmes. The legislation resulted in a significant influx of young women into competitive collegiate athletics (Frey and Eitzen, 1991). Given the groundswell of participant enthusiasm for the game, it is important to provide an overview of how this has translated into momentum for the creation of a national professional competitive structure for both genders. The next section provides a summary of the indicators of interest and commercialisation over the past 30 years.

### **Overview of United States Professional Soccer**

The catalyst to the establishment of both a male and female professional league can be arguably traced to their respective achievements on the international stage (see table 1). In 2008 on the twelfth anniversary since the establishment of Major League Soccer in 1996, there are wide ranges of statistics that support the assertion that soccer has made significant in-roads towards establishing itself as part of the national sports landscape (Collins, 2006). Historically, the men's national team although having never won the World Cup, did compete in the tournaments of 1930 (reaching the

semi-final), 1934, and 1950 (defeating England 1-0). However between 1950 and 1986, the USA failed to qualify for the World Cup finals.

The impetus to the establishment of Major League Soccer can be traced to two significant events. Firstly, the U.S. Men's soccer team, unexpectedly in the view of many observers, qualified for the 1990 FIFA World Cup. Despite limited previous World Cup success, many proponents of the game felt this event established the United States as a viable participant on the world soccer stage (Collins, 2006). Not only did the U.S. team advance beyond 'round robin play' (including a 1-0 loss to eventual champion Brazil), but average-game attendance was 69,000 (ibid). More significantly, the tournament recorded a then record \$60 million profit (Foer, 2004) justifying the financial viability of the tournament upon American soil.

The second significant development in the creation of a professional league structure can be traced to FIFA's decision to hold the 1994 Men's World Cup in the United States. The decision was made in preference to bids from Morocco and Brazil and led to surprise due to the common observation that America had a relative lack of soccer fans (Soccer Times, 2005). FIFA clearly intended that by staging the event, it would lead to America's growth of interest in the sport (one condition FIFA imposed was the creation of a professional soccer league, as Major League Soccer started play in 1996) (ibid, 2005). Despite these misgivings, in terms of attendance the event was a success from a variety of perspectives. The average attendance of nearly 69,000 broke a record that had stood since 1950. The total attendance for the entire tournament reached nearly 3.6 million and remains the highest recorded in World Cup history (FIFA.com, 2008).

By 1995 MLS executives had obtained FIFA sanctioning as a Premier domestic league, but lacked investors, players, or team locations (Delgado, 1997). Despite these issues, preparations went ahead for the league's 1996 inaugural draft and opening season. While the MLS' foundation as a men's professional sports league were being laid in 1994-95, several concurrent developments reflected the growth of U.S. women's soccer. The founding of the United States Interregional Soccer League (USISL) and the 1994 establishment of the W-League, a national amateur league that provided playing experience for many elite female players, was an important first step (Collins, 2006). The league played a brief exhibition schedule in 1994 and launched a full schedule in 1995 with 19 teams positioned nationwide (National Soccer Hall of Fame, 2005).

In 1995, the U.S. Women's National Team achieved third place at the Women's World Cup in Sweden, falling to eventual champions Norway in the semi-finals 1-0. Reflecting the growing prowess of the women's national team, at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics the U.S. women captured the gold medal, before a crowd of 76,000 (Delgado, 1997). However, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) did not broadcast the game, an indication that women's soccer at this point was still not part of the U.S. sport hierarchy (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2007). Subsequently, the U.S. Soccer governing body declared its intent to host the 1999 Women's World Cup and successfully won the bid. Despite a lack of extensive media coverage by the traditional media outlets, the tournament was a resounding success, with significantly larger crowds than anticipated, peaking with over 90,000 at the Rose Bowl in California (Brown, 2007). The U.S. final victory over China (5-4 on penalties)

coupled with unprecedented media coverage [most notably for Brandi Chastain’s celebratory shirt removal] subsequently led to extensive coverage of what was previously considered a minority sport in non-traditional media outlets such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. The media attention generated by the 1999 Women’s World Cup appeared to signal the emergence of women’s soccer as more than just a niche sport (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2007).

Table 1. Summary of men and women’s national team achievements

	FIFA World Cup	Olympics	FIFA Ranking
Women	1991 (inaugural World Cup) Champions 1995 (3rd place) 1999 (Champions) 2003 (3rd place) 2007 (3rd place)	1996 Gold 2000 Silver 2004 Gold 2008 Gold	Aug 2008 World Rank = 1 CONCACAF Rank = 1
Men	1930 (3rd place) 1950-1986 (failed to qualify for the World Cup) 1990 (exit at group stage) 1994 (hosted the World Cup) (exit 2nd round) 1998 (exit at group stage) 2002 (5th place) 2006 (exit at group stage)	1904 Silver	Aug 2008 World Rank = 31 CONCACAF = 1

Success on the international stage is viewed by the national governing body for soccer in the U.S., the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), as a key factor in further developing the domestic profile of both men and women's professional soccer (Langdon, 1999). The blueprint for developing world class talent, termed 'Project 2010' was implemented by the USSF in 1998. Created to ensure that the U.S. Men's National Team become a legitimate contender to win the World Cup by 2010, the \$50 million development plan has initiated a full-time residency program for 120 boys under the age of 17 years old. In addition, by 2010 U.S. Soccer intends to launch a player development opportunity program that will allow 1000 players aged 12 to 20 years old a total of 100 days of training and matches under national coaches (Wahl, 2006). The lack of an equivalent program for the development of female professional players is rather surprising given the enthusiasm with which the game has been embraced by young women. The focus of player development in contrast appears to rest, in the absence of a professional women's league, with the coaching staff of the respective Division One universities.

### **Soccer as a Viable Career for U.S. Students**

Sociological interest in careers and patterns of occupational attainment is well-established and the subject of extensive research (Roderick, 2006; Weber, 1976; Young and Collin, 2000). The American Dream concept, central to this study, posits that through dedication and hard work, upward mobility can be achieved. The purpose of this discussion is to frame how a soccer



scholarship fits within the myriad of career definitions and pathways of how it is conceptualised within career literature.

From a sociological perspective, Mannheim (1940) and Weber (1976) were arguably the first researchers to link the concept of 'career' to an occupation. In essence, that a career represented a formalized ladder of sequential and recognized positions. However, it is the work of Hall (1948) that is potentially the most useful in framing the context of scholarship students within this study. The model proposed by Hall presents a hypothetical developmental career pattern through which an individual progresses in order to ultimately achieve their chosen occupation. Hall's (1948) framework, although originally applied to the medical profession, can be adapted to provide insight to the series of sequential stages or *career structure* that each individual potentially moves through. According to Hall, each person initially formulates an ambition and then ultimately gains entry to the institution which will further develop and formalise their occupational commitment. Within this study, the impact of the family and university represent an adaptation of Hall's framework to explain the career pathway of students. The family is analysed as to its impact upon how the process of student decision-making is formulated and negotiated. In essence the study will review the networks of relationships which impact upon and bind individuals to the concept of the Dream. Secondly, the university as an institution and its scholarship regulations are analysed and interpreted by interviewing both players and key university personnel within the respective athletic departments.

The complexity that is self-evident in formulating a career pathway has been highlighted by a variety of sociologists (Goffman, 1961; Roderick, 2006). The subjective feelings of players are used within this study to attempt to understand the complexity of emotions which impacted upon their decision-making to undertake a soccer scholarship. The work of Hughes (1958) is useful in providing insight towards the experiences of those individuals who have both an 'avocation as well as a vocation' (p. 64). Scholarship athletes potentially fulfil Hughes' criteria that careers can have both objective and subjective components. Student-athletes potentially fall into this category as they are taking part in a sport which they enjoy and which also serves as a catalyst for their ultimate goal of upward mobility. Therefore this study will attempt to explain the interaction and exchanges which take place between the individual and significant others from both the past and present. The research will also reveal the requirements of the American Dream which both binds them to a scholarship and simultaneously constrains them to it. This study will therefore take a holistic perspective towards the factors which informed scholarship motives and goals. The interpretive methodology adopted will consider student decision-making evidenced by athletes on an individual, athletic and academic/vocational level. In addition, the thesis will present the factors that account for the student's commitment to their scholarship. According to Becker (1960) this requires more than making a simple pledge or promise. The sensitivity that students have towards the expectations of others is discussed within references that the subjects make towards their families and coaching staff.

According to Arthur et al (1989), a career is 'the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time' (p. 8). Savikas (2000) has previously noted the importance for career self-management given the many career transitions individuals are likely to experience. Sullivan (1999) highlighted the difference between the traditional and 'boundaryless career'. Perhaps a playing career in soccer fits into the second category as athletes in the modern game are likely to experience a sequence of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of a single employment setting (Roderick, 2006). This is due largely to the player transfer system that operates in the professional game and the relatively short duration of their playing career. Many factors influence the professional player's life span, the most critical being injury. On average, a professional's playing career may last up to 15 years; however there are those who, for one reason or another (being transfer listed, change in manager and so forth) decide to, or are required to, opt out at an early age (Bourke, 2003).

Career development theories aim to explain such aspects of vocational behaviour as initial career choice, work adjustment, or life span career progress and are grounded in psychology and sociology. Gothard et al (2001) and later Syed (2008) provided a detailed review of career-development literature, starting with the perso-environment fit theories (Holland, 1959), developmental (Gottfredson, 1996; Super, 1980), learning (Krumbeltz, 1979), opportunity structure theory (Roberts, 1968), and community interaction theory (Law, 1986). They also include reference to Astin's (1984) socio-psychological model of career choice which focuses on career choices by women. A contextual explanation of career that emphasises action and pays

special attention to the role of narrative, dream and myth is presented in Chapter Five.

Patton and McMahon (1999) classified the main contributions in the literature as being those of Herr and Cramer (1992), and Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996). Although Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997) claimed that trait theory, developmental stages to decision making (Ginsberg et al., 1951; Super, 1997) and social learning theory (Krumboltz, 1979) are the dominant theories.

Roberts (1968) cited by Gothard et al. (2001) argued that decisions are not fully determined by the individual but by the opportunity structures in the labour market; these include the nature of industrial organisation, government regulation and social class (Hodgkinson, 1997). Maranda and Comeau (2000) examined career from a sociological perspective, identifying such theories as status attainment theory and human capital theory (Bourke, 2002). They asserted that the complementary nature of the various sociological viewpoints regarding career become evident when analysed from the perspective of the complexity of relationships between individuals and their specific context (Bourke, 2002). In their view, people's employment situations are the result of both constraints due to economic context and more or less strategic individual and collective behaviour. Auster (1996) asserted that individuals, when making occupational choices, are constrained by societal forces that have an affect on individual factors.

So why are undergraduate students in the U.S. pursuing a university degree via a soccer scholarship? Is it to exploit their talent and skills as a soccer player or to further their expectations of high earnings via a degree?

Or is their career structure and goals dictated by socio-economic factors?

Deloitte and Touche (2008) have asserted that each player in the English Premier League is earning on average £750,000 per annum, thus the financial attractiveness of a career in soccer with an English club is apparent.

Professional soccer is evidently a labour intensive industry in which employment is subject to increasingly mobile forms of labour which increases the possibility of player movement between teams (McGovern, 2000).

Employers however are fixed to specific geographical locations with the result that if individuals wish to pursue the highest salaries they must be prepared to relocate to the elite leagues of Europe.

Although some theorists assert that career decision making is a matter for the individual, Hodkinson (1997) has previously noted that career decisions can only be appreciated in terms of the life histories and narratives of those who create them. Previously, the choice of one's career may have been predictable on the basis of what is known of an individual's socio-economic background, gender and family (Bourke, 2002). Before the accessibility of career education in schools, nearly all individuals obtained advice from neighbourhood contacts (ibid, 2002). The main parties and factors that may influence scholarship decisions include family members, both nuclear and extended, teachers, career advisors and potentially sporting role models. Acknowledgement of the level of interdependence that both constrains and enables individuals' actions is explained within the concept of 'figuration' (Elias, 1978). Figuration is a generic term used by Elias to represent the:

... web of interdependences formed among human beings and which connects them: that is to say, a structure of mutually oriented and dependent persons (Elias, 1978, p. 249).

Elias' theory emphasises the relationships and processes of interdependence between individuals and societies which are dynamic and constantly evolving and subject to knowledge and hierarchies of status. Therefore this study acknowledges the impact of figurational theory in contributing to an interpretive explanation of the student decision-making process.

The decision to take part or develop proficiency within a sport is not a question of freewill, but is socially structured (Bourke, 2002; Jarvie and Maguire, 1994). It is also linked to one's educational experiences at school (especially at the high school level) where the board of education elect to offer specific sports to their students and thereby restrict or promote participation in certain leagues and competitions.

Hodkinson (1997) asserts that the reason why some young people reject career advice is that what is being said to them does not conform to their own personal schematic view or their perception of appropriate career opportunities. When questioned as to whether their high schools had a guidance officer, 100% of those surveyed answered yes. Less than half (48%) of the students actually used the personnel to discuss their options.

In career development literature, the career dreams are correlated with the concept of aspirations and are often used synonymously (Carroll et al., 2007). Within this framework the external pressures resulting from economic

mobility, family or social factors combine to influence vocational decisions (Martin, 1997). This perspective will contribute to the interpretive research paradigm which underpins the study and help to conceptualise the findings (see Chapter Three for a discussion of the paradigm).

Given the groundswell of popularity for the game in America it would appear inevitable that some individuals may consider utilising soccer within the broader ideology of the American Dream. Coakley (2007) has asserted that the opportunities for a satisfying and rewarding occupational career in sport do exist; adding however, that the number of opportunities for athletes is severely limited and they are short-term. According to previous research the reality for students is that only 1.6% of all scholarship athletes will obtain professional contracts upon graduation (Picou, 1978; Harrison, 2000). The harsh reality for the majority is that the intercollegiate athletic experience will represent the zenith of their competitive sporting achievements. However, such statistical observations do not appear to discourage a significant number of aspiring professional athletes from pursuing their dream; the clear conclusion is that they are either apathetic or oblivious to the data (Mello and Swanson, 2007).

A career in professional soccer is perceived by certain individuals to have many positive features such as high financial rewards, status and so forth and very few barriers apart from innate talent, wellbeing and fate. Yet, in common with other professions, it is demanding and has an elevated failure rate, especially during the early years (Hardwick, 1999; O'Donoghue, 1999). For many individuals, pursuing a career in professional soccer involves relocation to distant lands to follow career goals. Northcroft (2002) noted the

increase in the number of young overseas players in the first and reserve teams of leading European professional teams, of these players from the U.S. compose a small but significant minority. As of the start of the 2007/08 season there were 81 players registered across the elite leagues of the European Union, of which six currently play in the English Premiership. However, according to Collins (2006) this trend is now displaying evidence of a change. A career as a professional soccer player in the U.S. is now slowly emerging as a viable option for those individuals who wish to pursue soccer as a profession (these figures are corroborated by the independent research presented in table 2). A combination of mass U.S. youth participation coupled with international success at high profile televised events such as the World Cup and Olympic Games has led to the realisation that a domestic market exists for the game, leading to the formation of professional leagues for both men (MLS) and women (WUSA) (Southall, et al., 2005).

Traditionally high profile senior players such as DaMarcus Beasley and Bobby Convey have been encouraged to play for foreign teams in order to pursue salaries commensurate with their level of ability. However, recent evidence from the MLS reveals that the average salary is now approximately \$85,000 per year (Wahl, 2006) allowing the MLS to compete with the European clubs for their own players. The retention and recruitment of U.S. role models such as Eddie Johnson and Freddy Adu (recruited at age 14yrs by MLS) combined with international success has inevitably impacted upon the perception of soccer as a viable career option. The high visibility of U.S. soccer has led MLS, as discussed previously, to launch Project 2010 as a



channel for developing players. Players such as Adu are 'critical in attracting the next generation of sports spectators and players' (Collins, 2006, p. 355).

It is self-evident from the statistics presented in Chapter One and Two that individuals within the USA are attracted to undertaking a soccer scholarship. The career options available can therefore be categorised into four discrete headings.

Table 2. Soccer Career Options

Soccer Career Options	Description
'Direct Benefit' 1. Playing Abroad: International Dreams	Individual with a high level of technical ability as a player (informed by objective feedback); An individual who simply possesses the strong desire to achieve a professional football career and envisions success; Displays Individual initiative; Ambitious: can also be considered as someone who has the desire to improve his career by moving to what is perceived as a 'better quality league'
'Direct Benefit' 2. Playing at Home: Domestic Dream	Individual with a moderate level of technical ability and competence in soccer; Seeks security/ stability offered by a domestic playing career; Would potentially consider a career abroad should circumstances be favourable.

<p>'Indirect Benefit' 3. Status in the Community</p>	<p>Individual with an appreciation that their athletic status leads to notoriety and prestige amongst the university community; Appreciates limitations of own ability and uses available networks to establish a career not necessarily linked with soccer.</p>
<p>'Indirect Benefit' 4. Alternate Career (supported by scholarship)</p>	<p>Pragmatic approach towards career development and opportunities; Athletic status impacts upon occupational attainment. The belief that sports serves as a vehicle to occupational success and upward mobility</p>

N.B. The categories identified above thus far are preliminary and open to further investigation. As noted by Magee and Sugden (2002) typologies have a shifting dimension dependent on the career stage of the individual player.

The common denominator that each of the above categories share is the potential financial/economic benefits that result from either the 'direct' or 'indirect' involvement in a soccer scholarship. The likelihood of achieving a career as a professional player is clearly statistically unlikely; however, the indirect benefits of undertaking a university scholarship are tangible and within reach of many individuals.

Many media commentators suggest that the allure of a career abroad is the key motivating factor for young players opting for a career in soccer (Bale, 1998; Bourke, 2003; Maguire and Pearton, 2000) leading to extensive labour migration as the characteristics of the global sports labour market evolve (Bale, 1998; Maguire and Pearton, 2000). Despite the limited statistical chance of achieving the dream of a professional career abroad, other evidence (Gothard et al., 2001) reveals that the impact of myths and dreams cannot be underestimated in our lives. The powerful narratives inherent within

American sport mean that numerous children (and adults) regularly fantasise that they are representing their country in the World Cup or that they scored the winning goal for their team in an elite professional competition (Bourke, 2003). Coakley (2007) and Bourke (2002) have observed that in contemporary society many athletes now act in accordance with other professions (medical, academic and so forth) in appreciating that to advance one's career, it may be necessary to spend some time outside their home country in order to further develop their skills.

As mentioned earlier, this chapter shows that the professional soccer infrastructure in America is still in relative infancy in comparison to that of western European countries. Given the increased media exposure via soccer specific television channels in the U.S., such as Fox Sports, the European elite leagues may convince many impressionable young athletes that to be successful, it is necessary to join a European club (Bourke, 2003; O'Brien, 2002).

Despite the limitations of the existing professional structure in America, career potential can be arguably fulfilled within or indirectly via the domestic game. The conventional view of sports in America is that involvement in athletic participation may lead to occupational mobility and the acquisition of marketable skills i.e. athletes may benefit from non-athletic jobs as a result of their sporting career with a prestigious and high profile university (Dubois, 1980). Such views are echoed within the myriad of published autobiographical player accounts. *A View from the Bench* by George Mills (2007) is one such book which provides an account of the reality behind the glamour of college sport and the lived experiences of a 'benchwarmer' (Lawrence, 2007).

George Mills was a player who clearly enjoyed the game, but had only one opportunity in nearly five years at making the University of Nebraska's starting team. The book provides a glimpse into the hero status that is accorded to the players of university sport. The most striking feature of university sport in many universities in the United States is its commercialization and the degree to which student athletes have been transformed into professional entertainers (Coakley, 2007). The giant stadiums, television contracts, and other trappings of commercialism which are commonplace at many Division One schools in America are simply not found in European universities. The key message from books such as by Mills is that the ultimate measure of the rewards gained from participation in college sport is success in life after college and the prestige that is accorded to such individuals in their communities (Lawrence, 2007).

### **Men's Potential Salaries**

The establishment of the MLS in 1996 and the WUSA in 2000 reflected the significant in-roads that soccer has made into the lexicon of American sporting culture (Satterlee, 2001). Professional soccer clubs in the U.S. are subject to a salary cap estimated to be of the order of \$1.9 million for 2006 (MLS.com, 2006). However, under the 'Designated Player Rule' (DPR) for the 2007 season, each MLS franchise can potentially sign a maximum of two players whose salaries are not governed by the cap (MLS.com, 2007). This regulation seemingly allows each team to compete for the elite players within the international soccer market. The relaxation of player regulations has somewhat inevitably facilitated the transfer of a number of high profile

'marquee' players, most notably, David Beckham from Real Madrid to the Los Angeles Galaxy. Conversely, the regulation has also facilitated the return of a small number of domestic players from overseas to the MLS. This impact appears to be growing despite the fact that the most high profile and successful male players, such as national team players, Tim Howard and DaMarcus Beasley, are currently contracted to foreign domestic teams.

The league however is dominated by young players such as Brian Carroll, Alecko Eskandarian, Clint Dempsey and Eddie Johnson. Such high profile U.S. players represent the first generation of successful domestic role models for aspiring players. Among the top American players in MLS, the Red Bulls midfielder Claudio Reyna, who returned to the United States after playing for more than a decade in Europe, has a base salary of \$1 million and guaranteed compensation of \$1.25 million, making him the highest-paid American in the league (MLS.com, 2007). A summary of the highest reported salaries for domestic U.S. league players can be seen below.

LA Galaxy's Landon Donovan (\$900,000)

Kansas City's Eddie Johnson (\$875,000)

Real Salt Lake's Freddy Adu (\$550,000)

FC Dallas' Carlos Ruiz (\$435,000)

New York's Clint Mathis (\$410,000)

New England's Taylor Twellman (\$350,000)

Toronto FC's Carl Robinson (\$315,000)

Colorado's Pablo Mastroeni (\$298,000)

D.C. United's Luciano Emilio (\$293,000)

Of the 361 players listed by the national governing body for U.S. soccer, 55 earn just \$12,900 a year and an additional 35 make \$17,700. All of those players are young Americans just starting their professional careers (Bell, 2007). The median base pay for the men's professional league is reported at \$85,000 and is modest by the standards of median earnings in other U.S. professional team sports. According to reports, the median base annual earnings in the U.S. in 2007 were approximately \$2.6 million, \$1 million and \$0.6 million for professional players in basketball, baseball and football respectively (Frick, 2007; Reilly and Witt, 2007).

As regards players who are selected for international duty they can expect to receive significantly higher salaries. Under the new contract signed in 2005, the men's national team players earned \$37,500 if they qualified for the World Cup squad, \$3,750 for each cup appearance and \$3,000 per friendly (Reilly and Witt, 2007). During the qualifying stages of the World Cup, incentives or 'bonuses' ranged from \$1,350 to \$6,000 per player for victories and draws, depending on the opponent (ibid, 2007). Bonuses for 'friendlies' during this period ranged from \$750 to \$5,250 per player. The World Cup squad collectively earned \$150,000 per competition point earned in the first round, which included three games and \$2.775 million for advancing to the knockout stage of the final 16. The national federation (USSF) guaranteed to pay the players a total of \$2.25 million for making the quarterfinals, \$2.625 million for advancing to the semi-finals, \$3 million for going to the final and \$3.75 million for winning the tournament. Winning the third-place game would be worth \$500,000. In 2002, the bonus for making the quarterfinals was \$1.5

million, the semi-finals \$1.75 million and the final \$2 million, while winning the championship would have generated \$2.5 million for the team (Associated Press, 2007). Under the new agreement, retroactive to 2003, the players received \$1.35 million for qualifying for the World Cup for the fifth straight time. This marked an increase from \$900,000 in 2002.

### **Women's Potential Salaries**

Research has indicated that professional career opportunities for women to play, coach and report sports are limited (Acosta and Carpenter, 1996; Delpy, 1998). Although mechanisms that prevent or inhibit career advancement clearly continue to exist, the increased participation and profile of women in sport has raised public awareness of the possibilities of women to perform on and off the playing field. The heightened social and political sensitivity has led to the creation of opportunities for women in sport via the introduction of the Title IX legislation (Coakley, 2007; Delpy, 1998). The reality of a career in soccer is difficult to assess accurately given that no professional league currently exists. However, based on the most recent women's professional league (WUSA), the following can be observed. Player salaries in the WUSA during the years of its existence (2001-2004) were set at a yearly minimum of \$27,000 and a maximum of \$85,000 (Markovits and Hellerman, 2003b). It is widely anticipated that any new professional league in 2009 would foresee player salaries falling within similar parameters.

As regards the women’s national team, the players association negotiated with their national governing body (U.S. Soccer Federation) in 2006 to receive at least \$1.28 million annually to players in the squad. At least 14 of these 20 players would be guaranteed annual salaries of \$70,000 with the six others assured of being paid at least \$50,000 (Soccer Times, 2006). Additionally, the USSF would have the option of employing up to four more players at \$30,000 per year and would have the right to call in other players for trials lasting up to six weeks (ibid, 2006). In addition, each women player also receives bonuses of \$1,000 - \$2,000 for each victory and an appearance fee for each of the 27 preparatory matches leading to the Olympics and World Cup. The players are also ‘incentivised’ according to the USSF, where financial payments to players increase depending on the finishing position of teams in both Olympic and FIFA sanctioned competitions (USSF, 2007).

According to the Associated Press (2007), the team would divide a \$100,000 bonus for reaching the semi-finals of the Olympics, \$150,000 for winning the bronze, \$300,000 for winning the silver and \$700,000 for ultimately winning the competition. The new agreement contains a severance package of three months pay for players who failed to be awarded a position on the team.

Table 3: Summary of Salary Expectations

Highest Paid U.S. male domestic league player (MLS)	Highest Paid U.S. female domestic league player (WUSA, 2003)	Men’s National Team (potential earnings)	Women’s National Team (potential earnings)
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Landon Donovan \$900,000	Mia Hamm \$150,000	Squad Retainer (central contract) \$105,000	Squad Retainer (central contract) \$70,000
		Competition: Semi-Final place \$132,500 per player	Competition: Semi-Final place \$5000 per player
		Runner-Up \$150,000	Runner-Up \$15,000
		Winner \$187,500	Winner \$35,000

The above figures are based on an average squad size of 22 players

Source: Bell (2007); Sawyer and Gooding (2007)

The perception of what the men's and women's professional leagues have to offer to the U.S. public is clearly a significant factor in their respective business models (Southall et al., 2005). The historical failure of the women's professional game in America can therefore be placed upon their inability to penetrate the youth soccer market and not necessarily upon a nativistic antagonism to what is perceived by some as a 'foreign sport' (Eitzen and Sage, 2003; Southall, et al., 2005).

Given the comparatively small salaries in comparison to the 'Big Three' the question remains why students would be interested in pursuing a scholarship in soccer. Namely, whether the enhanced profile of professional soccer in the U.S. has inspired students to undertake a scholarship in search of prestige and the potential financial incentives of a career in the game, or whether it is part of a more pragmatic route in the pursuit of the American

Dream. A review of relevant labour market literature within this context reveals an increasingly pragmatic approach towards student use of scholarships and a heightened awareness towards career development (Meggyesy, 2000; Stieber, 2004).

A contextual explanation of career that emphasises action and pays special attention to the role of narrative, dream, and myth along with the power relationship that exists when engaging in guidance and counselling is a key part of this study and presented within Chapter Six. Patton and McMahon (1999) classified the main contributions in this context as being those of Herr and Cramer (1992) and Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996). Within this context, Roberts (1968) and Gothard et al. (2001) have both previously argued that decisions are not determined by the individual but by the opportunity structures in the labour market (Bourke, 2002); these include the nature of industrial organisation, government regulation and social class. The complementary nature of the various sociological viewpoints regarding career become obvious when observed from the perspective of attempting to understand the complexity of relations involved. Based on the above observations it is the pretext of the study therefore that people's career aspirations are the result of both constraints due to economic context and more or less strategic individual and collective behaviour. Auster (1996) asserted that individuals, when making occupational choices, are constrained by societal forces that have an affect on individual factors. In the context of this study they will be studied within the themes of family, social class, social mobility and education.

So why are undergraduate students in the U.S. pursuing a soccer scholarship? Is it to use their talent and skills or their expectations of high earnings for direct benefits? Or is their career choice due to social and economic factors for indirect benefits? Gothard et al. (2001) referred to the role that myth and dream play in the lives of people, often manifest in individual attitudes toward the world of sport. The questionnaire designed for this study reflects the importance of the dream of playing for the U.S. as a potential key influence in career choice and is detailed in Chapter Three of the study. Similarly, all students interviewed in the pilot study declared that it was their childhood ambition to represent their country in soccer. Young et al. (1996) cited in Gothard et al. (2001) asserted that the role of emotion in career theories has been undervalued as emotion energises, regulates, and controls actions and provides the key to narratives of career. There was strong agreement among respondents in relation to emotive reasons (love of the game, dream of playing for the U.S., possibilities of winning trophies) for choosing soccer as a career. Conversely, certain interviewees in the pilot study stressed the practical reasons (i.e. the opportunities to make money, develop one's talent, and gain experience and knowledge). Acknowledgement of the myriad of factors which underpin student career decision-making is factored into the design of both the questionnaire and subject interviews for this study (Schulenberg et al., 1991). The interview findings presented in Chapter Four are organised according to Denzin's (2001) methodology of interpretive interactionism and subjected to inductive content analysis. The presentation of the student narrative involves the organization of student life histories and the life-shaping events they have experienced. The explanation

and the stories presented by the students are done so in the language, feelings and emotions of those being studied in order to accurately reflect their decision making process.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented a critical review of what the concept of the American Dream has meant historically to the people of the U.S. The Dream is not an entity that operates outside of culture, but rather a set of values and ideals that are dynamic and evolving according to the changing nature of U.S. society. A key factor in the evolution of the concept has been the meanings applied to it by society. As American society has evolved so have the pathways within which it is regarded as acceptable to pursue its goals. This chapter has argued that soccer has built and expanded from its traditional base of youth and ethnic participation to enter the lexicon of mainstream American sport and values.

Evidence presented so far in this thesis has proven that to a large extent national antipathy toward the sport has been altered. On a simplistic level this could be credited to a pragmatic approach towards the business of 'supply and demand' or as American President Calvin Coolidge, speaking in 1924 stated, 'The business of America is business' (Wagg, 1995, p.179). More precisely and elegantly, playwright Arthur Miller writes that the business of America is 'show business, symbolic display, the triumph at last of metaphor over reality' (Miller, 1988; in Wagg, 1995, p. 179). In the context of

a business model, American soccer has been seen as a miniature reflection of the emerging aggressive, Darwinian capitalist environment (survival of the fittest financially) (Bar-On, 1997).

Hobsbawm once observed about soccer, 'the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people' (1990, p. 143). For cultural historian Hobsbawm, soccer has the ability to grasp the popular imagination and worryingly arouse both nationalistic and even chauvinistic tendencies more concretely than other realms of cultural and political construction (Bar-On, 1997). Furthermore, soccer is a sport with mass appeal and without the connotations of socio-economic class that identifies and restricts sports such as rugby union, golf or tennis (Wilson, 2007). This sport clearly has appeal to U.S. audiences beyond the traditional television diet of baseball, football and basketball.

By what criteria do individuals designate some countries as 'soccer-playing countries'? In trying to define what exactly constitutes a national sports culture, Markovits and Hellerman's (2001) used the concept of 'hegemonic sports culture.' By this they mean that soccer has failed to dominate America and facilitate 'emotional attachments.' Based upon data assimilated over 8 years ago their book fails to recognise that measuring comparative levels of emotional attachment to sport is extremely difficult. Should emotional attachment be measured relative to those who are self-reported sports fans? Or should we more properly consider what percentage of the total population is committed to, or at least interested in, a given sport? There is no clear answer to this question, nor do Markovits and Hellerman attempt to provide one. To suggest that the American public has tried and

rejected soccer is founded upon historical notions of exceptionalism. Insight provided from a variety of empirical sources has revealed that soccer continues to grow and establish itself within the mainstream American psyche.

Soccer as a potential career pathway for students is a contentious issue as it challenges traditional notions of what defines patriotic and appropriate sport. The growth and establishment of professional leagues and the continued expansion of scholarship opportunities at University challenge the perception of soccer as a 'foreign sport.' Consequently, the career possibilities available via a soccer scholarship to students can be summarised according to their 'direct' and 'indirect' options. Evidently a professional career in soccer is feasible, if statistically improbable. The alternative explanation offered within this chapter and supported by 'career options in table 2' is that students could feasibly adopt a rather pragmatic approach towards the use of scholarship in their pursuit of the Dream. According to the literature presented in this chapter, sport and soccer specifically are used as a catalyst for career ambitions which are not necessarily related to their sport of choice.

The next step within this study is to provide details of the methods employed in order to establish the potentially complex motives for undertaking a soccer scholarship.

## CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH DESIGN

### **Theory and Methodology: Overview**

The focus of this chapter is on providing an overview of the sociological theories *and* research methods employed within the study. Throughout the thesis, *theory* and *method* are not treated as distinct and unrelated aspects of the process. In fact, there is an important two-way relationship between the theoretical framework and methods employed within the work. In short, one informs the other throughout each stage of the research process. In addition to synthesising the extensive literature available on the subject of the American Dream and sport, provided in Chapters One and Two, the value of this research is in providing insight to the complex motivations of students for embarking upon a soccer scholarship. The opinions of students, coaches and athletic directors are sampled in order to generate primary data.

### **Adoption of suitable research methodology: Interpretive Research Paradigm**

Two of the most prominent research paradigms within sociological studies of this nature are regarded to be the ‘scientific’ and ‘interpretive’ (Andrews et al., 2005). In order to decide which paradigm had the most salience to the analysis of the subjects in question an extensive review of existing literature was conducted.

Ernest (1994, p. 22) identifies that the scientific research paradigm, 'is concerned with objectivity, prediction, replicability, and the discovery of scientific generalisations or laws describing the phenomena in question.' Theoretically, by employing a scientific approach to potentially contentious issues, general laws which can be used to anticipate future outcomes can be identified (Barry, 1998). The scientific research paradigm is therefore based on a hypothetico-deductive approach (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Simply stated, according to Barry (1998) it adopts a systematic enquiry into the considerations of knowledge. The paradigm evidently has the distinct advantages of clarity, precision and generalisability (Andrews et al., 2005; Barry, 1998). However, it is not without its critics. One of the foremost issues is that the paradigm fails to recognise individuals within their specific context. As a result, insight towards understanding human beings as individuals is neglected, resulting in a partial, distorted picture of social reality (Barry, 1998; Gratton and Jones, 2003). The intention of this research was to comprehend the student learning experience whilst in their university learning environment; the scientific research hypothesis was therefore not considered appropriate for the context of the thesis. As a result, attention was turned to considerations of the 'interpretive research paradigm.'

Traditionally, sport has been eulogised within the work of former players, journalists and film makers (Bower, 2003; Giulianotti, 1999; Goffman, 1967; Roderick, 2006). As a consequence, the realities of a playing career leading to tangible rewards have been mythologized and are dominated by the views of 'quasi-insiders' (Wacquant, 1999, p. 222). In the spirit of attempting to obtain a participant's perspective, similar to Wacquant's (1992)



study of boxers and Roderick's (2006) study of professional soccer players, this research critically analyses the interaction between the individual and society. By examining the perspective of scholarship students through face to face encounters, the study necessitates consideration of the micro and macro social contexts in which the subjects operate. Interactionism therefore constitutes:

... an appealing approach in relation to a study of people, whose daily work is situated among a relatively small, tight-knit group that is all but 'closed' to non-group members (Roderick, 2006, p. 5).

The fundamental concern of the interpretive paradigm is to understand individual human experiences at a holistic level (Barry, 1998; Gratton and Jones, 2003). As a result, researchers adopting this approach aim to interpret the complexities embedded in such personal experiences in order to shed light on their significance. Ernest (1994, p. 24) states that, 'the paradigm is primarily concerned with human understanding, interpretation, intersubjectivity, lived truth (i.e. truth in human terms).' Interpretive research is therefore frequently undertaken in natural settings and is subsequently often referred to as a form of 'naturalistic inquiry' (Barry, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 45) state that 'the natural setting is the place where the researcher is most likely to discover, or uncover, what is to be known about the phenomenon of interest.' As highlighted in Chapter One, the narrative of social mobility is at the core of the American Dream, however, the mechanisms by which it can be achieved are inherently complex and

intricately woven (Goffman, 1967). The interpretive paradigm thus facilitates qualitative analysis of student decision making which is central to this study. The paradigm is arguably closely linked to the concept of the American Dream whereby the individual has the power to change society rather than being manipulated by it.

Critiques of interpretive sociological approaches take issue with both the theoretical and methodological aspects of the approach. The most common criticisms are that the approach assumes social meaning is unproblematic and may be understood directly or believe that it is possible to discover standard laws that govern human behaviour (Denzin, 1989; Flick, 2006). However, the defining characteristic of an interpretive approach is that any statement regarding the social world is relative to any other (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Donnelly, 2003). At the cultural level, a relative approach permits the researcher to understand and interpret the culture on its own terms and is a key rationale for the adoption of a paradigm that facilitates an understanding of human action.

Interpretive perspectives have had a relatively restricted impact within the study of the sociology of sport since their rise in the 1970s (Giulianotti, 2005). This may be due to the time-consuming nature and expense required with the pre-requisite fieldwork. Before embarking on this approach it was necessary to consider the commitment in terms of fieldwork in the U.S. The clear benefit of such an approach, however, is in terms of the 'thick descriptions' and fuller understandings that are presented (Andrews et al., 2005; Donnelly, 2003; Flick, 2006) facilitating analysis of career aspirations within soccer. A further potential danger of the interpretive approach is the

relative neglect of the power of external-structural forces that shape behaviour and events (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). There is a risk in interpretive approaches that they become 'hermetically sealed from the world outside and the participant's theatre of activity' (ibid, p. 25). Just as positivistic theories can be criticized for their macro-sociological bias so interpretive theories can be criticized for their narrow or micro-sociological perspectives. In order to balance both perspectives the discussion of the themes of the study in Chapter Five will provide discussion of the interview results from both a micro and macro perspective.

One of the most authoritative views regarding the contribution of the interpretive paradigm to the study of sport was presented by Donnelly (2003). In his review, Donnelly presented a critical evaluation of the impact of the paradigm upon the study of the sociology of sport. He identifies a number of areas, such as firstly athlete biographies and autobiographies that have benefited significantly from this research approach. Significantly this research paradigm facilitates comprehension of the extent to which students interviewed are conscious of their actions. Secondly, what socialisation experiences were involved in the process of becoming a student-athlete and, finally, to what extent student decision-making reflects upon broader issues of social mobility.

The challenge of the thesis was to discover what motivates a group of soccer scholarship students to pursue a particular avenue of involvement in higher education. In order to achieve this goal, it was necessary to understand their formative experiences in their natural setting - the university context by conducting fieldwork in the U.S. both for the pilot and the final study itself.

Having determined the research paradigm to use, the next step was to become familiar with the research methodology relevant to this particular approach (Barry, 1998). Hence, an additional literature review was conducted.

The research that has been reviewed suggests using a 'mixed methodology' that includes the use of detailed questionnaires and focus groups to facilitate qualitative analysis (Gratton and Jones, 2003). In addition, several studies have emphasized the use of qualitative techniques such as interviewing (Bower, 2003; Lewko and Greendorfer, 1988; Roderick, 2006; Moon, 2003). By using a combination of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the research aims to provide a deeper level of understanding as regards the experiences and context of scholarship athletes. Precise details of the instruments used are provided later in this chapter.

The importance of methodology in the research, as a whole and within the elements discussed so far, warrants its recognition as a crucial part of the interpretive framework. It could be argued that a methodological element is out of place within a theoretical framework. However, in a similar vein to Sugden and Tomlinsons' (1999) elements of a critical interpretive framework, it is the packaging of the overlapping elements which constitutes the framework. The mixed methodological approach adopted in this research refers to a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques used to ensure a fully informed interpretation of the subculture of student athletes within Division One programs. Due to the under-researched nature of soccer scholarship students there is certain fundamental research data which is needed to be gathered by other means. Included in these data are the essential socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, occupation,

educational qualifications, family background, area of residence, and so on. The construction of a socio-demographic profile lends itself to a more quantitative research technique. The profile makes a considerable contribution to this research on two levels. First on an individual level, knowledge of such characteristics allows us to set the experiences of individuals within the wider context of their lives. Second, collectively, the data provides us with a comprehensive answer to who the student athletes really are. Knowledge at both of these levels is an essential feature of making an accurate interpretation of student athlete decision making. The use of questionnaires and interviews within this study represents an attempt to allow the research and a quest for truth shape the methods used. It essentially avoids an adherence to a particular social theory. Rather, it fits into the interpretive paradigm in the ways in which it uses a combination of both quantitative and qualitative techniques to achieve a fully informed and educated interpretation as possible.

The interpretive approach adopted towards investigating the research questions of the thesis began with the question, what is going on here? According to Spradley (1980) and Barry (1998) this process prevents the researcher from attempting to verify a pre-determined idea. The research method therefore employed a 'bottom-up' approach allowing exploration of details in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the complexities embedded within the student experience, interpret meanings and ultimately facilitate insights from their accounts (Barry, 1998). At the beginning of the enquiry, it was therefore important that the research adopted a broad focus, which was informed from both a review of literature and the personal

experience of having lived and taught in the U.S. The deliberately broad focus was open-ended, allowing for important meanings to be discovered or uncovered and clarity to be obtained (Andrews et al., 2005; Barry, 1998; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

As identified in the introduction to this thesis the American Dream is something that is inculcated into each citizen and as such encompasses a myriad of complex issues. The initial broad focus of the research within the pilot study allowed the filtering of how social mobility as a core concept potentially relates to sports scholarship students. The ideology of the Dream is evidently fuelled and sustained by a societal belief that America is a meritocracy. Sport in the context of this credo is narrativised to be the purest form of democracy. This research contributes to the wider body of sports sociology scholarship by asking whether such perceived notions of social mobility apply to the 'lived experience' of scholarship athletes. Research interest in career aspirations and patterns has traditionally referred to an organised sequence of upward movements (Goffman, 1967). The key for this study was to analyse decision-making in an objective fashion, in doing so reflecting upon the individual's own self-identity and their dreams. As a result the data obtained and their aspirations therein would inevitably contain both objective and subjective components (Roderick, 2006).

The research method selected to most effectively explore such complex and varied lived experience of scholarship athletes was the qualitative approach. Qualitative research (i.e., interpretive, naturalistic, ethnographic or hermeneutic) is that of description, thus providing the basis by which the reader can obtain insight as to how the students within the

research make sense of their world (Gratton and Jones, 2003; Munroe-Chandler, 2005). The adoption of a qualitative methodology for this research facilitates a flexible means of studying the subjective experience of the individual participants, thereby offering a detailed description of how the student perceives, creates, and interprets their world (Munroe-Chandler, 2005). A variety of different research instruments were considered for the study which included case studies, focus groups and systematic observation. However, the instruments selected for the testing within the pilot study methodology were participant questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

The use of questionnaires that contains 'closed' questions has been advocated by researchers in an attempt to gain an understanding of athletes' decision making where responses can be anticipated (Colman and Carron, 2001; Munroe-Chandler, 2005). This study recognises the advantage of adopting a closed questionnaire format to identify individual norms present. As practitioners, if researchers can anticipate the evolution of these norms, then it potentially offers a challenge to generalized behavioural expectations (Flick, 2006; Munroe-Chandler, 2005). To complement and provide rich and meaningful data the questionnaires were followed by a series of semi-structured interviews.

The interpretive approach towards interviewing recognises that meaning emerges through interaction and is not standardised from place to place or person to person (Donnelly, 2003; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). The paradigm emphasises the importance of understanding the overall text of a conversation and its meaning within its context. This approach recognises the

importance of culture and the necessity of a relativistic approach to the subject's culture.

This form of qualitative interview, unlike tightly structured or totally amorphous interviews, enables researchers to address a range of issues in conjunction with the advantage of flexibility (Gratton and Jones, 2003; Silverman, 1985). In other words, the format facilitated analysis of the complexities of people's thoughts and experiences precisely because of their flexibility. In the course of the encounter, the design allowed for adaptation of questions around a basic structure of themes in order to meet the personal circumstances of the respondents, re-order questions to coincide with the data revealed, or to insert additional questions to probe revelations or issues as they arose. Denscombe (1998) summarises this approach in the following manner:

... the interviewer is prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics are considered, and, perhaps more significantly, to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher. The answers are open-ended, and there is more emphasis on the interviewee elaborating points of interest (p. 113).

Thus semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to potentially tease out complex views and explore with the interviewees the wider networks of relationships in which they are embedded (Donnelly, 2003). In the course of interviewing, observing the interviewee face-to-face and reflecting upon their responses, sociological themes and patterns of behaviour were identified in



the data and then subsequently cross-referenced during later interviews. Enduring patterns, themes, and what Mason (1994) terms 'categories of meaning' emerged, details of which are provided later in this chapter within the pilot study findings.

A key component in facilitating rich and meaningful data from the interviews revolved around establishing a degree of 'trust.' Roderick (2006) argue that trust is an issue of paramount importance in an interview context in which respondents may feel exploitable. Oakley (1981) suggests that in her experience trust is fostered in research contexts in which the creation of a hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee is avoided. Similarly, Collinson (1992) states that people are more likely to reveal more when they are allowed to identify issues that are relevant to them. Collinson elaborates that a focus on, and sensitivity towards the issue of trust is a means to reduce or minimize 'distance' between researcher and respondent. For the most part therefore interviewers must have faith that the respondents who volunteer to participate are telling the truth and that their data is sincere. A number of sociologists have noted the potential for respondents to selectively distort information provided to the interviewer. Trust therefore is of paramount importance to facilitating qualitative insight when respondents may feel vulnerable to exploitation (Roderick, 2006). As an individual who has coached soccer and studied as a post graduate in America I clearly shared some of the participants' experiences and this hopefully contributed to establishing a sense of trust during the interviews. By allowing the subjects to identify and raise issues relevant to their own circumstances the interview responses that followed were particularly candid regarding their career

aspirations. This was facilitated by maintaining a structure to the interview that was flexible, iterative and continuous (Andrews et al., 2005; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). The design and approach adopted for the interviews was intended to achieve the goal of obtaining meaningful and rich data regarding student career-motivations. As a result the research themes, identified in Chapter One, were adapted in terms of how they were introduced into the interview according to the personality, interests and knowledge of the interviewees.

Underlying the methodological approach therefore is sensitivity towards the assumptions that underpin interaction between the student and their environment. According to the interpretive approach, people, individually or collectively, operate on the basis of the meanings that objects (actual or perceived) have for them. That is, people do not respond instinctively or directly to objects, but attach relevance and subsequently meaning to them and proceed on the basis of the meaning. Blumer (1969) suggests that such objects may be classified into physical, social and abstract objects. Within the context of this approach, the notion of the American Dream and its interpretation thereof by the students can be unpacked and categorised. Fundamental to this hypothesis is the presupposition that students interpret their social world through the process of interaction. Meaning and motivation for one's actions arises in the process of interaction between individuals (Donnelly, 2003).

According to research, meanings for an individual materialize out of the behaviour in which other individuals act to define objects (Flick, 2006). According to this view, students and their career aspirations must be seen as social creations. Interpretive sociology has tended to incorporate symbolic

interactionism as a basis for looking at core issues, such as meaning, status and cultural relativism (Jarvie, 2006). Interactionists assume that individuals act in particular ways because they have consensual meanings regarding the attachments in their environment. The conclusions of this research aim to establish the meanings and expectations that students attach to their scholarship.

Meanings are designated and adapted through a process of interpretation that is dynamic and subject to redefinition (Blumer, 1969). The relevance of symbolic interactionism to this research is that it is incorporated within a wider interpretive paradigm that takes a non-deterministic view of people and assumes that there is a degree of freedom of choice in human behaviour. This view clearly challenges the orthodoxy of belief that is inherent within the doctrine of American exceptionalism by recognising that individuals on a micro perspective impact upon wider macro perspectives of society. Sensitivity to the capacity of people for abstract and reflective thinking within this model allows for the development and redefining of traditional terms of reference such as the Dream. The synthesis of symbolic interactionism within this research is to explain how people often come to perceive phenomena from their perspective and not the prescribed views of others. To test the validity of such premises, one must engage in a direct examination of actual human group life. The contribution of this research is that it takes two separate cohorts of scholarship students to analyse their motivations for undertaking a soccer scholarship and in doing so offers a potential reevaluation of the American Dream.

## **The Pilot Study**

In order to test the effectiveness of the methodological instruments before beginning the study it was necessary to conduct a 'pilot study' at an appropriate institution. The names of the university and the players and staff interviewed within the pilot study have been changed in order to ensure their anonymity. This ethical obligation was deemed necessary in order to encourage participants to talk openly and frankly. For clarification, the university selected is henceforth referred to as Central University. 'Central' was selected from a range of potential higher education establishments contacted prior to the start of the research process. Athletic directors were e-mailed to establish their willingness to participate in the study, of the ten contacted only three replied. After a series of conversations with the athletic director at Central it was felt that the college and athletic staff would be the most cooperative in helping to facilitate the pilot study interviews. The initial criterion required was that the institution had both a men's and women's soccer team that competed in Division One or Two of the NCAA structure. According to the mission statement of the NCAA such institutions:

... seek to establish and maintain an environment in which a student-athlete's activities are conducted as an integral part of the student-athlete's educational experience (NCAA.com, 2006).

The above statement is important as it recognises that undergraduate participation in sport is central to both the student experience and by

inference also to the university itself. Students and personnel at such locations clearly value the role and impact that university sport has both on a personal and community level. The status of intercollegiate sport at Central therefore offered a potentially valuable insight to the career motivations and orientation of its athletes. The findings from which offered a valuable opportunity to narrow the research focus from its broad focus upon social mobility to the eventual categories detailed at the end of the pilot study.

### **The Pilot Study: Interviewing**

In total five students from Central were randomly selected to test the intended protocols for the study (Hence forward labelled as DC1, DC2, DC3, DC4 & DC5 to maintain anonymity). Each member of the group was selected for a one-to-one in-depth interview. This sample group, chosen at random, represented five different age groups, ranging from 18 to 22 years of age at the time of interview. Individuals were then invited to attend an interview at a location of their choice. This was designed to put the subject at ease and therefore facilitate an open dialogue regarding the themes of the research.

The format of the interview involved asking the students deliberately open-ended questions and probing where necessary to acquire data categorized as useful by the researcher (Barry, 1998). The interviews began with broad or 'grand tour' (Miller and Kerr, 2002) questions such as, 'can you tell me about your sporting experiences before starting university.'

Participants were then encouraged to elaborate upon their thoughts regarding

the question posed. The subjects were then asked to provide detailed reflection and analysis of specific topics as a consequence of 'elaboration probes' (Weiss, 1996). Such probes are used to gather additional information and/or probe a topic in greater depth (Kvale, 1996; Miller and Kerr, 2002). Typical probes used during the interviews were similar to those adopted by Miller and Kerr (2002) for their study of inter-collegiate student athletes. Questions typically began with, 'can you explain to me why you decided to attend to this university?', 'can you tell me if sport is important to you and if so has this changed since you enrolled at university?' The duration of each interview typically ranged between 45 and 75 minutes; during which participants views were recorded and then transcribed. The overall aim of the interviews was to ascertain the subject's views regarding their career decision-making strategy for deciding to accept an offer of a soccer scholarship. The literature review produced in Chapters One and Two revealed the themes of family (Frank and McPhail, 2005; Jamieson, 2005), social class (Eitzen and Sage, 2003; Heck and Takahashi, 2006), social mobility (Abowitz, 2005; Bettie, 2003) and career development (Bourke, 2003; Dubois, 1980). A sample of those findings as they relate to the above themes is discussed below.

DC1 (18yr old female).

Theme: Family.

My parents are not at all interested in sports but have always tried to support me in whatever I take an interest in. In the past they have driven me to games all over the state and in the process racked up a

fortune in gas alone. They (parents) know how important soccer is to me but they can't afford for me stay at school without some (financial) help. The scholarship helps towards that.

DC2 (18 yrs old male)

Theme: Social Class.

A lot of the players in the squad drive their own cars, their parents have money. I guess I'm the exception to the rule here, I get the bus almost everywhere, as does my Mom, we can't afford not to. I suppose it makes me hungrier to do well. Many of the guys don't share my enthusiasm for the training you could say. In comparison, I listen more to the coach, I'm not sure that I'm really on the other guys' (scholarship players) wavelength. Nobody here seemed to understand or relate to me. I'm here to follow my passion for the game. I seem to have more in common with the foreign players in the squad.

DC3 (20 yr old female)

Theme: Social Mobility.

My folks could afford to cover my tuition costs at school but they won't. I guess they are trying to give me a kick up the butt, instil some backbone as Dad would like to see it. This means that without the scholarship I would be working at McDonalds right now instead of being at school. I need the extra cash that the coach gives me. I think if I get cut (de-selected) from the team they (parents) might help me.

DC4 (21 yr old male)

Theme: Career Development

My team mates' pretend to be trying hard during the drills. They joke around a lot, but sometimes too much. They don't seem to respect the coach; they think he is too demanding. I want to be liked and make friends on the team, but I'm also here to make my parents proud. Sometimes I feel as though they are only here to have their education subsidised. I thought that they would all love soccer as much as I did and that this would create a bond between us. I know that I'm no Pele, but would love to earn a living as a pro. Hey we all have dreams. If I don't make it at least my degree will get me a head-start doing something other than flipping burgers.

DC5 (21yr old female)

Theme: Career Development

Girls outside of the soccer squad are just friends. I guess that is kind of inevitable. I say 'hello' to them if and when we bump into each other. When we talk though, it's mostly about class. I thought my team mates would be different when we talked about soccer on the bus to away games, however they didn't really seem to care whether we won or lost on those trips. I know that this could sound big-headed, but I could make it into the pro's. But I also know that I've probably got a better chance of being a civil engineer. I'll keep on trying though to keep my coach and folks pleased and see what happens in the next year or so.



In discussing the context of the research with the athletic director at Central it became clear that it was his impression that scholarship students were highly influenced in their decision making by their parents, a factor reinforced by the first round of pilot study player interviews. To further probe this potential dimension of student decision making I conducted a second round of pilot study interviews in the autumn of 2002 with four female players ranging in age from 18 to 20 years. There appeared to be a sense of guilt presented by the participants which related to perceived sacrifices their parents had made to support them in playing soccer. This response is typical of what interactionists such as Goffman (1959) and Wedemyer Moon (2003) would describe as the 'presentation of self in everyday life'. According to this view, how an individual appears before others is influenced and defined by the context they appear within.

Sometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain (Goffman, 1959, p. 5)

The above student responses would appear to be intentionally and consciously constructed to reassure their parents (Wedemyer Moon, 2003).

The role and significance of parents within this study is deliberately explored by the semi-structured interviews, details of which are provided in Chapter Four. This aimed to facilitate insight towards the qualitative experience and accounts of the subjects and in particular the role of their

parents from the context of 'support and challenge' in facilitating their decision-making (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000).

### **Interview: Framework of Analysis**

The framework employed to analyse player interview responses was the 'Support/Challenge Questionnaire' (SCQ) (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000). Initially developed for use in the study of talented teenagers by Csikszentmihalyi et al (1993) and later expanded for use in a longitudinal study of American adolescents (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000). The thirty-two item questionnaire (Appendix 6) measures the supportive and challenging aspects of a subject's family environment separately on an 'agree' or 'disagree' scale (Wedemyer Moon, 2003). Items were intended to assess family dynamics from a holistic perspective (including both positive and negative aspects of challenge and support). Examples of the four types of statements include: 'I get pleasure from playing competitive games' (positive challenge); 'I have a small number of interests outside of the home' (negative challenge); 'Despite the consequences of my actions or decisions, I know I'll be respected (positive support); and 'My family only seem to care about my performance' (classroom or soccer field) (negative support).

Responses on the SCQ were divided at the mean to create four family typologies: (a) High Support/High Challenge, (b) High Support/Low Challenge, (c) Low Support/High Challenge, (d) Low Support/Low Challenge.

The SCQ was used in this study to ascertain the soccer player's perception of their family dynamics of support and challenges. Their confirmatory responses to the positive support items and to the negative support items were summed. A total family support score was computed by subtracting the sum of the negative items from the sum of the positive support items (Wedemyer Moon, 2003). In Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider's (2000) study of adolescents the scores on the support scale of 5.5 or higher were classified as High Support and scores of 5.4 and lower was classified as Low Support. The Family Challenge Scale has 12 positive and 4 negative challenge items. Scores of 6 or higher were classified as High Challenge and scores of 5.9 or lower were classified as Low Challenge (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider's 2000; Wedemyer Moon, 2003).

In summary, the themes that consistently emerged from the literature review and the pilot study were those revealed via the pilot study of family, social class, social mobility and career development. Each of the four themes frequently recurred in the data and in doing so linked the information provided together.

A key finding from the pilot study was the students' emphasis upon career development via their soccer scholarship. A detailed discussion of student views and associated university personnel is presented in Chapter Five. However, the concept of career development within this research is revealing as regards what this says about the Dream in contemporary society (Atkinson and Housley, 2003).

As a result of having undertaken an extensive period of reflection upon the findings produced by the pilot study the two universities selected for the thesis were contacted. The selection process followed the decision to establish a clear series of guidelines regarding which institutions would be appropriate for the context of the research question. The professionalisation of sport within higher education has been established within the introduction to this thesis. It has also been established that it is typically the players at Division One institutions who are most likely to have sports scholarships made available to them as an incentive to study at and play for the university. As a consequence only the elite talent pool of high school students is recruited by university coaches. In order to research the motivations of students for undertaking a soccer scholarship it was therefore necessary to limit the parameters of the research to those students who have the highest likelihood of utilising their sports scholarship towards becoming a professional athlete (Division One). In order to facilitate an equitable comparison of teams it was necessary to find university teams which had comparable achievements over an extended period of time.

## **Main Study**

### **Selection of Universities**

The two institutions of West University and East University were selected on the basis that they fulfilled the criteria required of the study which would

allow meaningful analysis of student experience and the career decision-making process.

1. Both universities have consistently finished in the top five of their respective Division One NCAA soccer conferences (as voted upon by a committee of Division One coaches) (NCAAsports.com).
2. Both universities share the same reputation of being locations from which players are recruited by the MLS and offered professional contracts to play soccer (Peterson's Guide, 2006).
3. Both universities offer comparable financial scholarship packages as inducements to students. The financial packages provided by the NCAA are categorized as:
  - (a) the 'Academic Enhancement Fund': distributes financial aid to colleges to spend on improving the academic experience of athletes;
  - (b) the 'Special Assistance Fund', distributes financial aid to colleges based on the number of athletes receive Pell Grants and can be used to meet the players' needs above financial support offered by the scholarship (family circumstances etc.);
  - (c) the 'Student-Athlete Opportunity Fund', which is allocated to conferences based on the success of their members' sports programmes.

## **Questionnaire**

The first data collection method employed for this study was obtained from a questionnaire administered to scholarship students during the summers of 2004-07 at both universities (Appendix 1).

Subjects selected for inclusion in the study were first contacted via e-mail to obtain notes of interest and then formally invited to participate in the study following their reply and confirmation of consent. In exchange for student participation within the study they were then eligible to be entered into a lottery for several campus bookstore gift certificates. This incentive was used having researched the methodological issues relating to previous studies of undergraduate participation (Abowitz, 2005). The soccer coaches for both men's and women's university teams acted as liaison assistants within the study and actively encouraged students to complete the questionnaire.

There were 160 players who were contacted by e-mail in the first instance in relation to the study (80 players per university; 40 women and 40 men). The questionnaire contained closed questions and was administered to players at both universities. The questions were designed to gain insights on the factors that influenced their decisions to pursue an athletic scholarship in soccer. 154 fully useable questionnaires were returned, producing a response rate of 96 %. The advantages of using a self-administered questionnaire for studies of this type are that it ensured confidentiality and encouraged players (particularly the reserve players) who were not comfortable in discussing their career ambitions to participate in the study (Bourke, 2002).

## **Semi-Structured Interviews**

To supplement the research data from the player questionnaires, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 12 players and key personnel at the university (coaches and athletic directors who have a professional interest in the development of the players) (Appendix 3). The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted as follows:

In person:

- 12 players in total (3 women, 3 men from each of the universities).  
Selected on the basis that they formed a sample of gender, race and social class.
- 4 head coaches in total (2 from each university – male and female head coaches).

By telephone:

- 2 athletic directors (1 from each university).

In general the interviews lasted approximately between one and one and a half hours long and were designed to broaden the research perspective. Personal interviews added to the quality of the data, as it was possible to probe further on many issues. The aim was to obtain the subjective experience of the individual, thereby offering a detailed description of how one perceives, creates, and interprets one's world (Munroe-Chandler, 2005).

The researcher was mindful of the need to be reflective of his emotional and intellectual reactions to the interviews (Glaser and Strauss,

1967; Trauth, 1997) and in light of such maintained a diary as a rigorous documentary tool of the process. The journal amounted to a personal documentation of the research process, specifically the recording of emergent ideas and results, reflections on personal and participant experiences, and an ongoing examination of personal attitude that proved invaluable when analysing the interview data.

The 154 undergraduates selected for the questionnaire was composed of 40% males and 60% females. In total, 20% of the subjects were first-year students ('freshman'), 25% equally came from the second year ('sophomore') and third years ('junior') whilst 30% were in their final fourth year of study ('seniors'). The above final sample represents a balanced distribution of 'fraternity' members (51%) and those classed as 'independents' (49%). The sample was predominately white (90%), a figure that reflected the overall student racial composition at both respective institutions.

## **Data Analysis**

The data was analysed following procedures suggested by Miller and Kerr (2002). An overview of the recommendations provided by studies of a similar context is briefly outlined here.

According to Miller and Kerr (2002) the first stage within the process of inductive analysis requires the creation of 'units of meaning' or 'tags'. Such tags represent elements of text containing a single idea or thought. Following this procedure, meaning units were then identified and separated from the



remaining text. An inventory of tags was then created and cross-checked to ensure 'like meaning units' were assigned the same descriptive tag (Miller and Kerr, 2002) facilitating the development of 'raw' to 'higher order' themes.

A central principle advocated by Elias (1956) within the above process regards the development of a two-way interplay between what is currently labelled 'theory' and 'research.' In other words, he suggests that the 'empirical' and 'rational' dimensions of sociology should be constantly and consciously interwoven (Hughes, 1958). Figurational sociologist, Dunning (1999), argues similarly that sociologists should always relate their observations to a body of theory and their theory to a body of observations. This two-way traffic proposed by Elias (1956) incorporates the above philosophy in advocating a departure from abstract discussions of theory per se towards considering theory in relation to research. During the process of research for this study this idea was at the forefront. Thus, from one interview to the next reflection upon what had been said was undertaken and whether modification to the interview format was required in order to develop additional questions.

During the transcription of interviews it was essential to consider the questions and responses in relation to orienting concepts, including 'career', 'self-image', 'networks of interdependency', 'power' and 'control' (Becker, 1960). It was necessary at each point to reflect on whether the turning-points discussed had similar meanings for players, and if they interpreted fateful moments in similar terms. During the interviews and then on reviewing the transcripts throughout the course of the research process, it was necessary to constantly attempt to identify emerging patterns of behaviour among the

students. This process was cross-referenced with a colleague to help facilitate accuracy of interpretation.

Careful consideration was given to whether it was possible to identify 'categories of meaning' based on a number of core interview themes (Gratton and Jones, 2003; Mason, 1994; Silverman, 1985). Certain themes emerged, were then cross-examined thoroughly and reached what might be termed a saturation point. In other words, patterns of enduring behaviour were identified. At this point, new ideas and questions were incorporated, or new themes were probed to an extent not previously undertaken. Underpinning the totality of this research process, however, was the constant and conscious thought that was given to the changing balance between levels of involvement and detachment (Elias, 1956). The problem encountered, then, concerns how to maintain an effective balance between involvement and detachment such that insight towards the research question was facilitated. Bryman (2001) argues that, 'there is a growing recognition that it is not feasible to keep the values that a researcher holds totally in check' (p. 22). Figurational sociologists, however, argue that whilst researchers cannot be completely detached in their work, this does not mean that it is desirable, or possible, for them to be completely involved. Elias (1978) observed that:

... anyone who, under the pretext of saying what science is, is really saying what he (sic) thinks it should be, is deceiving both himself and other people (p. 52).

Therefore this study adopted the approach advocated by Maguire (1988) that encourages the researcher to self-consciously distance oneself from the object of study. Being aware of the need to strive to remain as detached as possible is in their view sufficient enough to sensitise the researcher. By referring to the players from the 'they' rather than 'we' perspective, the aim was to which show how 'the intentions and actions of the various groups are interlocked' (Maguire, 1998, p. 191) and retain objectivity during subsequent analysis.

## **Chapter Summary**

The adoption of an interpretive paradigm for this study is an attempt to provide an explanation and understanding of student decision-making. The approach is primarily concerned with the way in which the social world is not just something to be confronted by individuals, but is continually reinvented by its participants. The major criticisms that have been directed at interpretive sociological approaches have previously identified the time-consuming implications of such research, coupled with a lack of objectivity that occurs when researchers potentially over-identify with their subjects and lose their research objectivity. The establishment of 'trust' and rapport with the subjects is defended in this study as of paramount importance in facilitating the

necessary 'rich' data. To facilitate an understanding of the player's point of view it was necessary to understand the subject's definition of the situation. All social reality is, according to the paradigm, the result of beliefs and interpretations. Thus it ought to be a truism that no form of sociological research can proceed without a preliminary grasp of the subject's meanings. People, in essence will act meaningfully in relation to *their* definition of reality.

The major contribution of the interpretive research paradigm adopted for this study is the way in which it hangs flesh on the skeletons of the primary data generated. In the final analysis, interpretive sociology is about what soccer means to the lives of the subjects.

The themes of the study were established via a combination of an extensive literature review of scholarship athletes in the U.S. and a pilot study at a comparable institution to the selected experimental locations. The themes that emerged were categorised according to: family, social class, social mobility and career development. Questionnaires were completed by 154 students from the two selected universities in order to obtain supplemental biographical data regarding the acknowledged themes of the study (Appendix 1+2). To facilitate 'thick' and 'rich' descriptions of their world an interpretive approach was adopted to the study. This approach examines meanings that have been socially constructed and consequently accepts that individual values and views may differ. The interpretive paradigm adopted aims to elicit interviewees' views of their world and the events they have experienced. Twelve students were interviewed using a semi-structured format (Appendix 3). Analysis of the responses was contextualised using the framework provided by Csikszentmihayli and Schneider's (2000) 'Support/Challenge

Questionnaire (Appendix 6). The framework was originally developed for use in the study of talented teenagers by Csikszentmihalyi et al (1993) and later expanded for use in a national longitudinal study of adolescents (Moon, 2003). The developers of the questionnaire report that although they found a strong correlation between the support and challenge indices, the analyses of their findings indicated that the indices appeared to measure different family characteristics (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000; Moon, 2003). Responses on the SCQ were divided at the mean to create four family typologies: (a) High Support/High Challenge, (b) High Support/Low Challenge, (c) Low Support/High Challenge, (d) Low Support/Low Challenge.

The SCQ was used in this study to ascertain the soccer players' perceptions of their family dynamics of support and challenges. A total family support score was computed by subtracting the sum of the negative items from the sum of the positive support items (Wedemyer Moon, 2003).

## **CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS**

The focus of this chapter is to detail and discuss the responses of subjects towards the research question; what are the motives of American university students for undertaking a soccer scholarship? Gender differences within the results are identified where they are distinct and significant. As identified in the previous chapter, the results will be categorised into the themes of family, social class, social mobility and education/career development. A discussion of the results in Chapter Five will then provide an interpretive analysis of the American Dream and its meritocratic ideology.

The hypothesis tested within this study is that soccer scholarship students are a site for a cultural expression of the American Dream in which success and social advancement are crucial aspects (Maguire et al., 2002).

By following an athletic scholarship they are adopting what has been culturally regarded as an acceptable avenue of social mobility. The value of this study is in revealing the opinions of students undertaking a soccer scholarship, a previously neglected area of investigation. The views that are documented provide a valuable contribution towards reflecting upon notions of soccer and American exceptionalism (Markovits and Hellerman, 2001).

The data gathered for this study were obtained from a combination of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews administered to soccer scholarship students from 2004-2006. The subjects represent an illustration of undergraduate views from two institutions on the west and eastern seaboard of the U.S. The first instrument used for data gathering was a questionnaire.

### **Player Questionnaires**

All of the students at the time of the study were enrolled as full-time and registered as being in receipt of a soccer scholarship. Initially, students were contacted by e-mail and then subsequently invited to participate in the research. Questionnaires were then distributed by e-mail with the request that subjects should complete them on their own without contact with their team mates or families. Following the recommendations of Abowitz (2005) and Gratton and Jones (2003) students were rewarded for their participation in the study by being entered into a lottery for a gift certificate. The soccer coaches for each of the men and women's teams at both universities were asked to encourage players to complete the questionnaires by an agreed deadline.

The data was collated during a period of 3 months with a response rate of 96%. The respondents were then organised into groups according to their gender and year of study. The 154 undergraduates who returned useable questionnaires were composed of 40% males and 60% females

The questionnaire was designed to obtain a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data from the participants. The aim of linking qualitative and quantitative research within the same project was to facilitate a detailed understanding the issue which is broader than a single mechanism could potentially provide. According to Kelle and Erzberger (2004) such an approach has the benefit of allowing qualitative and quantitative results to converge and mutually confirm the same conclusions. The questionnaire was divided in two parts.

Part one was designed to provide a player profile of each subject (Appendix 1). Information ranging from biographic details to their views on the central themes of the study: family, social class, social mobility and career development were sought. The aim of part one of the questionnaire was to provide a player profile which would facilitate a context within which their views on motives for undertaking a soccer scholarship could be contextualised.

Part two of the questionnaire was designed to discover student views regarding the concept of the American Dream (Appendix 2). In order to achieve this goal it was necessary to obtain their response to eight statements. The aim was to discover whether they believed that social mobility is possible to achieve. Secondly, did students perceive their current and future socio-economic position as the result of their own individual endeavour or initiative;



or if family background is seen as the main driver to success and upward mobility in American society?

An example of the final questionnaire distributed to the students can be found in Appendix 1 and 2. The results of the questionnaires are presented below.

### **Player Questionnaire (Part One) (Appendix 1)**

#### **Social Class and Family Background**

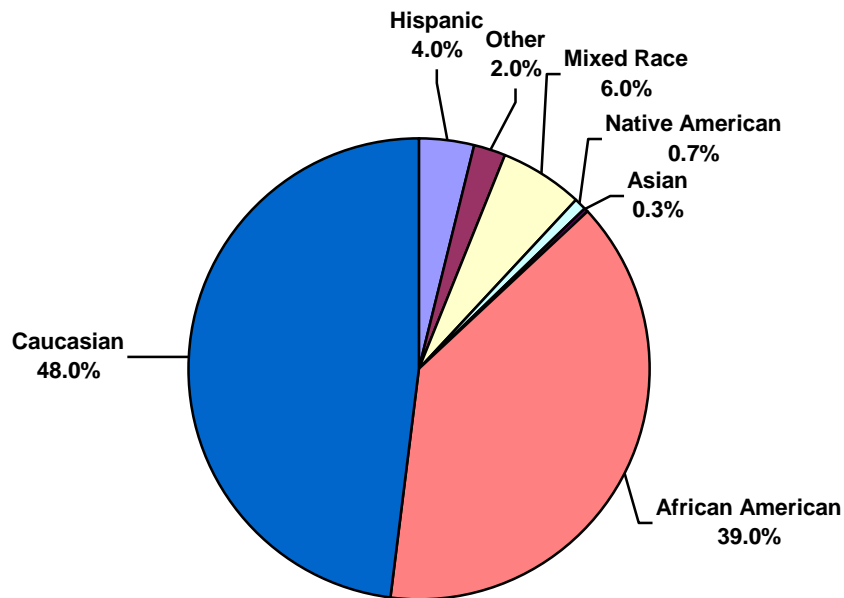
The questionnaire revealed that 53% of the 154 respondents identified themselves as being 'upper-middle' class, 29% as 'middle class', 12% as 'working class' and only 6% as 'upper class.' The above categorization of social class appears to broadly correlate with how the students perceived their family income. The majority of students (51%) stated that their family income was 'above average', 28% 'about average', 15% 'far above average' and finally, 6% categorized their family as having 'below average' income. The majority of students (71%) declared that both parents were full-time employed. This figure according to Abowitz (2005) is higher than the national average

but is beneficial in explaining the relatively high family income levels of the families.

According to the questionnaire results, parents represent a highly educated cohort of American society. 26% of all mothers within the study having completed a post graduate degree and 63% with a bachelor's degree. In comparison, 70% of fathers had gained a post graduate degree and 26% with a bachelor's degree. According to Sirin's (2005) meta-analysis of current literature regarding socio-economic status (SES) and scholastic attainment such results should not be surprising. Within his review he clearly identifies a medium to strong SES-achievement correlation between the educational level of attainment of parents and those of their children.

## **Ethnicity**

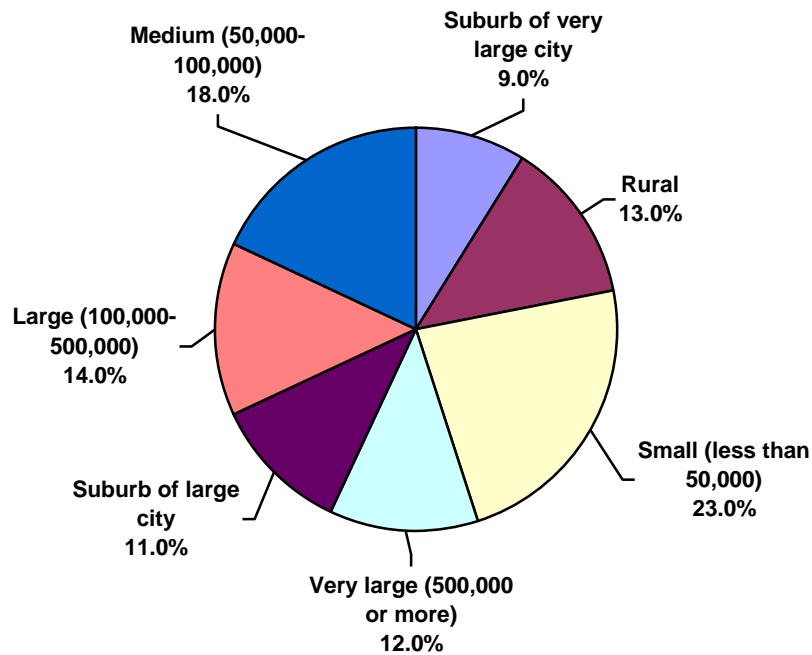
## Pie Chart 1: Ethnicity



According to the results of the questionnaire, 48% of respondents defined their ethnicity as Caucasian (56% women, 44% men) 39% as African-American (21% women, 79% men), 3% mixed race (11% women, 89% men) 3% Asian, Native American or other (2% women, 98% men) and finally, 2% as Hispanic (24% women, 76% men). Interestingly, students largely fell into distinct categories of playing position according to their defined ethnicity. 72% of Caucasian men and women identified themselves as 'offensive or attacking midfielders' and 66% of African Americans for both genders identified their position as 'defensive midfield.'

### Place of Upbringing

## Pie Chart 2: Home Town Size

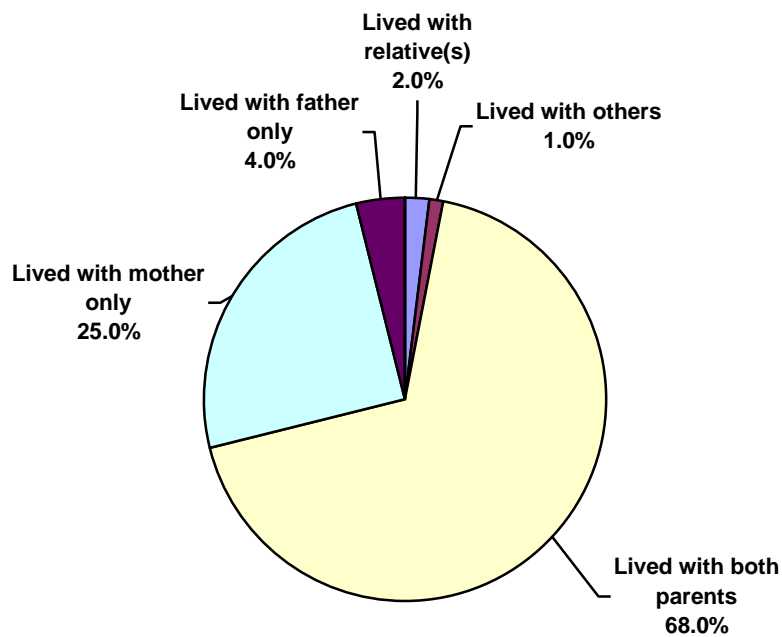


A clear conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that participation in high school soccer is not reflective of a stereotypical middle-class urban *habitus*, but occurs in a range of communities which vary in size from rural to large metropolises. This survey deliberately incorporated the categories 'rural', 'small city' and 'medium-size city' to question the notion that soccer remains the domain of the suburbs. The objective was to discover the environment in which players received their formative soccer experiences. Only 20% of all subjects identified that they were raised in a suburb. The stereotype that soccer has found a home in the American suburb is argued here to be a dated perception. Historically, it is accurate to present the view that soccer did initially find a sympathetic environment within the American upper-middle class. However, this was possibly due to the belief that upper-middle class parents find soccer to be preferable, especially when compared

to the perceived values and behaviour in other sports. The claim is that organized youth soccer has the 'right type of corporeal aesthetic for the upper-middle class' (Andrews, 1999, p. 48) clearly has substance. However, soccer's expansion into a wide range of communities is evident within this study.

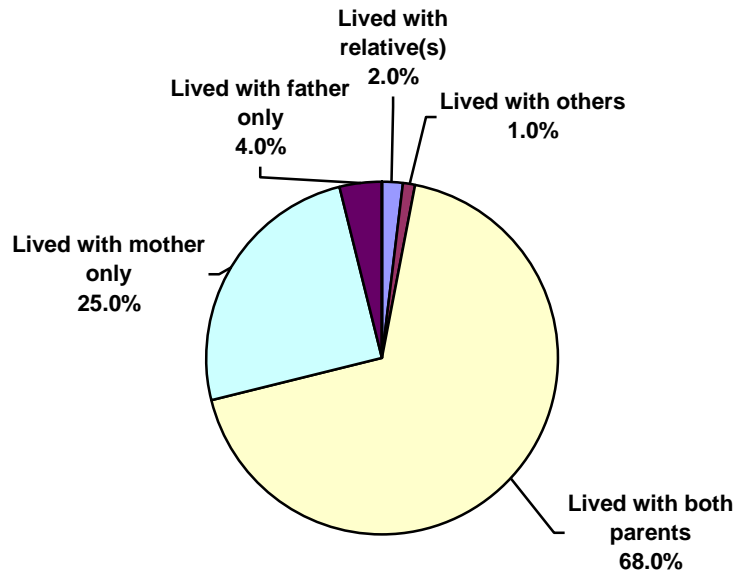
### Family Background

### Pie Chart 3: Family Background



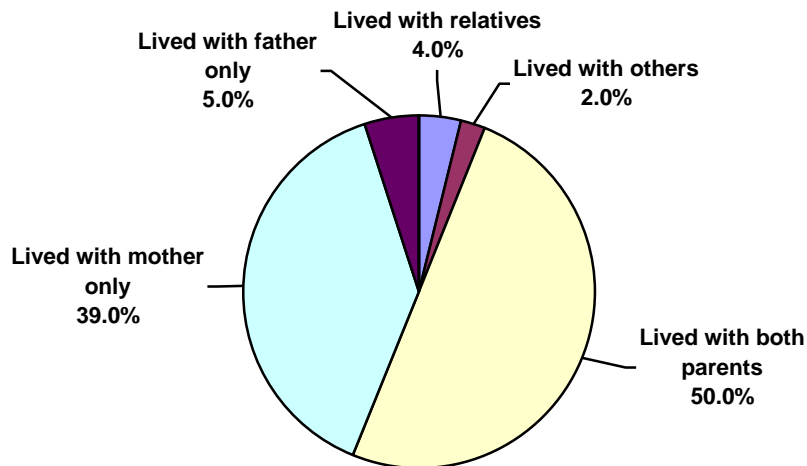
The questionnaire posed the question, what category most accurately defines your family circumstances? 25% lived with their mother only, 4% lived with their father, however the majority (68%) living with both parents. The study however revealed a significant difference in family structure between African-Americans and Caucasian students.

## Pie Chart 4: Family Background by Race: Caucasian



The majority (68%) of Caucasian students resided with both parents, only 29% lived with either their mother or father.

## Pie Chart 5: Family Background by Race: African American



As regards African-Americans the majority (50%) lived with both parents, 6% resided with relatives or others, 39% lived with their mother and 5% their father. The relevance of such findings will be addressed in Chapter Five.

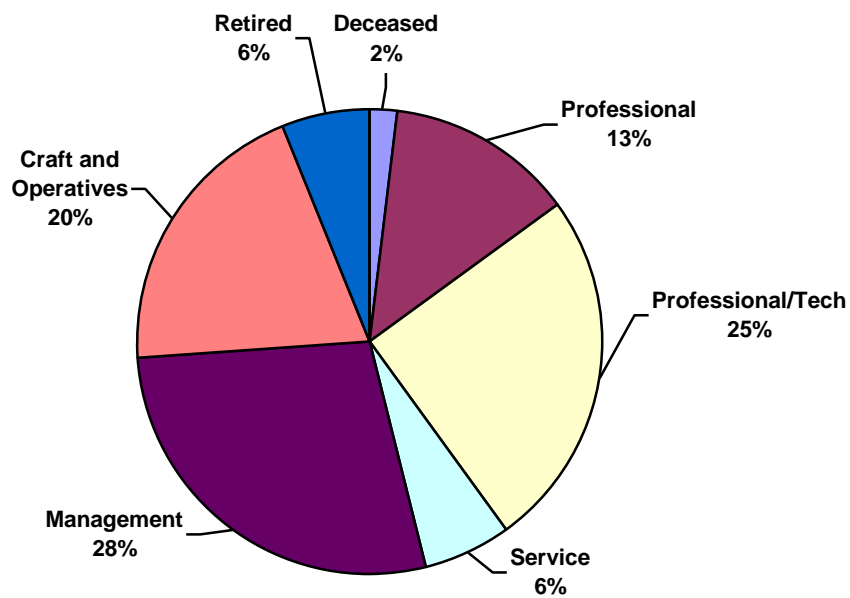
### Person of Greatest Influence

The questionnaire posed the issue of which individual had the most influence regarding their decision to attend university. The results of this question present similar findings to those carried out amongst 'grid iron' players (American College Football Association, 2003). Amongst Caucasian soccer players, 43% claimed that it was their father who had the greatest influence, this compares to 48% in the ACFA study. A similar correlation

between soccer and grid iron is observed with regards to African-American player views. 63% of all African-American soccer players, stated that it was their mother who had the greatest influence, compared to 69% of grid iron players.

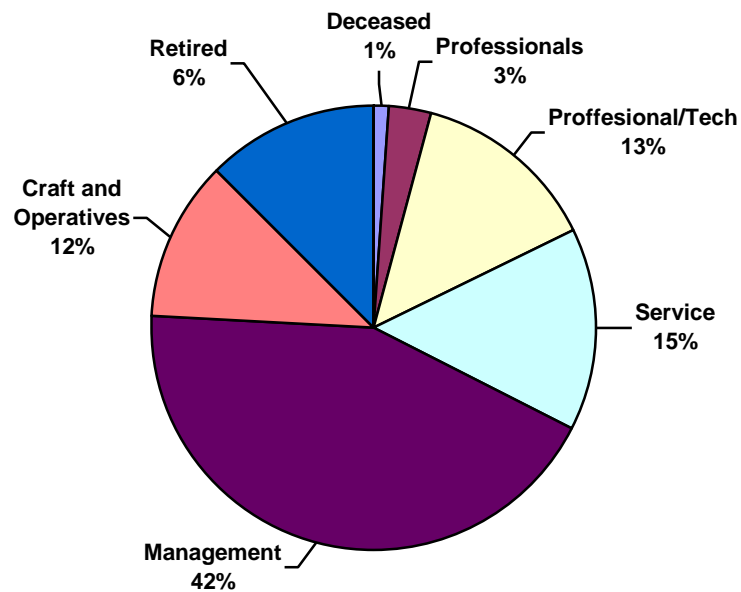
### Parents Occupation

## Pie Chart 6: Father's Profession





## Pie Chart 7: Mother's Profession



Employment within 'management' represents the most popular occupation amongst the players' mothers (42%). The category incorporates professions such as marketing, banking and advertising. The 'service' category is the next most common occupational category (15%). Within this section are retail sales advisors, beauticians and factory workers. The most dominant among respondent's father's occupations were those roles that fall within 'management' (28%). In addition, 25% categorised their father's occupation as 'technical'. These typically comprise local government and law enforcement roles (Appendix 4).

The impact of the profession of the parents upon student decision making is discussed in Chapter Five.

## **Family and Social Class: Summary**

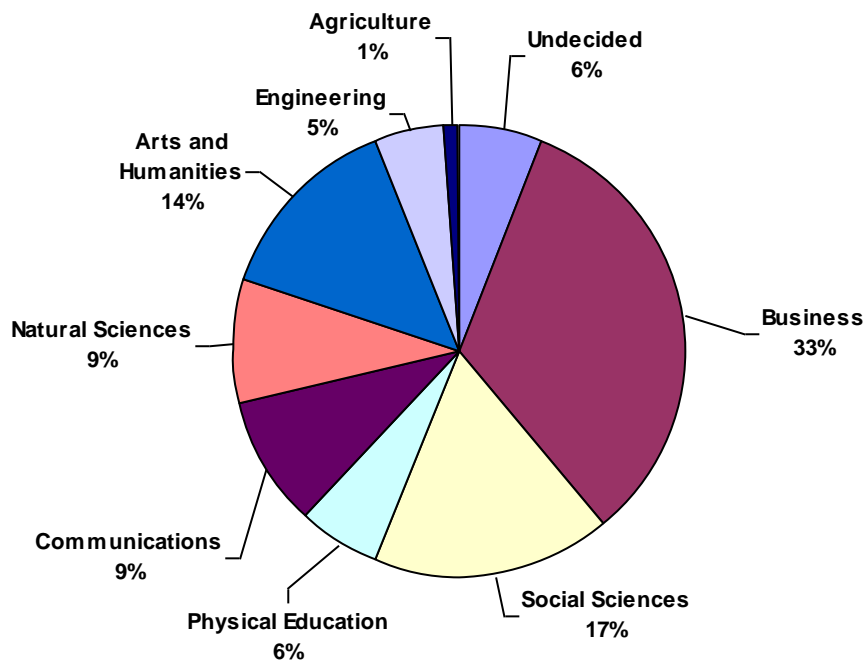
Almost 80% of respondents reported that their fathers held positions in 'prestigious' 'white collar' occupations such as corporate executives, lawyers and doctors. In contrast, 'blue collar' occupations comprised only 17%, the majority of which were involved in agriculture.

Clearly, the students in this sample were not dissimilar to those scholarship students identified in comparable studies (Abowitz, 2005; Delpy, 1998; Dubois, 1980; Heck and Takahashi, 2006; Sack, 1987). This cohort firmly identified themselves as being from an 'upper middle' class family background (54%) as opposed to those who categorised their family unit as 'working class' (13%), 'middle class' (31%) and finally 'upper class' (7%).

As regards family earnings, 52% defined their family income as 'above average,' 33% reported 'average' family income and 16% categorised their family earnings as 'far above average.' Only 5% declared that their family income was in their view 'below average.'

The parents of student-athletes in this research also resemble those in comparable studies and appear to be well educated (Abowitz, 2005). 73% of fathers according to the students had obtained an undergraduate degree with 38% of all fathers having then completed a post graduate qualification. In addition, mothers were also considered by their children to be 'well educated,' with 64% having completed an undergraduate degree with 30% having a post graduate qualification (see appendix for the 'professional categories' used within the player survey).

## Pie Chart 8: Major Field of Study



The most popular declared 'major' course of study for subjects was 'Business' (33%) amongst both genders surveyed, followed by 'Social Sciences' (17%) and 'Arts and Humanities' (14%).

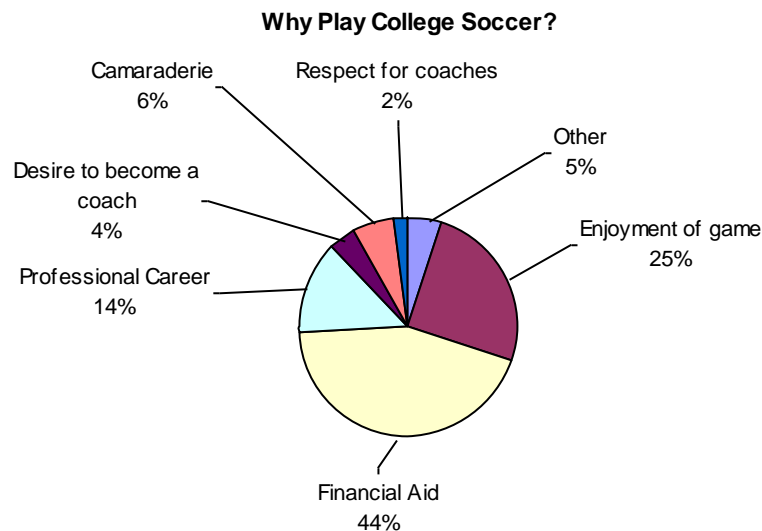
In Appendix 5 there is a 'Categorization of Majors for the Player Survey'.

### **Social Mobility and Education/Career Development**

According to previous studies, there is a widespread perception that a large number of student athletes consider higher education as a platform for professional sport (Abowitz, 2005, AFCA, 2003; Coakley, 2007; Sack, 1987). The evidence however is arguably conflictual due to the lack of longitudinal studies comparing university athletes with non-athletes in the same cohort.

According to research any upward social mobility that takes place can be the result of either 'contest' or 'sponsored' mobility (Turner, 1975). Contest mobility is argued by many to be egalitarian and indicative of the American Dream ethos (Coakley, 2007; Gorn, 2004; Turner, 1975). The concept declares that individuals can earn higher status and income through personal motivation and ability. Under sponsored mobility the alternatives are minimal and typically controlled by the elite. Turner, who proposed the distinction in the early 1960s, made the contentious claim that, in the U.S., contest mobility predominates, in comparison to western European societies where there is a greater emphasis on sponsorship pathways of mobility. This thesis sought to establish if such distinct and visible upward mobility pathways were being reflected within a soccer scholarship.

### Pie Chart 9: Reasons for Selecting a Soccer Scholarship



Players within the questionnaire were asked 'why they take part in college soccer?' Enjoyment and/or camaraderie was referenced by 31% (55% of women, 45% of men), 44% (52% of women, 48% of men) reported that a soccer scholarship allowed them to fund their education and finally only 14% (53% of women, 47% of men) played college soccer as a platform to pursue a professional career within the game. No significant differences were observed for either gender in terms of the above views. These responses were potentially highly significant for the conclusions of the study and were later raised within the context of the player interviews. The purpose of the subsequent interviews was to provide the interviewees with as much scope as possible to unfold their views as to their motives for undertaking a soccer scholarship. At the same time, they were provided a structure for what to focus upon in their answers, the purpose being to cross-reference the above responses as accurately as possible.

### **Attending college regardless of soccer scholarship**

83% of the players declared that they would attend college regardless of whether they had received a scholarship or not. Caucasians were significantly higher (92%) in this declaration than their African-Americans counterparts (77%).

## **Student-Athlete Decision Making (College Selection)**

The above results have clearly identified that there are a variety of factors that may inform and interact to facilitate the student decision-making process. The Player Questionnaire provided a range of results regarding what were the most significant variables in determining their selection of a college.

95% of all students stated that the 'soccer programme' was either very important or important (58% women, 42% men). Typically, the 'soccer programme' would refer to the 'win-loss' record that a team has recorded in recent seasons. This figure is commonly referred to as the number of games won compared to those lost and is frequently used as a point of reference within American sports for evaluating the level of achievement for any team.

Clearly, a major theme of the American Dream and sport is the idea of winning (Maguire et al., 2002). The players however, as is revealed within the interviews, did not appear to be obsessed with winning, but the balance of team performance along side other non-soccer related variables.

Of similar importance to the impression players had of the soccer program was the academic reputation of the prospective institution. 92% of players regarded this factor as very important or important (96% women, 88% men). A further significant factor was the coach. According to 90% of players they regarded him/her as very important or important. Characteristics that players found influential in their decision-making included the personality of the coach and whether the coach displayed enthusiasm and persistence towards their recruitment. The final core component of student decision-making related to the level of financial aid that they were likely to receive as a

scholarship athlete. 93% of all students considered the level of financial aid and any specific academic offerings as either important or very important within the overall process of decision-making.

### **Academic Experience**

The efforts of universities and the NCAA to ensure the academic integrity of intercollegiate athletics are well documented (AFCA, 2003; Cornbleth, 2002; Heck and Takahashi, 2006). The players were asked a sequence of questions which were intended to facilitate personal reflection upon their formative experiences during high school and currently within college. The following details provide a summary of the players' responses.

### **The Importance of Graduation**

The significance of obtaining a degree is the foremost consideration according to the players. When questioned regarding the importance of graduating from college, 98% held the view that it was either very important or important. The 2% that did not value graduation could be categorised as those who: anticipated failing their degree, were preparing to withdraw or defer for financial reasons or anticipated being offered a position in professional sport regardless of their academic record. No difference was observed regardless of the subjects' ethnicity or gender. This conclusion

supports earlier research that has followed college athletes upon graduation (Sack and Thiel, 1979). Such studies show that involvement in college athletics may not have an immediate impact upon earnings or social mobility, but may ultimately lead to higher occupational prestige and earnings in mid-life.

### **Academic Interest**

According to the results of the questionnaire, scholarship students recorded a positive correlation between their participation as an athlete and this stimulating their academic interest. 75% of the players believed their interest in academia had been stimulated since starting at college. 25% however had maintained the same level of interest in their academic studies. Such views appear to present a positive correlation between participation as a student athlete and increased enthusiasm towards academic requirements. Lapchick (2006) however, has recently observed that graduation rates for both male and female athletes' lag behind those of their non-athlete peers at Division One institutions. The principle concern being that the physical demands of practice placed upon student-athletes by their coaching staff negatively impact upon their academic commitments.



## Socio-Economic Background

Each player within the questionnaire was assigned a socio-economic description based on their parent's occupation and level of education. The resultant categories revealed that students felt their families could be defined as: middle class (26%), lower middle (22%), lower (20%), upper-middle (18%) and upper (14%). Interestingly, the questionnaire reveals that there is a correlation between individual's defined socio-economic circumstances and their Grade Point Average (GPA) scores (see footnote<sup>1</sup>). According to these results, students from an upper class background had the highest consistent grades at college. Over a third of this socio-economic group typically recorded 70% or above for their academic modules. Conversely, less than a quarter of all 'lower class' students were able to achieve this level of performance.

College GPA by Socio-economic Background				
Socio-economic Background	3.0 >	2.5-3.0	2.0-2.5	>2.0
Upper	37%	34%	25%	4%
Upper-Middle	33%	31%	32%	4%
Middle	30%	37%	30%	3%
Lower-Middle	28%	32%	35%	5%
Lower	22%	37%	36%	5%

<sup>1</sup> The GPA is the average of all the grades in classes that the student has taken in college ranging from 0-4.0.

'A+/A= 4.0 (outstanding); 'B'=3.0 (good); 'C'= 2.0 (average); 'D'=1.0 (poor); 'F' = 0.0 (failing)

An average percentage of 90-100% corresponds to a maximum GPA score of '4.0' on the student transcript.

A minimum GPA of 2.0 is required for a student to maintain their eligibility for scholarship according to NCAA regulations. This figure can be raised at the discretion of an institution.

Past research has demonstrated that social class is strongly associated with an individual's level of formal schooling (Lapchick, 2006). The studies of Lapchick and others have indicated that upper class students generally have higher career aspirations that make attendance at college imperative to the goal of realising their career ambitions. The explanation hypothesised for this finding is that there is a correlation between occupational mobility and academic performance. Grades subsequently become very important for students with high career ambitions since they indicate the ability to perform at a high level. The implication of such views is that social class provides both the motivation and the resources to pursue high grades within college. As a consequence students with high occupational aspirations would associate low grades with 'failure.' The impact of which should be that students from high social class backgrounds should perceive low grades as failure and 'drop-out' of college. Conversely, students from lower class families should have a low drop-out rate. However, what has been identified by this study is that there appears to be no direct correlation between student's social class origins and their chances of graduation.

In this study all categories of social class appear to value their academic grades and put in place strategies to maintain and improve them. This finding supports the 'contest mobility' pathway of the American Dream as contended by Coakley (2007). The notion that the Dream is an egalitarian concept which is attained through hard work and dedication is evidenced within this study.

## **Academic Standards**

Many social commentators have noted the increasing commercialization of college sports has made it even more difficult for universities to reconcile the widening gap between sport and the fundamental mission of higher education. According to Sack (2001, p. B7):

longer seasons, significantly lower admission standards for athletes, and the growing power of coaches over all aspects of an athlete's life are just a few of the changes spawned by the unprecedented commercialism that has invaded athletics departments.

Research has frequently documented the basic incompatibility of elite college athletics and what is termed their philosophical goal of 'educational primacy' (Duderstadt, 2000; Lapchick, 2006; Zimbalist, 1999). Eitzen (2000) has previously stated that coaches within this structure are under the intense pressure to win and as a result tend to ameliorate the academic responsibilities of their players by advising them to take less problematic modules. In October, 1989 The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics was formed by John S. and James L. Knight in response to more than a decade of highly visible scandals in college sports (Coakley, 2007). The goal of the commission was to study and report on reform efforts that recognise and emphasise academic values in a climate in which commercialization of college sports often overshadowed the underlying goals of higher education. The common perception of Division One athletics,

according to its critics is that they appear to exist in different worlds from their athletics programmes, particularly at institutions where some sports attract broad outside interest.

As a result of the above issues there appeared to be a degree of cynicism attached to student views regarding their prospective coaches and the objectivity of their guidance. The conclusion that student-athletes present is that their high school coaches are regarded as the most reliable source of objective feedback concerning NCAA academic and scholarship requirements. 48% of the players surveyed stated that their high school coach was the most objective and trustworthy source of information. This finding correlates with similar studies conducted with American football scholars (AFCA, 2003). Secondly, 29% of students used their high school career counsellors whilst 15% were informed about the NCAA regulations via their parents. The conclusion to be drawn from the above statistics is that students appear to be aware, yet cautious of the professional sports model that operates within higher education institutions. The implication being that students are wary of coaches delivering visions of grandeur combined with promises of a professional contract upon graduation. The issue that emerges is one of concern from students as to whether universities are providing a safe haven for participation and academic support. This anxiety is arguably compounded by the increasing role of agents within Division One sports. Although the NCAA is explicit in the stipulation that student athletes may lose their eligibility by dealing directly with an agent it does not preclude them from receiving advice and or guidance in proposals (NCAA, 2003). Sport can be a vehicle which significantly raises the educational attainment of many student athletes

from lower socio-economic conditions. The commercialisation of sport within higher education at Division One level has clearly influenced the minds of the athletes within this study. Educators, parents, coaches and administrators need to confront many of the broader societal issues concerning exploitation and manipulation of young athletes. The conclusions presented in this section raise concern over the moral conscience and ethical principles that exist within university sport at the highest level.

### **Financial Issues of the Student-Athlete**

Amateurism as it is promoted and marketed by the NCAA may according to its critics be 'one of the most illusory corporate veils ever conceived' (Slack, 2003, p. 147). As represented by the NCAA, amateurism contradicts the very essence of what a corporation is and does. Consider the principle of amateurism (Article 2.9) as published in the 1998-1999 NCAA Manual:

Student-athletes shall be amateur in an intercollegiate sport, and their participation should be motivated primarily by education ... student participation in intercollegiate athletics is an avocation, and student-athletes should be protected from exploitation by professional and commercial enterprises (p.9).

Despite the above sentiments the reality is that scholarships offer financial compensation for playing sport at college. Financial transparency and integrity is self-evidently a significant issue facing collegiate athletics in contemporary U.S. society. Given the commercial environment in which the student-athlete must operate the question was posed as to the influence of financial implications of participating within college soccer. The following information provides a summary of the 154 questionnaire returns.

### **Type of Financial Aid**

In order to contextualise the student results it is necessary to provide an overview of the types of financial aid available potentially to student-athletes. The scholarship amount awarded can vary considerably from one individual to the next and can range from a few thousand dollars to nearly \$30,000 for one academic year (Pennington, 2008; Slack, 2003). Athletic scholarships however, do not necessarily compensate the student for the full cost of maintenance and tuition fees incurred. Scholarships are typically offered on a percentage basis (for example, a 50% scholarship will cover 50% of the total cost for one year) (NCAA, 2008). Therefore, a university will frequently divide their scholarship budget into a number of lesser-value awards. For example, a university that has four 100% scholarships to offer per year may split them up to award eight 50% individual scholarships. Scholarships are provided on a yearly basis, generally renewable for four years: the normal time required to complete a U.S. undergraduate degree

(NCAA, 2008). Within this study, 55% of the players were in receipt of a full athletic scholarship (tuition, books and accommodation) (88% women, 60% men). 45% were in receipt of partial scholarships. An analysis of ethnic origin reveals that 85% of African-Americans and 64% of Caucasian players received a full athletic grant.

### **Player Perspectives: What players enjoyed most about being a soccer scholar**

Players were asked to state on the questionnaire what they enjoyed the most regarding college soccer and any perceived benefits they may have obtained. 73% indicated that playing soccer was the most enjoyable aspect of their university life. Typically players cited the excitement associated with being part of a Division One team. The importance of how university sport was perceived by the wider community was not lost on the players. A frequently identified feature of home games was the 'carnavalesque' atmosphere.

63% of students acknowledged that financial aid was imperative for education and represented the greatest advantage from playing college soccer. A further 35% observed that soccer at university had led to increased maturity on and off the field; reinforcing self-discipline and a work ethic. In drawing together how the results presented have contributed to the student decision making process it is necessary to return to the narrative of the American Dream. Gothard et al. (2001) referred to the role that myth and

dream play in American children's lives, often manifesting themselves in the child's attitude toward the world of sport. The popular narrative is that children and adults often dream of scoring the winning goal in an important game. However, despite such fantasies, the questionnaire data in this study reinforces the view that students have adopted a rather pragmatic approach to their scholarship and the realities of funding what is an increasingly expensive higher education. The dream of playing for the U.S. national team is clearly not a key influence in their decision to undertake a soccer scholarship. The student responses clearly reveal that pursuing a career in soccer post graduation is recognised as being statistically unlikely. The factors which were cited as mitigating against pursuing a career in soccer upon graduation were as follows: Desire to obtain a higher salary than was perceived available as either a player, coach, administrator or official (66%); Preference for a non athletic occupation (55%); lack of enthusiasm or fatigue from participating in soccer scholarship (31%); Poor relationship with a college coach (19%).

There was strong agreement among respondents however, in relation to emotive reasons (love of the game and the possibilities of winning trophies) for influencing their initial scholarship decision. Conversely, interviewees also stressed the practical reasons (i.e. the opportunities to make money, develop one's talent, and gain experience and knowledge).

Schulenberg et al (1991) and Gianakos (1999) referred to parental influence in prompting and facilitating career planning. The fact that a significant proportion (65%) of the subjects in this study joined a community-based soccer club in childhood is evidence of parental guidance with respect



to the respondent's choice of sport. The players' views on this issue (drawing on questionnaire data) are less clear. For example, 53% of questionnaire responses acknowledged that there was a correlation between their choice of career and their fathers' enduring level of enthusiasm and support. In comparison, the majority of respondents noted that their mothers were less of an influence (17%) in guiding their career strategy. These figures appear to be reflective of previous studies that have clearly identified the importance of the primary care provider within families (Bourke, 2002).

Caplow (1954) cited in Osipow (1968), has suggested that the crystallisation of a career choice may occur at any stage. The particular timing that is observed usually reflects one's culture. This crystallization of a career strategy occurred for the participants within this study at an early age as questionnaire data (and confirmed during interviews with students) reveal that 50% of respondents decided on soccer as a mechanism of career development when aged 15 years or younger (mean age = 13.6 years), some when they were just 7 years old. According to Osipow and Auster (1996), precise and specific occupational images are held by the majority of youth in the process of decision-making regarding their future careers. For example, adolescents may aim for a career in sport upon graduation to attain status and ultimately pursue the American Dream. Alternatively, they may use sport as a means of funding their higher education which in turn promotes contest mobility. Holland's (1959) theory of career selection and decision making is based on the premise that occupation is an expression of one's personality and thus, members of the same occupation have similar personalities and similar histories. In this instance, it might be argued that the majority of

students surveyed have similar socio-economic backgrounds, but any similarities in their family circumstances do not necessarily explain their motives for undertaking a soccer scholarship. The decision-making process which informed such actions is considered within both the second part of the questionnaire and the subsequent player interviews.

### **Player Questionnaire (part two) (Appendix 2)**

In order to discover student views regarding the concept of the American Dream it was necessary to obtain their response to eight statements organised within a supplementary questionnaire (distributed one month after completion of the first questionnaire and to the same students as in part one). The aim was to discover whether they believed that the American Dream is attainable? Secondly, did they perceive social class as a consequence of hard work and talent? or did they perceive their family as the principal factor in achieving upward mobility in contemporary America?

The questionnaire was distributed via e-mail and required students to record their views upon each of the eight statements by referring to the Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) attached.

The data reveals the following views. Firstly, college students do have confidence in the veracity of the American Dream. Player support for this statement is demonstrated by agreement with the statement that 'one can live well in America' (85%). Secondly, there appears to be an enduring confidence in the statement that success is no longer founded on family and

social class origins, but on individual endeavour. An individual's eventual social position is therefore a product of educational achievements and individual skill, not family background.

Finally, students reported a level of uncertainty regarding how social class was defined and within that a perception of 'success' and 'failure.' Students clearly identified that social differences in America are justified if individuals have not taken advantage of the opportunities available to them. This could be as a result of a lack of initiative or hard work. In addition, they appear uncertain whether there was a correlation between 'high' social class and whether this identified someone as having outstanding talent. What is apparent however is that family background is not viewed by college students to be the critical factor in determining upward mobility.

In summary, the questionnaire reveals that student-athletes do fundamentally believe in the American Dream. Secondly, there is considerable support for the idea that individual hard work and initiative, not family circumstances and socio-economic position, matters most in the process.

An analysis of beliefs according to gender reveals that men were more likely than females to support the idea of the American Dream. This finding supports previous research which identifies that gender dynamics in the U.S. have historically supported superior occupational and economic rewards for men (Abowitz, 2005; Morrison, et al., 2001).

The research presented reveals a picture of student confidence in upward mobility founded on an open system of contest (Abowitz, 2005). This may be partly explained by examination of the concept of class as presented

by Marx. According to Marx, class was the most important principle of social organisation and the chief motor of social development (Sugden and Tomlinson, 2000). As regards the context of modern sport, Guttman (1994) argues that sport was used in American society to sustain the status quo and the ethos that drove it. This rationale can be observed in the conceptual relationship between the idea of 'living well in America' being directly related to the means of production.

The data gathered clearly identifies that student-athletes do believe in the American Dream and the credo of achievement ideology that pervades it. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the achievement philosophy of the credo is fuelled by ambition. This view is succinctly summarised by Abowitz (2005) in stating that '... those who work hard earn their advantages. They deserve to live well' (p. 729). The corollary suggested by Gorn (2004) and others is that those who have failed are evidently those who did not work hard enough and are therefore not entitled to the equivalent results. Student-athletes in this study embody the values of Dream narrators such as Alger and Adams; they believe in striving to succeed (Gorn, 2004). However, students also represent the conceptual tension that surrounds Generation 'Y' notions of equity and 'fair shares'. As a consequence, students do not present themselves as being fully at ease with the ramifications of the American Dream.

All in all, they evince a modern version of the 19th century Protestant work ethic combined with a 'postmodern' discomfort at its logical consequences (Abowitz, 2005, p. 729).

## **Player Semi-Structured Interview: Results**

Player interviews were used to obtain detailed qualitative insight towards the participants' opinions and motivations for undertaking a soccer scholarship. Each of the 12 players interviewed was selected from the 154 subjects who participated in the questionnaire.

The players interviewed were students currently in receipt of a scholarship (full or partial) and, as such, all their experiences were considered valid for the purposes of analysis. Contact with some of the players had been made using information obtained from the head coaches at both of the selected universities who acted as 'gatekeepers'. The involvement of the four head coaches was very important in a small number of cases as without their reassurance it is unlikely that the players would have given up their time. A number of players were sent letters speculatively; in many of these cases, as was anticipated, the players did not reply. However, a number of players did respond. All players who were sent letters were asked whether they would be willing to be interviewed on a range of issues related to their scholarship. The players were told minimally about the likely areas of discussion. At the outset of the data collection period it was considered that had players known in detail of the likely questions to be posed they may have attempted mentally to construct 'appropriate' answers, or they may have discussed them with other players. This may have presented a risk of contamination. However, one consequence of this style of interview is that a number of players from time to time had difficulty when probed recalling specific details of their experiences.

The sample therefore was constructed on a 'snowball' basis. The players who were interviewed first were asked to recommend others who they thought may be prepared also to discuss their playing and career experiences. Attempting to be selective with a group who do not give extended interviews readily would have been a mistake. At the outset of each interview the players were given an assurance of confidentiality. Part of the 'access' problem involves a residual fear for players that they may be viewed either as openly criticising their teammates or team coaches or more simply as complainers. It was important to reassure them that their comments, whether positive or negative, would not be traceable to them. If they had not received this type of assurance they may not have responded to questions openly or freely. The use of player interviews as a data collection method was designed to interpret meaning to their experiences as they form identities and interact with others.

The player interviews were divided into two parts. Part one asked respondents to provide biographical details of their personal values as they related to family, social class, perceptions of social mobility and educational goals. These responses were then used to cross-reference the opinions stated within the questionnaire. Part two of the interview required subjects to reflect upon their wider notions of the American Dream and the specific reasons for undertaking a scholarship.

To supplement the players' opinions interviews were also held with the coaches and athletic directors of both universities; details of which follow the results of the player interviews. The objective of surveying support staff was to check for congruency between players and staff. The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted as follows:

In person:

- 12 players in total (3 women, 3 men from each of the two universities)
- 4 head coaches in total (2 from each university – male and female head coaches).

By telephone:

- 2 athletic directors (1 from each university).

In general the interviews lasted approximately one to two hours long and were designed to address the core questions of the study and broaden the research perspective. In order to facilitate thick, rich and nuanced descriptions, no time limit was necessarily imposed upon each interview, but was negotiated with each subject according to their personal circumstances and external constraints outside of the research process.

Personal interviews added to the quality of the data, as it was possible to probe further on many issues. The aim was to obtain the subjective experience of the individual, thereby offering a detailed description of how one perceives, creates, and interprets one's world. The key element to this interpretive approach was allowing the subjects to express how they viewed their experiences both before and since joining their college. A profile of each subject is provided in order to allow the reader to obtain a sense of the background and thereby potentially contextualise the responses of each participant. The names of the both participants and the universities within the study have been changed in order to ensure their anonymity. This ethical obligation was deemed necessary in order to encourage participants to talk openly and frankly.

The following section intends to provide an overview of each player interviewed within the study according to the research themes (family, social class, social mobility, education/career development). A brief biography of each participant is given below. It should be noted that each participant has been given a pseudonym in order to maintain his/her anonymity.

## **Overview of Players**

### **Melanie (19yr old Caucasian female)**

At the time of the interview Melanie was in her first year of a Social Sciences degree at West University. She was in receipt of an athletic scholarship worth \$5,000. Her preferred playing position on the women's team was that of centre half, however she was frequently required to play in her less favoured role of midfield.

Melanie described herself as being from a middle-class background, due to her parents both being involved as mid-level executives in sales. Her father was regarded by Melanie as a key figure in her life, taking an active interest in her playing career. This typically meant an extended telephone conversation after each game in which he would analyse Melanie's performance from her perspective. This she found to be rather tiresome on occasions due to the embarrassment that she received from her fellow teammates who were aware of her father's involvement. She said, 'Dad's heart is



in the right place, but he just doesn't know how stupid he makes me look when he starts to holler his half-baked ideas from the side line.'

**Erica (20 yr old African-American female)**

Erica was in her second year as a student at West University, studying Social Sciences, whilst receiving an annual \$2500 scholarship as a goalkeeper. She believed that there was less competition for this position at the university and therefore felt confident of being able to comfortably sustain her status as the best goalkeeper and thereby maintain her scholarship.

Erica described herself as being from a middle class background, both parents having been to university and now working in law enforcement. This she felt placed a great deal of pressure upon her to perform both on and off the field at university. She felt partly intimidated by the athletic achievements of her father who had previously played football at a high profile university. 'Dad achieved so much as an athlete that I find it difficult to please him, he was a star player at university and I'm not in comparison.' As a result, the parent of greatest influence in her family was her father with whom she often referred to as having a 'stormy relationship.' Erica felt that it was difficult to replicate the achievements of her father either as a student or athlete. Erica elaborated that possibly because of the demands placed upon her by both parents she was in a state of confusion regarding future career goals upon graduation.

### **Karin (20yr old Latin-American female)**

Karin was in her third year of studying Business at West University. Her preferred playing position was as a left wing. Karin judged that her main physical attribute was her speed. She said, 'it's probably the only reason why I was recruited by the university (soccer coach) ... I think coach hoped that I would blossom into a more technically proficient player.'

As a child from what she described as a traditional Mexican family she emphasised the role that her extended family provided in her upbringing. She expressed pride when reflecting upon the fact that she was the first person in her family ever to have ever attended university. This in her opinion was due to her parent's impoverished background. In particular Karin referred to the discrimination that typically existed within Hispanic traditional families. As a woman she was particularly proud of her parent's liberal attitude towards allowing her to attend university. However, without the \$3,500 per year scholarship she firmly believed that she would be unable to afford the eventual repayment of her tuition fees. In addition to the role that her parents played in being supportive, Karin also mentioned the importance of her former High School coach who acted as a mentor during the process of applying to university. 'My parents are not like the other parents from my neighbourhood, they are cool. It was Coach Perelli though at high school who gave me the idea that I could make it at university ... without him I don't think I would have even made it past high school never mind university.'

### **Byrony (20yr old Caucasian female)**

As a first year student at East University studying Business, Byrony was the most enthusiastic female subject interviewed with regards to her desire to pursue a career in professional soccer. Byrony's preferred position was as a right full-back. However, she was often required by the coach to play in the 'sweeper' position. She explained that she understood the strategy which underpinned her coach's decision, but resented the fact that it prevented her from demonstrating any potential to a prospective professional talent scout. 'I have some ability, that's not boasting, but I find it hard to keep my temper under check when coach consistently plays me out of position.' Despite this Byrony was confident that she could potentially increase her scholarship from its current \$5000 per year to the maximum of \$8000 with some 'careful negotiation skills.'

Byrony categorised her family as being 'upper-middle class.' Her entrepreneur father was self-employed and she cited him as the main influence in her life. Despite Byrony's ambitions to progress her career in soccer she had a pragmatic attitude towards her studies, emphasising the importance of achieving high grades in all of her business modules. The most probable outcome in her words was to 'follow in her father's footsteps.'

### **Bridgit (21yr old Caucasian female)**

Bridgit was in her third year of studying Physical Education at East University. She echoed the views of some of the other players interviewed

when she expressed concerns regarding the defensive role that she was forced to play on the team. Her preferred position was in fact as an attacking midfielder player. Despite this she was confident that her scholarship of \$4000 was amongst the highest on the women's squad. This she felt was a 'fair return for her contribution to the squad, on and off the field ... I know that the coach expects me to act as a leader.'

Bridgit described her family as being in the 'upper-middle class' category. This she seemed rather self-conscious about, due to the fact that her house mate was present in the room during the interview. Bridgit appeared reluctant to divulge specific details regarding her parent's occupation, describing them both as involved in education. However, this in her view created its own set of problems, due to their 'inside' knowledge of how higher education is assessed; she felt that they placed a great deal of pressure and responsibility on her to achieve the highest grades possible. 'My parents are focused on me achieving my potential which I respect, but at the same time they know the system and set the bar very high for me in terms of grades.' Despite Bridgit's efforts she felt that she would inevitably disappoint her parents due to comparisons with her elder sister (Ivy League graduate).

### **Tracey (18yr old Caucasian female)**

As a second year Engineering student at East University, Tracey described herself as 'hard working', particularly off the field. She firmly believed that her academic grades were of far greater importance than any athletic success that she may gain as a soccer player.

Tracey defined her playing position as centre-forward. The role she believed was possibly the most demanding in the entire squad, leading to pressure from the coach to 'produce' in each performance. 'I feel that as soon as you accept a scholarship the coach feels that they own you ... for \$3000 per year they don't. I know that I'm not on the best scholarship package here, but if I complain nothing will happen'.

As the youngest of three daughters, Tracey categorised her family as being 'firmly middle class' where the expectation was that each child needed to obtain a scholarship if they intended to study at university. Tracey accepted the pragmatic approach of her family and felt that it was unfortunately symptomatic of the economic reality for most middle class families in America.

### **Christopher (21yr old Caucasian male)**

As a third year student at East University, Christopher was recruited from his home town in Pennsylvania to study and play soccer in New York on a \$3250 scholarship. A key factor in making the decision to relocate was Christopher's High School coach who highly recommended the Liberal Arts and Engineering degree programmes at the university. As a former graduate of East University himself, the High School coach actively encouraged Christopher to attend his former institution. Christopher eventually opted to study Engineering whilst accepting a scholarship which over the course of his degree had ranged from \$3000 to \$3500 per academic year. In addition to receiving a scholarship Christopher partly financed any student debt by working as a part-time personal fitness trainer. The abiding concern that

Christopher had for his studies at East University was that his parents would not be left with responsibility for any debt that may accrue.

My parents don't need to remind me about how important it is to graduate. I will in any case because I'm doing ok academically. They also don't need to stress over having to pick-up any debt. I work whenever I'm either not playing or studying in order to take some of the stress off them.' This fear was in part due to the experience of his elder sister who had completed her law degree with debts in advance of \$120,000.

#### **Paul (19yr old African-American male)**

Paul was a first year student at East University. He described himself as one of the most enthusiastic players on the men's squad and enjoyed the reputation as being the 'midfield general' and labelled himself as the 'engine of the team'. Despite Paul's evident enthusiasm for playing soccer he was undecided regarding any future career ambitions within the sport. Paul was possibly the most enthusiastic and animated male participant in this study. 'I love the game, but I'm realistic. The main goal is to graduate, what happens after that is up to God'.

Paul described his family as being from a lower-middle class background, with his father in particular having experienced long periods of unemployment. The consequence however was that his father was then able to attend almost every game he took part in whilst at High School, a contribution he appreciated. Paul was quite candid regarding his parent's

financial circumstances and repeatedly emphasised that his \$3500 scholarship was essential to completing the degree. He reinforced throughout the interview that at no stage could he approach his parents for any financial support. Paul was also cognisant of the reality of maintaining his place on the soccer team. Failure to do so would inevitably lead to having his scholarship reduced or potentially removed entirely. As a result, he stressed that both parents emphasised to him the need to maintain his academic performance and not solely focus upon his athletic achievements. The need to focus upon the academic demands at university however did not prevent Paul from considering the possibility of a career in soccer. 'It's a dream, yes ... but a distant one at the moment. My parents have always emphasised to do my best, even when at elementary school I can remember them saying it to me ...do your best, that's all you can do. If that means that I turn pro then so be it.'

### **Mikael (20yr old African-American male)**

As a second year student at West University, Mikael was the only subject interviewed who confidently described his ambition as that of aspiring to becoming a professional soccer player in the U.S. elite domestic league. Mikael was evidently a talented forward, claiming that he was actively pursued by eleven different universities before deciding to study and play in California for \$7000 per year. The most significant factor he cited was the reputation of the head coach at the university and the network of contacts this individual

had within the professional structure. This he believed offered him a distinct advantage over friends from High School who had opted for a rival university.

Mikael identified his family as being categorised as 'lower class.' This he felt was the primary reason why he would succeed in achieving his dreams of playing professionally either in the U.S. or abroad. He believed that this gave him the 'hunger' to persevere when others on the team did not. Inspiration for his ambition was partly fuelled by both the need to financially assist his mother and three younger siblings and also by the U.S. international Freddy Adu. As a fellow African-American, Mikael cited Adu as a role model for aspiring players. 'Freddy has given a lot of black Americans the inspiration that we could be a pro. His contract with Nike when he was 13yrs old was fantastic'. Mikael, however did have a pragmatic attitude towards his academic responsibilities. As a Social Science major he was prepared to consider the possibility of working within either health care or social work that completion of the degree would potentially offer. 'I think that my mother would be proud of me regardless of the career that I have upon graduation. As long as I'm happy and give my all then she'll be happy also.'

### **Pat (19 yr old Caucasian male)**

As a second year Social Sciences student at West University, Pat described himself as a 'stopper' or defender. Pat's attitude towards his \$2750 scholarship was interesting in that he clearly stated that no financial inducement was considered when considering where to study. The fact that



he obtained a scholarship was significant in terms of the status that it afforded both 'on-campus' with fellow students and to a lesser extent with his family. Pat described himself as coming from what is frequently regarded as one of the most affluent communities in California (Palo Alto); as such Pat represented the least socially mobile member of either team within the study. Pat clearly identified an unusual attitude towards his soccer scholarship by identifying the prestige and status that soccer had within his parent's community, this he felt was more of a factor in encouraging him to retain his place than any distal career goals. 'I think being a soccer player is much more impressive to my old friends from high school than it is for my parents. They won't admit to it but they are snobs. I think they would much rather preferred that I was on an academic scholarship.'

### **Ian (18yr old Caucasian male)**

As a first year Business studies student at West University, Ian clearly identified himself and his family as 'born again Christian'. Despite this statement, Ian was dressed in what appeared to be military paraphernalia and presented himself as a rather reluctant interviewee. 'I find it awkward to talk about my beliefs and values at university; it's not the kind of thing that goes down well in the locker room. So, I tend to keep my values to myself.'

Ian categorised his family as being 'upper class', but was unprepared to identify either of his parent's occupations, simply referring to them as 'working within our church.' The advantage of this was in Ian's view, that it allowed both parents the flexibility to attend all of his home games. In relation

to soccer, Ian highlighted the conflict between the demands of both his scholarship versus his academic requirements. Despite the pressure that Ian felt to perform academically he maintained an ambition to potentially pursue soccer as a career at some stage in the future, but also considered a potential career as a 'lay-preacher.' The possibility of combining both was something that Ian had clearly considered and cited several high profile players whom he considered role models. 'I have a lot of respect for Kaka from Brazil, not that too many of the guys on the team are aware of his values. From what I understand and have read about him he shares my family's Evangelical outlook. Everyone in my family just wants each other to achieve their own personal goals'.

### **Samuel (19yr old Caucasian male)**

As a third year student at West University, Samuel had not at the point of the interview declared his major course of study and was clearly uncertain as to future career orientation. Samuel was conscious of the need to be as financially independent as possible during his career at university; the \$3750 scholarship he received was a significant factor in assisting this goal. The eldest of three brothers, Samuel described his family as being 'firmly middle class.' As a result of his father's early retirement due to illness, Samuel was sensitive to the need to try and obtain a high income occupation upon graduation. As a member of a religious family, Samuel stated that his parents had impressed upon him from childhood the need to do well, but within what he described as a 'Christian ethos of fair play.' As a result Samuel recognised

his limitations as a player, but enjoyed the ethos of training and dedication that the coach instilled within the team. 'I love the game (soccer) don't get me wrong, but I recognise the importance of graduating with a good degree and for me that means maintaining a GPA between 3.5 and 4.0. If I can do that then I'm confident that all the hours training will have paid off.'

The above summaries are designed to introduce the players selected before more detail and analysis is provided subsequently in this chapter. The key elements revealed from the above summaries can be categorized as follows. Firstly, each player recognised the importance of a scholarship in order to finance their university education. As a consequence, each player emphasised the pressure they felt under to sustain the required academic grades. The pressure was for the majority directed from their parents and to a lesser extent due to sibling rivalry. However, the main source of expectations and resultant player anxiety was the father of the family. The father was noted by players as having the key role in both determining and shaping their child's academic and sporting objectives. The players for the most part recognised that their father's wanted them to achieve their potential, but were uncomfortable with the manner in which this was articulated. Finally, all players emphasised the importance of balancing their academic responsibilities with their sporting requirements. The ability to graduate was fundamental to their career strategy. A minority of the players declared an ambition to further their career in soccer, but this was conditional upon firstly and foremost obtaining their degree.

Table 4 (below) provides a synopsis of the players interviewed and is intended to provide insight towards the core question of this thesis and reinforce the key themes for the interviews.

Table 4. Synopsis of Player Details

<b>Student Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Playing Position</b>	<b>Family / Social Class</b>	<b>Career Goal</b>
Melanie	19	Caucasian	Female	West University (1st year)	Defender	Middle	Social Sciences
Erica	20	African-American	Female	West University (2nd year)	Goalkeeper	Middle	Social Sciences
Karin	20	Latin-American (Mexican)	Female	West University (3rd year)	Forward	Lower	Business
Byrony	20	Caucasian	Female	East University (1st year)	Defender	Upper-Middle	Business / Professional Soccer Player
Bridgit	21	Caucasian	Female	East University (3rd year)	Defender	Upper-Middle	Physical Education
Tracey	18	Caucasian	Female	East University (2nd year)	Forward	Middle	Engineering
Christopher	21	Caucasian	Male	East University (3rd year)	Midfield	Lower-middle	Engineering
Paul	19	African-American	Male	East University (1st year)	Midfield	Lower-middle	Undecided / Professional Soccer Player
Mikael	20	African American	Male	West University (2nd year)	Forward	Lower	Professional Soccer Player
Pat	19	Caucasian	Male	West University (2nd year)	Defender	Upper	Social Sciences
Ian	18	Caucasian	Male	West University (1st year)	Forward	Upper-middle	Business
Samuel	19	Caucasian	Male	West University (3rd year)	Midfield	Middle	Undecided

In order to provide detailed analysis of the subject interviews consideration was given to an appropriate analytical framework. As identified in the previous chapter, the contextualisation of interview results was based upon the 'SCQ' model (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000). The 'Support/Challenge Questionnaire' (SCQ) originally developed for use in the study of talented teenagers allows the reader to ascertain the soccer players'

perceptions of their family dynamics of support and challenges. This is achieved by grouping player responses into a series of four discrete quadrants.

## **Family Typology**

Similar to Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider's (2000) study, this research generated several shared themes which emerged across all subjects. For example, each participant stated that their parents wanted them to achieve their potential, expressed simply as 'be the best that they could be in school, in soccer and in life.' The players also indicated that they believed their parents wanted them 'to decide for themselves out what their career should be based upon what they excel within'.

Although there are clear similarities across subject family backgrounds, there are also differences that are apparent around four central themes: (a) family interaction, (b) communication, (c) expectations, and (d) goals. The procedure for relating the experiences of the participants and their family dynamics will be summarised using the framework initially offered by Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000), and later employed by Wedemyer Moon (2003) into the four quadrants: High Challenge/High Support, High Challenge/Low Support, Low Challenge/High Support, and Low Challenge/Low Support.

**Table 5 : Summary of Players' Experiences: Family Typology**

	HC/HS	HC/LS	LC/HS	LC/LS
Family Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Parents involved in outside activities (volunteer)</li> <li>-mutual involvement in a variety of activities e.g. church</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Parents less involved with soccer (parents do not go to all home games)</li> <li>-student has less understanding of what their parent's outside activities are</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Students are with their family frequently</li> <li>- student often lives at home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Limited interaction with their parents - Parents come to a limited number of games</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Bi-directional</li> <li>-talk daily on either the telephone or via e-mail</li> <li>-discuss current events</li> <li>-opinions validated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Parent frequently informs the student what they can do better</li> <li>-Both genders talk to their father more about soccer</li> <li>-talk to mother more about school and friends</li> <li>-parent questions what they want</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Family appear to be concerned about one another</li> <li>-positive / open communication</li> <li>-talk daily</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Very limited / no in-depth conversations</li> <li>-no communication about expectations</li> <li>-no set times to talk</li> </ul>
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Parents stress the importance of practice</li> <li>-future-oriented goals</li> <li>-care about each other's goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Parents stress the importance of making a commitment</li> <li>-friends are important to soccer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Parent doesn't 'push'</li> <li>-Student feels that parent "knows their limits"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Parents do not set goals</li> <li>-parent does not influence enjoyment of soccer or future career goals</li> </ul>
Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Student and Parent agree what is expected</li> <li>-choice whether to play</li> <li>-desire to do well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Parent emphasises "not give up / to try hard ... do well in school"</li> <li>-finance is discussed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Parents have high expectations, but not pushed</li> <li>-student has a choice to play or not at university</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Parents emphasise "play hard"</li> <li>-student not sure if they have a choice to play or not at university</li> </ul>

				(soccer scholarship)
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According to how subjects responded within the interview they were then grouped according to the above categories.

### Samples of Participants Views (according to category)

#### **High Challenge / High Support** (Ian, Tracey and Samuel)

Ian is an 18-year-old white, male who reported both High Challenge and Support. He was formally dressed in a suit and tie. He was courteous throughout the interview, often replying, 'Yes Sir.'

Families within this category appear to be usually involved with each other, as well as with other community groups such as the Church. Both of Ian's parents also volunteered extensively in the local community. As far as family experiences and soccer Ian's mother is the soccer team manager of a local junior team and also assists as an administrator on the Olympic Development Program (ODP)<sup>2</sup>.

Communication in High Support/High Challenging families is typically more open and occurs more frequently (Wedemyer Moon, 2001). For example, Samuel stated, 'as a family our main time to talk is in either the morning [if I'm sat at the breakfast table] or over dinner in the evening.' This

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<sup>2</sup> The US Youth Soccer Olympic Development Program, or ODP as it is more commonly called, is a national identification and development program for high-level players. The program identifies and develops youth players throughout the country to represent their state association, region and the United States in soccer competition. ODP teams are formed at the state association and regional levels, made up of the best players in various age groups. At the state association level, pools of players are identified in each eligible age group, brought together as a team to develop their skill through training and competition (source: [www.wiyouthsoccer.com](http://www.wiyouthsoccer.com)).

interaction can be summarised as a 'two-way open dialogue, where Samuel felt able to talk to them, as well as they can talk to him.

In relation to soccer, Ian stated that he knows and respects the importance of their expectations. 'My folks expect me to always give my best and take it (university academic and sport commitments) seriously'.

With reference to goal setting, Ian, Tracey and Samuel highlighted the conflicting demands and time requirements between their university studies and soccer. Tracey stated, 'I would like to stay on the scholarship programme, but the sessions are so intense. My grades are suffering and I'm starting to think is it all worth the effort. I'm letting everybody down at the moment, my folks, my professors and me.'

As can be seen from the above interview excerpts with the players, several elements appear important in the category of High Challenge and High Support family dynamics. Some of these include the significant amount of time spent together, specifically around soccer, the openness and frequency of communication, which allows for the opportunity to discuss expectations, and the goals that are set which reflect future orientation (Wedemyer Moon, 2003).

Communication



With communication the key points to reflect upon are the frequency, breadth, and substance of the information that is shared between parents and children (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000; Wedemyer Moon, 2003). The following section presents examples from the interviews with Ian and Samuel, which are indicative of 'positive communication.' Ian reported that he and his family frequently discuss issues such as soccer, school, and current events. He had this to say regarding the range of information he consults with his parents about, 'I'm always raising soccer as a subject in our conversations. Probably a lot more than I should or they really to hear.'

#### Family Interaction

This dimension involves considering the level of involvement among family members. The category includes being conscious of common interests and level of joint activities (Wedemyer Moon, 2005). Ian and Tracey both discussed how their mother was still involved with their local community soccer team even though they had left to attend university. Both Samuel's parents, as well as Ian's parents are highly involved in Church related activities. One particular activity involved Tracey directly with her family included 'working out' with her father at the local athletic track.

#### Expectations

Samuel stated that his parents constantly remind him of their expectations, 'They want me to be the best I can be and help me set goals.'

They expect me to do have core values, and handle my money wisely. I think a big part of this is fear on the behalf of my father. As you know he had to take early retirement because of illness and he's worried that if I ever came and asked him for more support than I already receive then he'll be placed in an awkward situation. Bottom line he won't be able to help me.'

## Goals

Tracey emphasised the importance of setting 'reasonable goals,' both academically and in terms of her soccer ambitions. She gave this example to summarise her philosophy towards university, 'I drive myself, probably too much for my own good, both on and off the field of play. Knowing when to stop would be good. I kind of have the same approach towards my academic responsibilities. I keep on pushing myself to go further and faster. I will push myself and get every last ounce of ability out of my studies.' Following university Tracey demonstrated a pragmatic view of her employment options. 'I'm an engineering major which opens up a few options for me down the line. I think after four years of playing soccer every day, I will have had enough of running around a field. My intention is to use my degree to get a 9-5 job.'

## **High Challenge / Low Support** (Paul, Melanie, Bridgit)

Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) defined this family typology as putting success above everything else. Inordinately high expectations, goals,

and competitiveness are conveyed to individuals in an external, non-communicative manner.

Paul (19-year-old African-American male) described family interaction as being dependant upon sport (either taking part or watching on television). Both he and his younger brother, age 16, concentrated on playing soccer, to the exclusion of other sports throughout their latter high school years. Although Paul reported spending a lot of time around sports-related activities with his family during his formative years, he stated:

Both of my parents work long hours. I think they've always worked long hours, so I guess it was my dad his love for it [sport] rather than doing stuff together which has kept the fire burning.' He's cool though and appreciates that I may get cut from the team. As long as I work hard he'll support me whatever job I end up doing.

The above represents what appears to be a common-reference point for the subjects, that of ambitions potentially fuelled by a fear of occupations which in their view would represent 'failure.'

When asked about future goals, Paul highlighted the possibility of coaching soccer after college, but was more concerned with obtaining a degree which would offer him career possibilities currently in his view unattainable. 'Soccer is fun and I enjoy the camaraderie, but I'm no Pele. If it helps me to pay my way through college and get out of town I'm happy.'

Finally, Melanie had this to comment regarding expectations, 'The more they [my parents] talk to me, the more I'm forced to consider their expectations and not my own. Maybe that's a good thing, I don't know Am I selfish? I usually try and fulfil my expectations independently, by myself without talking a lot about it.'

### Communication

All three students within this category presented the view that soccer seemed to be the only in-depth subject they were able to raise with their parents. However, each student felt a degree of anxiety when the conversation turned to a discussion of future goals related to both their academic work and athletic responsibilities.

### Family Interaction

Bridgit highlighted that her parents are highly involved in her soccer at university, almost to the point of 'suffocation.' When I asked how much time she spends away from the family during the week she reported, 'only when we travel to away games... 48 hours, it allows me time to decompress away from them which is probably a necessity'.

### Expectations

The interview with Bridgit raised an interesting point with regards her impression of parental expectations for her career following the scholarship. For example, Bridgit commented that her parents frequently predicted that she 'would make a wonderful waitress or something,' this she thinks although said in jest reveals that her mother in particular believes that she is not a highly motivated student.

I'm constantly asked by dad to consider my playing position. Things such as whether I should consider playing offense. But, I like my current position [defense]. Sometimes he thinks he knows more than my coach, it's embarrassing.

## Goals

Paul discussed throughout his concerns of, 'not wanting to be the best soccer player, but above average.' However, this he believes has caused a great deal of conflict in his family and in particular with his father. Paul noted that 'dad has tried to get me to try harder in games and catch the eye of the coach and make sure that I'm starting each game.' This is clearly an example of the student perceiving that his parents having expectations or goals that may not fit with their motivation for playing soccer.

## **Low Challenge / High Support (Byrony)**

## Communication

The interview revealed that Byrony has a great deal of respect for her parents and this she believed was reciprocated. The importance of the well-being of all family members was expressed in her interview. There also seemed to be a significant level of interaction, including the father attending a high percentage of games, including tournaments.

## Family Interaction

A consistent theme that emerged from the interviews is the mutual interest in spending time in one others company. 'I respect what dad has achieved in business and I think that possibly some of those work hard/play hard traits have rubbed off on me.' Byrony evidently enjoyed the company of her father and this appeared to be reciprocated. 'He is pretty much my best friend. I know that doesn't sound cool for a 20yr old woman to reveal that, but he is. He usually knows when to stop pressurising me. Although, I'm only in my first year and maybe that will change if my grades start to suffer!'

## Expectations

Byrony commented that her father's expectations reveal that, 'Dad has ridiculously high expectations of me, but he does not push them on me all the time, he kinds of goes in peaks and troughs.' She also reported that, 'He

never tells me he expects more because he knows I am always trying my best.’ In addition Byrony reflected that her father is not like some of her team mate’s parents that she describes as ‘driving’. ‘It feels like they [parents] allow me to choose my own course kind of ... with some prodding!’ Both of Byrony’s parents appear to have an active role in shaping her expectations both current and future. However, it is clearly her father who she has the most admiration for and who has the dominant role in guiding and shaping her expectations for university. ‘Dad was a good athlete at university, probably better than I am, but he didn’t become successful in business because of any passion he had for playing sport, it was through good grades.’

## Goals

It was difficult to determine from the interview with Byrony as to what extent her parents influenced her goals and aspirations before deciding to undertake a soccer scholarship. This appeared to be a topic which she felt reluctant to elaborate upon. She regarded her parents as having a ‘laissez-faire’ attitude towards specific goals. This she felt reflected their ‘laid-back, hippy approach towards life in general.’ However, a supportive environment in which Byrony was allowed to take responsibility for her own actions was clearly evident in the interview. However, it was clear that Byrony was highly influenced by the recommendations that her father had given her before selecting to study business at East University. As a successful businessman he had influenced her decision to study in New York. ‘Dad knows the reputation of East University and its Business School from when he was an

undergrad. He fully appreciates what it could do for me if I choose to obtain a job within business. To say he was pleased when I took the soccer scholarship here would be an understatement.'

### **Low Challenge / Low Support (Erica)**

#### Communication

There appeared to be a limited degree of communication among Erica's family members. Overall Erica reported that she spent approximately 1-2 hours talking to her father on average per week including weekends. She also reported that there is very little that she talks to him in-depth about. She had this to say about their communication style, 'When he does ... I don't and vice versa.' As regards her mother, Erica revealed that her biological mother had died over ten years ago and that her father had re-married three years ago. As a result, Erica was raised in what she described as 'blended' family in which she felt 'increasingly distant from her father's wife.'

#### Family Interaction



## Expectations

Erica described that when he does try to talk to her father regarding expectations and aspirations, 'they are stormy talks.' She also reported, 'I am not sure what he expects of me.' This sense of confusion was apparent throughout the interview and in her view partly complicated by the views of her step mother. 'I think Dad is trying to be sensitive to her views and at the same time maintain his ... as a result I kind of make my own mind up as regards life.'

## Goals

Erica expressed an issue regarding goal setting in that they, as a family, try to establish goals, such as purchasing a new laptop computer and how she would achieve this goal. She also raised the point that, 'I just kind of do whatever I want.' This evidently has created some issues with both her current and previous soccer coach. Erica observed that 'sometimes I can appear a little dreamy and spaced out. I am actually thinking about what I'm doing, but the coach doesn't often see it that way.'

## Family Conclusions

The player interviews revealed a subsidiary question within the study, 'How do the players experience family dynamics of support and challenge and

does this influence their decision making?' The participants were organised into the four family typology groups: HC/HS, HC/LS, LC/HS, and LC/LS. Interview data was used to assess this question. The researcher's bias needs to be made overt, in that there was the possibility of looking for particular themes once the participants were categorized. Another point to mention is that support and challenge sometimes seemed to go hand in hand and it was hard to distinguish between the two complex terms.

Most males reported high levels of support and challenge from their families. For the females, the level of support and challenge offered varied greatly. Support seemed to be expressed in various forms ranging from, 'they [parents] help me with my studies' to 'they [parents] come to all of my games.' In relation to soccer, macro issues and regardless of category, most subjects reflected that their parents were supportive (Wedemyer Moon, 2005). Particularly with soccer this would seem to be a given, based on the level of soccer their children are playing. As a general rule, Csikszentmihalyi (2000) explains that:

the most effective families appear to be those that give teenagers the sense that they are loved, together with the sense that much is expected from them. This combination is related to students' self-esteem, as well as to their feeling that their present actions contribute to the future (cited in Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000, p.138).

The above interview results reveal that students scholarship decisions appear to represent a flexible vehicle through which ideological associations

with the Dream are reinforced. Scholarship therefore becomes a cultural symbol and metaphor both for the parents and recipients of the athletic stipends. The findings reveal a common hypothesis derived from various theoretical standpoints in sociology which state that the family is a significant agent in socializing of their children to the cultural values of the American Dream

The next section of the interview results will now focus upon the themes of social class and social mobility.

### **Social Class and Social Mobility**

It is clear from the above section that students are inevitably products of particular family environments. As Bettie (2003) argues in her ethnographic study of students and social-class identities, families are crucial sites for the accumulation of cultural capital, and schools are sites for their display. In this context, the interviews aimed to discover whether students own perception of social class was a factor in motivating students to undertake a scholarship.

For the women interviewed, it seems their academic and athletic endeavours represent refusals of pre-existing race, class, and gender classifications. In fact, although none of the women interviewed here articulated a particular racial-ethnic location in talking about families; several alluded to the influence of racial-ethnic heritage on their current location as collegiate athletes. In all cases, social class is a mediating factor in the extent

to which they articulate a particular kind of identity. For example, 20year old Karin alludes to her privilege as the daughter of an 'Americanized' father:

My dad comes from a traditional Mexican family, you know, the wife does the cooking, the house, takes care of the kids, and the husband goes and works. But my dad does stuff too. He's a really good cook, so if he knows my mom's been doing a lot of running around, he does the cooking. But mom does the majority of it. I think she's the most amazing woman I know. She was always running around taking us to practices when I was at high school, working and then coming home. My dad helps her out also, but sometimes he forgets. I think that's the traditional side of him. But he's more Americanized than traditional, so that helps.

Karin who grew up with her extended Mexican family, discussed her academic and athletic choices. Ironically, in the same passage, she spoke very eloquently about the impact her achievements may have had on her Mexican family members and by extension, other young Mexican women:

I'd say my biggest fans besides my parents are my grandma and my aunt, my mom's sister. They travelled to see me. I loved playing for them. They get a kick out seeing [*sic*] their granddaughter or niece play soccer. None of my mom's sisters' or brothers' lives were like that at all. I think my life is different because my mom married a 'white' guy. Really, he's the one that pushed me to get here. My mom, she's been

a supporter. With all her daughters, whatever we want to do [is] fine with her, as long as we're doing better than they did, as long as I stay in school. If we didn't play soccer, I don't think it would've been a big deal, but because she married a 'white' guy, that's why my sisters and I play sports. But I think it's good. Not many girls with my social class get a chance to do that, just because of tradition and stuff like that.

Karin reflected on the limited role of higher education in the lives of her parents as it influenced her knowledge of and strategies for gaining entry to collegiate soccer.

I played on my high school team, and I had no clue about college ball. I didn't know anything. My mom went to 2 years of business school, and my dad went to JC [junior college] for a year or two. But no, they weren't familiar with the whole college thing, and I wasn't either. It was just friends that said hey, there's a good coach at this college. So I moved and played on the JC team for a year. That was my first experience with travel ball too. ... That's when people started saying you know, you're pretty good, and maybe you could get a scholarship. My parents were real supportive, but they weren't familiar, and I wasn't familiar, so I did it on my own with the help of my coach. I think that getting the scholarship was like a miracle for my folks. Nobody in the family has ever been to university. In my house I'm a star.

In direct comparison to the experience of a student from a lower socio-economic background and associated social class category, 19yr old Caucasian Pat offered a different perspective as to why he and other similar students decided to undertake a soccer scholarship. As a Caucasian male from what is commonly regarded as one of the most affluent communities in southern California, Pat represented the least socially mobile and elite class members of either team within the study. Pat was first asked why he decided to undertake a soccer scholarship.

I was never really pushed by either Mom or Dad when I was at high school. Both my parents have done well in terms of their own careers and I guess their work ethic has rubbed off on me and my older brother. I can't ever remember being that enthused about playing any other sport than soccer. Nothing came close. Dad made it very clear to me that either I got an academic scholarship (laughs) ... which was never going to happen, or I tried out for an athletic scholarship. It just so happens that I'm above average I guess at soccer. Any other sport and I'd be flippin' burgers at McDonalds (laughs).

When probed as to whether a career in soccer is a realistic goal for the future, Pat answered in a similar manner to others within the study.

Listen, I'm a realist. Would I like to be the next big thing? Sure. Will I be? I think it's unlikely. In the States, everyone needs a degree, by doing soccer I get a small scholarship and keep my Dad off my back. He

kinds of like coming to watch me play. Soccer has been the coolest sport for kids like me for as long as I can remember. Maybe, we're snobs. I couldn't see Mom and Dad wanting to hang out with anyone who doesn't have an SUV (laughs). I think Dad is in danger of turning into a soccer Mom (laughs).

The above extracts reveal what appears to be indicative of the transfer of social mobility values from parents to their children. According to Bourdieu (1978) sports cannot be distributed among the social classes based on the activities' 'nature,' instead any sport can be practiced within any social class as long as it fits within that class' 'body schema' (p. 831). Bourdieu noted that as part of the working class habitus, it is expected that sports require high energy, physical contact, and even pain. While soccer is energy demanding, and therefore, suits working-class expectations of the body in sport, it is not an inherently dangerous sport in comparison to traditional recreational pastimes (American Sports Data, 2002). Self-evidently, injuries have and always will always be an inherent part of sport. However, the fact that soccer is able to fit into class expectations of appropriate bodily practices demonstrates that it has now become successfully interwoven into the lives of all subjects within this study and reflects an effective sublimation of social class relations.

## **Education/Career Development**

An alternative theoretical paradigm which attempts to explain the mechanisms by which social mobility is achieved is 'career development

theory'. This section of the study aimed to discover the extent of self-management given the many career transitions individuals are likely to experience. Sullivan (1999) has previously highlighted the difference between the traditional and 'boundaryless career'. Perhaps a playing career in soccer fits into the second category as players in the modern game are likely to experience a sequence of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of a single employment setting. This is due largely to the player transfer system that operates in the game and the short duration of their playing career. Many factors influence the professional player's life span. At best, a professional's playing career, according to Bourke (2002) may last up to 15 years; however there are those who, for one reason or another (injury, being transfer listed and so forth) are forced to terminate their career at an early age (Roderick, 2006).

The results presented so far clearly indicate that students are highly influenced by their families in terms of their decision to undertake a soccer scholarship. The following section of the interview results provides an overview of whether the students had an educational goal or career objective to be achieved via their scholarship.

Christopher (21yr old male from Pennsylvania) summarised his career strategy for taking part in soccer with the following quote.

When the coach contacted my parents in Philadelphia and offered me a scholarship, I screamed 'show me the money'. I'm not that obsessed with money nor are my buddies, but I was really worried that I wouldn't be able to make it to college at all without that financial help. It does



make a difference. I'm fortunate in that a few schools were chasing me, but I'm glad that I decided upon East University. It's the right school for me, they have a good team and they have a great academic reputation.

When asked to elaborate upon whether he considered a career in professional sport, Christopher responded.

I'm no Gerrard [Steven Gerrard], I love Liverpool [Liverpool FC] I went to see them when I was on a soccer tour with my high school team four or five years ago. After watching those guys play up close you realise what it takes to reach the top. I know that I don't have that level of dedication or skill. My best bet is to use what little God given talent I have and milk it to give me a head start when I graduate. A lot of the old businesses have closed down in recent years back home. I don't want to be claiming social security anytime soon.

The above extract provides an insight towards the global appeal of soccer set against the backdrop of localized economic issues of career formulation for scholarship students. As has been previously noted (Maguire, 1994, 2005) the inclusive popularity of sport has helped to achieve a process of 'homogenisation' within national cultures. Soccer in this context has been absorbed within the concept of the American Dream as a somewhat pragmatic avenue of social mobility.

When asked about the guidance and counselling as regarded his decision-making, Christopher commented.

We used to get challenged whilst at high school by our teachers all the time. My favourite Mathematics teacher was always encouraging me to get my head out of the clouds. Maybe some of what he said has paid off. I think he was concerned that I'd end up like some meat head dumb jock. I always knew the importance of paying attention in class and not thinking that ESPN would be seeing me anytime soon. College is expensive, even with my scholarship it's a struggle. My sister graduated from law school with debts that are scary. I know that by taking Liberal Arts and playing soccer I can leave with pretty good prospects. For that, I can thank my coach, family and the Lord. I can clearly remember talking about the soccer scholarship that was offered by the coach before I came here with my family. We discussed the offer for a long time. I don't think at first my family could quite appreciate how important soccer was to me and my future goals, but they came round in the end [laughs]

The above extract represents a 'fear of failure' and the student perceptions of which occupations are indicative of 'failure.' Previously in this chapter students have labelled 'flippin-burgers' as symptomatic of a wasted scholarship outcome.

The final student used within the interviews for the study was Mikeal, a 20yr old African American attending West University. Mikeal potentially represented similar views to those documented from Karin, in that they both described themselves as being from a lower socio-economic class

background. In addition, both had parents of mixed ethnicity. Mikeal was first asked his views regarding opportunities within professional sport.

My aim is to make my Mother proud. She has done so much for all of us in the family [three brothers and one sister]. I'm the oldest, so it's my responsibility to help out at home and help raise my siblings. By obtaining a scholarship at West University I can do that. Not by much, but at least my mother doesn't have to work 24/7 to make ends meet. I know that my chances of playing for the L.A Galaxy are slim to nothing but I'll give it my best shot.

When asked to elaborate on how he intended to achieve the dream of a professional career, Mikeal stated:

Coach says that I have a gift [smiles]. He's a good guy and I'm sure that he's just trying to keep my spirits up, but I'm the leading scorer in my conference. The last guy who did that was given a contract out in Kansas. Hey, you never know. If you don't give it your best then you will never know. I'm realistic to appreciate that if I get injured or if my grades drop then I have a problem. Worse case scenario, I graduate with a degree in business and open-up my own soccer franchise [laughs]. My main issue really though is with those guys [fellow scholarship recipients] is what my counsellor calls 'scholarship envy'. I sometimes hear it when someone has had a bad game. On a couple of occasions I've heard someone criticising a team mate who is on a big

percentage scholarship. Usually though the coach steps in and tells them to be quiet.

Ian, an established member of the West University men's soccer team agreed with the above observation that scholarships can often lead to resentment if the individual amounts are ever revealed:

You have to be careful who you tell about the amounts you receive. I trust only my room mate. Even so I wish I hadn't told him. It's not good for the morale of the team. After all it's a team game and finding out about another player's scholarship leads to resentment.

The above comments from Ian offer insight towards the dual dimensions of the American Dream and its core concept of a meritocratic society. The 'materialistic version' of the Dream according to Fisher (1973) is a simple deployment of the Puritan work ethic that sanctions competition as a means of determining personal worth. In addition, the ethic asserts that one's rewards are directly proportional to the effort put forth. The harder one works, the greater the achievement and the larger the returns. According to Fisher, 'it promises that if one employs his energies and talents to the fullest, he will reap the rewards of status, wealth and power' (p. 161). As a soccer player, however, Ian is part of a collective unit where all members of that team must cooperate in order to optimise their performance. However, the differentiation of payments within any squad challenges notions presented by any 'moralistic' version of the American Dream. According to Fisher this version is

embodied in the ethos of the Declaration of Independence of 1776. The 'inalienable rights' of which refer the presumption of equality. Fisher observes that these tenets 'involve the values of tolerance, charity, compassion, and true regard for the dignity and worth of each and every individual'(p. 161).

The materialistic nature of U.S. students and universities within this study has meant that any moralistic notion of the Dream is susceptible to subversion.

Melanie, a freshman player at West University added:

Cliques inevitably form within university, but in soccer we have to stay together as a team. You can't allow money to effect the team performance. I haven't personally seen it happen with my team, but at a friends college the women would not pass the ball to a girl who they were jealous of. I think the coaches here are on top of the issue though and remind us in meetings that we should keep our financial details private.

Melanie added that players were discouraged from discussing their scholarship totals for a variety of reasons.

The coach does not want us to see ourselves or our team mates in terms of their scholarship amount. He says that we define our worth on the field of play. My parents are the only people I ever tell about my scholarship amount. It took a fair bit of persuasion to allow me to

choose soccer over other [scholarship] opportunities I had, so it's important that I maintain my scholarship each year.

When interviewing the participants regarding their career or academic goals, most of the answers were discussed in general terms. For example, the majority of participants reported that their parents wanted them to initially obtain a college place with the expectation that graduation would ultimately lead to a 'better life.' Most of the participants had some indistinct proposal of career goals. The majority of subjects mentioned that they had short-term goals and some outlined their long-term goals also. A minority of subjects declared a dream of becoming a professional player either in the U.S. or abroad. Long-term goals typically included working within a specific degree related occupation and thereby increasing their earning potential. Short-term goals for the students included doing well in school, and maintaining their soccer scholarship. Some players were clearly uncertain as to what their parents' career goals were for them, but knew that their parents wanted them to 'do their best' and 'be successful.' A potential issue with such statements is what do those statements mean exactly? This sense of ambiguity was clearly related within the interviews. A positive outcome of, in some instances, a rather laissez-faire parenting approach was that students were acutely aware of their responsibility to obtain and ultimately maintain the scholarship for their own intrinsic upward mobility motives. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) mentions the importance of individuals being able to set their own goals too as important for them to reduce anxiety and reduce any 'fear of failure.' This palpable sense of anxiety regarding their career was in part, a result of pressure from their father

to emulate their sibling's achievements or to avoid the financial consequences of not graduating from college.

## **Interviews with Coaches and Athletic Directors (Appendix 7)**

The following section reveals the views of both coaches and athletic directors regarding student decision making in undertaking a soccer scholarship at their respective universities. The results of the interviews are organised into three themes.

### **Themes**

#### **1. The role of the family in decision-making**

In interviews with all four soccer coaches and both athletic directors at the two representative N.C.A.A. Division One universities, the coaches said they encountered parents on a regular basis with an almost ridiculous aspiration to negotiate an athletic scholarship, regardless of their son or daughters ability level.

I regularly encounter parents who, although I have sympathy for their financial circumstances, almost beg on behalf of their kid. I constantly have to repeat how little money there is within the program and the fact that it has to be distributed throughout the team. However, I'm sure that the parents think that I'm lying to them. The families have clearly

invested a lot of time and energy into their child's ambitions and want some kind of return for that investment (Men's Coach, West University).

The East University men's coach:

Every meeting with a prospective athlete and their parent is interesting. Part of the problem is the attachment these kids form with their old high school coach. They have their egos massaged and believe that they are the next sure thing. Bottom line the vast majority of parents will try and negotiate the size of the scholarship.

Both of the women's coaches agreed that parents were often 'devious' during the negotiation of scholarships.

A frequent tactic is that a father will tell me that his daughter is wanted by a whole host of Division One programmes. What the family don't know is that the coaching community is a fairly small, tight knit group. I pretty much know how much each coach can offer and in some cases I'll call a colleague and find out. Having said that, it is a business as well and I'm starting to notice a lack of cooperation. Maybe it's a generational thing (laughs) (Women's Coach, West University).

The Women's coach at East University added that parents sometimes are often misled and can be confused by the number of recruitment advisers and the different messages that are sent.



The first thing that both the player and the parent both need to understand is that balancing a life as a student and an athlete is tough. They are unlikely, even with a 'full-ride' to graduate without a chunk of student debt. Certainly obtaining a scholarship is helpful, but it is not the answer. Parents have a responsibility to help their children make sense of what is realistic and attainable and what isn't. I've personally encountered a full range of expectations from parents. Everything from 'my daughter is the next Mia, according to her high school coach' to 'I'm amazed that you are considering recruiting my kid.' The varsity coach at their high school has a lot to answer for [laughs]. They build these kids expectations up and with that the parents hopes and dreams as well. It's no wonder that they are so confused ... as a result I'm seen as the grim reaper when I tell them the reality of what soccer here is all about (Women's Coach, West University).

I sometimes meet with a family who clearly don't need the financial assistance, but for them it's a matter of status. I understand that if you are a parent and value hard work you also want your kids to appreciate that value. But not if it's just something to wear as a badge at the barbecue. My bigger concern regards the lack of emphasis upon fair play, team work and ethics in the game. It's not just about winning. Sport can be a great vehicle for personal and spiritual development, and not at the expense of their overall education. I sometimes see what is fundamentally a philosophical difference in approach between two

parents. The father clearly has professional aspirations for their daughter while their mother is on a different wavelength (Women's Coach, East University).

The above extracts reflect a concern that is echoed by the majority of the students within the study that the father is a frequently a significant factor in the decision making process of their children. The transmission of values and orientation towards career expectations upon graduation appears in many cases to be a two-way process, whereby the parents influence the child and vice versa. Soccer, in this context appears to present a scenario whereby the child informs their parent as to the merits of a scholarship as opposed to taking part in other more established sports. The athletic directors however, appeared concerned with the financially driven expectations of parents. The concerns reflect wider philosophical issues that surround the marriage of college sport and academia (Abowitz, 2005; Howard-Hamilton and Sina, 2001). Current trends in intercollegiate athletics clearly indicate that there are conflicting philosophical aims that deviate from the educational and financial nature of intercollegiate athletics and the educational mission of universities (Lapchick, 2006). The dominant model of sport within American collegiate sport has been defined as 'professional' (Jarvie, 2006). This model represents an infusion of profit maximization and commercial objectives which are indicative of a shift from athletics as a diverse educational entity toward a professional enterprise.

According to the above interviewees all student athletes are likely to experience some conflict between the demands of their sport and the

responsibility of the classroom. However, it can be argued that corporate college sport is structured in such a manner that student-athletes are especially pressed to reconcile their student and athletic roles (Eitzen and Sage, 2003; Sack, 1987). Furthermore, the fact that coaches control financial aid gives them power to make demands on the time and energy of athletes (Lawrence, 2007). This responsibility is clearly acknowledged by the coaches and is apparent to parents who, according to the interviewees, place pressure upon staff to prioritise their children and petition for financial support.

I take the time to explain to any prospective scholarship player how important it is that they choose the best fit university. Parents naturally have a big say in where their child goes. In the last 12 months I've spoken to parents who cover the entire spectrum of expectations ... from the father who lives vicariously through his kids' soccer achievements through to the mother who doesn't even return my phone calls. Often the students have a more realistic appraisal of what they can achieve via their playing career than their folks do. The ideal scenario for me is if the parent allows me to explain how the system works and what the likely outcomes are for their kid. Sometimes however I'm talking but there is no light on upstairs if you know what I mean? Strangely enough it seems like the kids have a more realistic appraisal of what a soccer scholarship can do for them. In some cases I've had the son telling their parents in my office what soccer can do for them (Men's Coach, West University).

Coaches at both universities stated that players should select their college regardless of any financial inducements as first years. However, the financial reality and pragmatism attached to studying within the state and possible living at home is attractive to many players and their parents.

## **The number of scholarship opportunities ('the myth of a full-ride')**

### **2. The 'myth of a full-ride'**

Statistically, the opportunities for both men and women to play soccer and receive a scholarship are limited. Scholarship athletes within this study are categorised as those individuals receiving financial aid based solely on their playing ability rather than upon other factors such as financial need or academic qualifications. There are 721 separate college programmes in the U.S. with an average of six scholarship places available per institution per year. This equates to a total of 4,416 total player openings. On average, 8% of players who apply for a scholarship are awarded one.

All subjects within the study agreed that there is a myth of the 'full ride' (100% scholarship financial package) amongst student applicants at both universities. However, all coaches recognised that they were in a highly competitive environment for a relatively small talent pool of players.

A lot of people are delusional. Parents and students seem to believe that they will all receive a 100% scholarship. Having to tell kids that in

some cases we can't even offer them a partial scholarship is tough. Some even think that they can negotiate with us. It makes me laugh. I understand that a university education is a serious investment and at East University we place our academic value on the same level as our athletic achievements (Women's Coach, East University).

All four Division One coaches agreed that there is a widespread misunderstanding as regards the level of financial aid that is available to student-athletes and try to communicate this fact to prospective athletes.

Some kids [student athletes] think that I'm on the same income as the Division One basketball and football coaches. They watch ESPN and receive conflicting images. They have an expectation that they will come into a very grand office. The reality surprises them [laughs]. On occasions I will have \$500 remaining in my budget before the season starts with key positions still needing to be filled. The process of recruitment is crazy. I have close links with all of the high school coaches in my area and often liaise with them regarding prospects. This means going to games and on occasions speaking to the kids and their parents. They also recognise me and seek me out on the sideline. I have everyone from parents who are CEOs to parents who are probably unemployed trying to push their child or negotiate with me. Inevitably, the talented kids are the ones that you target and try to sell your program to. The average cost to attend West University is around \$40-45,000 a year. After you tell parents that they inevitably ask how much their scholarship will be. When I mention that they are unlikely to

receive a full scholarship they often don't believe me. The wealthier parents are particularly adamant about how much their child should receive. In the past I don't think that such parents would have even approached me. I think soccer clearly has a different resonance with kids in the U.S. to say what it may have had when I was growing up. Once upon a time it [soccer] resonated or was stereotyped as a game played by ethnic minorities and then latterly as a 'yuppie' sport ... you know the whole 'soccer mom' phenomenon. But, that has changed. I meet with parents and kids across the entire spectrum of society. There are not too many sports that can claim that. Take for instance basketball and baseball. They both clearly have identities linked in with either the Hispanic or the African American cultural identity. Soccer does not have that label; it's something it can be proud of in my view (Men's Coach, West University).

In opposition to the college coaches pragmatic view of the athletic financial aid is the common perception that scholarship money is abundant. Online recruiting services and private counsellors have as a result flourished within this vacuum of uncertainty to promote the notion that some athletic scholarships go unclaimed (Pennington, 2008). To recruit athletes, university representatives in the United States are permitted, depending on the sport, two or three visits to an athlete's home; the athlete is permitted only one expense-paid visit to each campus and no more than five expense-paid visits in total (Loy et al., 1978). Only full-time employees of the university may contact athletes. According to research, recruitment violations have included,

however, having alumni (boosters) entertain prospects and offer financial inducements.

I'm concerned by the lack of realistic expectations which I hear from parents and their children from all financial backgrounds. Soccer is growing in popularity as a sport and with it I'm seeing more and more talented players, but the number of scholarship places is not expanding at the same rate. Currently at our school we potentially have three, sometimes four (new) scholarship sports open a year. According to the NCAA data however there are 9.9 scholarships (the NCAA limit) for 25 players ... the numbers simply don't add up (Women's Coach, East University).

The possibility of being awarded a scholarship, according to the athletic directors, appears to reflect the main themes of the American Dream, that of success, individualism and achievement orientation. University personnel clearly believe that the basic tenets of the Dream can be achieved via their scholarship program if allowances are made for the role and importance of a student's academic responsibilities.

The growing popularity of soccer in the U.S. has been reflected by an increase in the number of universities taking part in intercollegiate competitions and subsequently an increase in scholarship places. However, the task of selecting appropriate applicants has become increasingly difficult for both coaches and administrators. This is due largely, in their view, to the cultural symbolism and economic importance that soccer and a scholarship present to both students and their parents. It seems inevitable that the sports

adopted by people in society articulate something about them. In this context, soccer scholarship students reflect a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, but unity in terms of their optimism that soccer can provide the platform for future upward mobility.

The unifying feature of all players and their parents according to the athletic directors is that the Dream via the financial support afforded by an athletic is problematic. On a deeper level, soccer appears to reflect a shift in how the sport has been viewed by the various socio-economic class divisions within society. According to the views of the directors, soccer does not appear to be the stereotypical domain of either ethnic minorities or the middle class. It now represents a reflection of the evolving nature of U.S. cultural values and the pragmatics of funding higher education in contemporary society that typically the upper echelons of society have not been forced to consider. For the majority of the students interviewed it was apparent that they had convinced their parents that by obtaining a soccer scholarship they could partly fund their education and continue to take part in a sport that they enjoyed. As such, the dialogue represents an unconventional dynamic where the child socialises the parent and not vice versa.

The reality is that few of the players that I recruit receive full scholarships for the entire duration of their degree. To obtain a full scholarship as a freshman, you would need to be considered of national team standard. Currently, all of the players on both the men and women's programmes are on 'partial' scholarships. That can mean approximately \$400-600 per year. We don't have anyone near a full-



scholarship that would equate to around \$25,000 per year (Men's coach, West University).

Here at East University we on average have around ten men who receive no financial aid as freshmen (Men's coach East University).

Each year we receive more applications and videos in the mail from high school coaches and recruitment agencies trying to sell their players. The reality is that competition for available place increases each year. I guess what each coach is looking for is the next Adu or Akers, in other words players who can make a difference to the team. I think for prospective students recognise that our soccer program is highly competitive and that sells us an attractive proposition. We can compete with and beat most schools that are twice our size (Athletic Director, West University).

The competition for scholarship places at university really is becoming difficult, in particular for girls. I recently attended a conference where the NCAA stated that there are 1,800 competitive players aged between 17-18yrs old. Bearing in mind that there are 301 women's teams in Division One, the mathematical chances of receiving a scholarship are small. Inevitably, most freshmen will be non-scholarship players (Women's Coach, East University).

Statistically, the scenario of obtaining a scholarship for men is even more difficult than their female counterparts. According to the Men's team coach at East University:

At the same conference just mentioned the presenter stated that there are approximately 100,000 prospective players leaving high school each year all vying for around 1,500 scholarships (Athletic Director, East University).

Despite the statistical reality of receiving a scholarship according to the above views, there is self-evidently no shortage of applicants for the places. The trend is fuelled by what are concerns regarding the increasing costs of attending a university in the U.S. 'The Measuring Up Report' (2004) calculates the affordability of college by surveying the average family income of state and factoring in the net cost of college attendance. The 10-year analysis asked whether it is easier, about the same, or more difficult for families to pay for college today compared to in the early 1990s.

The conclusions presented illustrated that the cost of a student attending college had surpassed the growth of family income. In part the report authors believe that is a reflection of financial aid, which now represents a smaller portion of tuition than it has previously. Put simply, the combined cost of living and steep rise in tuition fees has led many individuals to reconsider whether higher education is a viable option for them.

The report estimates that during the last decade, the average cost of tuition within state higher education has increased by 44%. In contrast, the nation's median family income has only increased by 6%. This disparity has been particularly felt by those families that fall into the middle-to-low-income bracket. The report outlines that the median annual income of the lower 40% of families was \$20,157 in 2003; the net cost of sending a student to community college averaged 34% of that income (p. 10). Somewhat inevitably,

therefore the report authors predict that in the future universities will increasingly reflect a socio-economic disparity between families of affluent and poor students. The role of the family in facilitating and funding the higher education has arguably never been more important.

### **3. The Americanisation of Soccer**

There was a clear perception amongst all coaches and Athletic Directors interviewed that soccer had traditionally failed to capture the attention of the media due to the widespread belief that a low-scoring game is a boring game. In addition they all felt that structurally the game was not 'television friendly' to a media which was familiar in financing their sponsorship of sport via strategically placed television time-outs.

In soccer, there are no natural commercial breaks for advertisers; and it does not translate well to television because the close-up shots that lend drama to other competition[s] don't work. Kids who have grown up playing soccer watch soccer on tv with a different set of expectations. They don't want to see numerous time-outs and commercial breaks. The problem for the national broadcasters is in re-educating the American public to the idea that a zero-zero score can actually reflect a great game (East University, Men's Coach).

This view is contrasted by the opinion of the Men's coach at West University.

I think the traditionalists have a challenge on their hands. People in 21<sup>st</sup> century America are a little more sophisticated than we can give them credit for. Soccer clearly has a traditional appeal to immigrants from Latin America and Europe, but that's now expanding. You only have to look at a snap-shot of popular culture over here to see how cosmopolitan we are. We have sushi bars, European beer, Mexican take-a-ways and Italian clothing lines in our stores in every city. The list is endless. America is changing and with it I think a lot of people are looking at 'non-traditional' sports in a different way... have a look at the marketing of SUVs on television. On almost every commercial they have a Golden Retriever jump out of the back with two or three kids in soccer uniforms. I think soccer has played a role in making the American public a little more aware of world culture. In many ways the kids of today's generation are educating their parents as to global fashions and cultural movements. I think that soccer in contemporary society has really benefited from the expansion of the internet. Its proliferation has meant that you don't have to rely upon the national tv stations in order to watch domestic and foreign games. Having said that Fox Sports now has a nationally syndicated programme that is devoted to domestic and international soccer (Men's Coach, West University).

The implications for this study of the above comment are that what defines popular culture in contemporary society is dynamic and evolving.

Clearly in his view soccer has transcended previous notions of a dual middle-class and 'soccer mom' label and embraced a wider more inclusive identity.

In order to try to overcome residual traditional preconceptions of what defines American sport, the Athletic Director at West University suggested that methods need to be developed which would help to 'Americanise' the game, to encourage fans and the media to take soccer seriously as an American sport. He continued:

It's a positive to make it like other [American] sports, because you don't want to alienate the American fans, make them feel like they're in another country watching a game. You want to make them feel like they're home ... and comfortable ... It's not the pitch; it's the field. It's not nil-nil; it's zero-zero. You don't want to give them [the spectators] the sense that they don't know what's going on and confuse them with jargon that they are unfamiliar with. Soccer ... has enough to overcome with historical and media prejudices towards it. Look at the English game, with pitches and nil-nils, basically who cares? Give me the facts. It's a field, it's a ball, it's one-nothing ... And just make it as American as possible.

At both East University and West University games there was a concerted and observable effort on their respective marketing departments to 'Americanise' the game. When both Athletic Directors were asked about the rationale behind this atmosphere, they explained that it simply reflected the nature of modern American sports.

No longer is 'the game ... it', this is what the kids are used to over here. To the average fan ... zero-zero [means] we didn't see any goals ... Well ... if you have the in-game promotions going on and 'Ho, look at that! That's pretty funny going on up there!' and you hear some music ... in the background, it [music] generates that exciting atmosphere. I think ... for the entire fan-base ... it's a better experience. If there was nothing going on, it would be *bor-ING!* ... But if there's something going on, something for you to tap your feet to, or laugh at, chances are you're going to come back. Here in the States we rely heavily upon our alumni and their financial support. It's an expectation not just of them but of the wider community that support our athletic programmes that we provide entertainment. I know for the purists in Europe it may not sit very easily, but it's how we do it over here (Athletic Director, East University).

Surprisingly, the female coaches at both universities were in agreement when observing that soccer in the U.S.A needs to be presented in what one coach defined as the 'American model' (East University, Women's Coach).

We knew our demographic wasn't going to be able to sit and just watch soccer games for two hours. I don't think they [the WUSA] know if the game can stand alone [She recounted how shocked her family had been that the game they had attended had been punctuated by music

and announcements]. I just think that that's their culture-you know, keep the fans involved as much as possible ... The fans [just] need to be entertained. They don't know how NOT to be (East University, Women's Coach).

A lot of the blame I guess can be aimed at the MTV generation. Everything has to be done at break-neck speed, explosions, music. I blame the parents [laughs]. I'm still hopeful of a women's professional game that will establish itself over here. It has the foundation of players. We just need to sell it to our media and potentially 'Americanize' it some what [laughs]. If you don't have the oxygen of television coverage the candle dies (West University, Women's Coach).

The 'American Model' that both coaches and athletic directors refer to touches upon a variety of ideas and strategies that could be employed to further develop the game beyond its current support base. Such methods in the past have included an experimentation with 'shoot-outs' in order to resolve goal less draws during the inaugural MLS season. However, the problem from a European perspective is the use of the term 'Americanize' when associated with soccer. According to Markovits (2007) this is an example of 'schimpfwort', or a swear word used by its detractors to discredit or stigmatise. An example of which can be identified in the comments of Michel Platini in 1994. According to Markovits, Platini [currently UEFA President] commented that the 1994 World Cup hosted by the U.S.A. 'was outstanding, but it was like Coca Cola. Ours [France 1998] will be like champagne' (cited in Markovits,

2007, p. 97). What is clear about Platini's comments are that regardless of actual success and achievements, soccer in the U.S. is subject to pejorative observations both within and outside of America. To its detractors soccer is perceived as unauthentic and crude whereas established sports by definition are refined (like champagne).

Institutions from the above interviews appear to have the constant dilemma of attempting to reconcile their values with increasing revenue needs. In fact, given the evolving funding landscape, it is not always clear what American values in higher education are. Both academic and athletic officials appear to recognize that they call their legitimacy into question when they do not balance traditional academic values with commercial and professional impulses, but identifying the line between the two can be particularly challenging. It is especially so given the assumption by outsiders that the professional sports business model is naturally the most appropriate in higher education.

Just as sport within the setting of higher education is a peculiarly American phenomenon, American cultural expectations have proven an undeniable influence on intercollegiate athletics (Abowitz, 2005). Social and cultural factors have intensified the philosophical conflicts in athletics. As demonstrated above there is little doubt that athletic directors place pressure on their coaches to become concerned about spectators and the 'win-loss record' (Eitzen and Sage, 2003; Giardina and McCarthy, 2005). A concern of the findings within this study is the perception that the success or failure of spectator appeal should be the measure of the success and or the standard by which excellence is to be measured in evaluating intercollegiate athletic



programmes (Gorn, 2004). Conversely, as suggested by the soccer coaches, the measure of success must be the value of the learning experience and the joy of participation for the athlete.

Achievement, success and upward mobility are the basic tenets of the American Dream. For the individual players within this study it basically states that with hard work both on and off the field the rewards will be forthcoming. The use of a scholarship in soccer appears to be indicative of the main themes of the American Dream, that of success, individualism and achievement orientation (Maguire et al., 2002). By pursuing a scholarship students are intrinsically linked with the cultural values of mainstream U.S. society that are in turn closely related to the American Dream. An athletic scholarship in this context appears to represent a flexible vehicle through which ideological associations with the Dream are reinforced (Guttmann, 1994; Maguire et al., 2002). Scholarship therefore becomes a cultural symbol and metaphor both for the parents and recipients of the athletic stipends. It seems inevitable that the sports adopted by people in society articulate something about them. In this context, soccer scholarship students reflect a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. However, the unifying feature of all players interviewed is a continuing belief in the veracity of the Dream. The students, however, are differentiated in terms of how they understand soccer and scholarship as contributing to the career aspirations. The pursuit of the Dream via the financial support afforded by an athletic scholarship appears to be at its most basic level a pragmatic decision on the behalf of its recipients. On a deeper level, soccer appears to reflect a shift in how the sport has been viewed by the wider American society. No longer does it appear to be the

stereotypical domain of either ethnic minorities or the middle class. It now represents a reflection of the evolving nature of U.S. cultural values and the forces of globalisation from which it cannot remain immune. A discussion of the cultural implications is presented in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to analyse the motives for students pursuing a scholarship in soccer. The socialization influences of female and male intercollegiate players were assessed in order to determine the sport socialization process at work. The data from this study indicated that parents of both male and female student-athletes are likely to be actively involved in sport themselves. Parents of students appear to be supportive of their child's soccer scholarship decision. However, fathers were perceived by their children as being more challenging, enthusiastic and supportive of their sons than of their daughters. In contrast, mothers were perceived by the student-athlete as being largely neutral in terms of challenge or support. The research identified a relatively tentative positive correlation between parental expectations and socio-economic status (SES)

The findings support a common hypothesis derived from various theoretical standpoints in sociology which reinforce that the family is a significant agent in socializing of their children within the cultural values of the American Dream (Eitzen and Sage, 2003).

The way in which sports historically have been perceived as a path to mobility has been recognized in a number of contexts. What is not known is whether or not scholarship students have come to value soccer as an important, valuable, and meaningful occupational path to pursue. The findings reveal support for the notion that families are important influences on their child's sport mobility orientations, but are also highly influenced by their child's aspirations (Oliver, 1980).

Although this study aims to address the current lack of understanding of soccer and its meaning to scholarship students, there are limitations to the generalisability of the findings. Firstly, there is the lack of the variability among the participants. By restricting the study to those athletes who participate at the elite university level of competition (rather than recreational players), the study has inevitably focused on those individuals who have already invested significantly in the sport of soccer. Ideally this study would include a greater range of participants from diverse socio-economic categories.

The next chapter will provide an interpretive discussion of the results findings, in doing so it will answer the fundamental research question of what are the motives of students for undertaking a soccer scholarship. The central themes of family, social class, social mobility and career will frame the discussion. Chapter Six will then provide a critical analysis of student decision-making from both micro and macro perspectives.

## **CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION**

This chapter aims to provide a discussion of the results according to the themes of family, social class, social mobility and education/career development. In doing so it will address the central research question within this thesis: what are the motives of student athletes for undertaking a soccer scholarship? This section will also address how scholarship athletes reflected on the role that their socializing agents played in shaping their experiences and career orientation. Blumer (1969) suggests that such objects may be classified into physical, social and abstract objects. Within the context of this approach, the veracity of American Dream to students can then be unpacked and categorised.

## **Family and Social Class**

Prior research regarding the capacity that parents provide in socializing children into and within sports served as a significant portion of the foundation for this research (Shakib and Dunbar, 2004). With regard to socializing children into sports, parents appeared to occupy a primary role for research participants (Lewko and Greendorfer, 1988; Storm and Jenkins, 2002). Frequent communication about sports with parents and a high degree of parents' visibility in a sports setting contributed to participants wanting to become involved in sports. Often, watching and/or playing sports with older siblings created a desire for participants to join sports teams as well. Communication and visibility have been listed as important determinants in children becoming initially interested in sports (Shakib and Dunbar, 2004; Storm and Jenkins, 2002) and are associated with social learning theory. Social learning theory suggests children are more or less socialized into sports participation. If children view their parents and/or family members engaging in sports in some capacity (playing, coaching, discussing, watching, etc.), then they are more likely to become involved with sports (Lewko and Greendorfer, 1988). As Shakib and Dunbar (2004) revealed in their study with male and female high school students, 'the strongest prompt to children learning about parental sports involvement was parents' athletic visibility, especially seeing parents play sports' (p. 283). This was a common theme for the participants in this study.

The results of the player questionnaire and interviews revealed that in general, most of the subjects reported that soccer feels like *both work and play*, one reporting that it feels like *work*, one reporting it feels like *neither work nor play*, and one female participant failed to answer. Every participant reported that they wanted to be doing this activity (playing soccer at University), except one, who stated that she 'had no option if she wanted to attend University.' The role of the family in conceptualising a soccer scholarship as 'work' rather than 'play' appears to be a common denominator for all students within this study.

The questionnaire and interviews aimed to establish, 'how players experience family dynamics of support and challenge in their scholarship and to what extent did their family influence their decision making.'

The Support /Challenge Questionnaire (SCQ) model (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000) adopted for this study helped to contextualise players' views as well as group the participants into the four family typology: HC/HS, HC/LS, LC/HS, LC/LS. Interview data was used also to assess this question. The researchers' bias needs to be made overt, in that there was the possibility of looking for particular themes once the participants were categorized.

Within this study, soccer support seemed to be expressed or internalised as the time commitment and financial help parents provided for their children (Wedemyer Moon, 2005). These forms of support came in the way of attendance as spectators at games, tournaments, and even in some cases parents acting as unpaid assistants on the university soccer teams. Financial support came in the form of paying travelling and equipment expense. Communication could be seen as supportive and challenging,

depending on the type of communication interaction perceived by the player. For example, if a mother were to cheer for her daughter on the soccer field, then the player perceived it as supportive. If a parent attempted to discuss the type or intensity of training, then it was viewed more as challenging.

The impression from the interviews was that none of the subjects 'felt pressure' to play soccer at university. Pressure was interpreted by players more in terms of academic performance and grade point average in university.

Complex perceptions of challenge and support are not only problematic to classify and understand, but they are also difficult to find a consensus in the views of the players. The subjects appeared to be sensitive to the balance of their parents being supportive and challenging without this becoming excessive and stressful. The implication from the findings is that the student-athlete assimilates either partially or completely the identity of their parent(s).

According to research, 'identity formation' is a life-long process which occurs as individuals take note of and internalise the appraisals of people whose opinions they value, and is seen as integral to healthy and adaptive development. Self-concept or self identity is seen as multi-dimensional, and is represented as a diverse set of images and conceptions about the self (Cantor et al., 1986). The many and varied self-dimensions that an individual possesses all have the potential to motivate and direct behaviour. Webb et al (1998) proposed that the formation of a strong athletic identity is problematic because it differs from other role identities in significant ways:

it [athletic identity] is formed and internalised early in life; it is likely to dominate and subsume all other identities; it often has a public

dimension due to the high profile of many sportspeople; it is defined by performance pressure; and it provides a high level of status and esteem which is unlikely to be achieved through other means (p. 181).

According to results of this study, the most effective mode of parenting appear to be found in those parents that provide their children with the reassurance that they are loved, together with the sense that a great deal is expected from them (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000).

### **Communication**

Overall, parents, according to the students, tended to spend more time trying to communicate with their child, versus the child trying to communicate with the parent(s); an observation which may be indicative of the communication patterns in most families (Wedemyer Moon, 2003). One observation that can be concluded from such results is that players perceived that 'constructive criticism' was crucial not only their development as players, but also in support of any career orientation they may wish to articulate.

### **Family Interaction**

Most of the subjects within this study appear to have parents who are relatively supportive and committed to their scholarship decision. Support for their scholarship decision was evidenced in the players view by their interaction as a family unit, whether it is a discussion of soccer practice or



family attendance at tournaments. Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) and Moon (2001) suggest a difference between interacting with one another, and having *mutually* involving activities. With the families in the study, soccer could be identified as being a mutually involved activity. According to Csikszentmihalyi (2002), it is important for individuals to act in a self-deterministic manner. In essence to be able to choose the activity, the level and goals associated with involvement. For example, if an individual enjoys participation in soccer simply because of the social dimensions, such as being with team mates, and parents then fail to appreciate this locus of their involvement then it creates potential issues. One potential problem is that self-motivation from the individual will probably not be comparatively and adequately high, thus the potential for impacting upon the team. Coaches may sense the lack of motivation and problems may arise with the individual's interactions with the coach. Eventually the player may become anxious, enjoyment decreases with the demand of participating at a competitive level, and ultimately leave soccer all together. However, if there is open communication between the parents and child starting at a young age, then the knowledge of their child's interest would lead to a more appropriate option. In the context of this study the result may be that the parent advises their child either not to undertake a scholarship or alternatively to opt for one at a lower ranked university where there is less perceived pressure.

## **Parental Issues**

According to Sevier (1998) there are five trends that can be identified in

American higher education. Firstly, there are demographic changes within the student cohort. Statistically, it is anticipated that there will be minimal growth in the Caucasian population. Simultaneously, there is continued and advanced growth among Asians and the Hispanics communities. The consequence of such statistical changes is that 'future consumers of higher education will be persons of color' (Chenevert, 2004, p. 25). This observation is reinforced by the sample provided in this study. According to Howe and Strauss (2003) contemporary students are jointly funding the costs of higher education with their parents. It is evident from the results of the player survey that the current 'millennial generation', have different characteristics than previous generations (Chenevert, 2004). The implication for universities, athletic directors and coaches is that they should therefore distinguish parents as an important audience. The results of both the coaches and athletic directors' interviews support this observation. At both universities the personnel responsible for player recruitment identified the parents as being the most significant factor in guiding their child's decision-making. As a consequence, parents were invited to attend all meetings between the prospective student and coach. At the meetings the coach was acutely aware of the need to 'sell' the merits of their organisation. The frustration for each coach interviewed however lay in the need to correct what were seen as 'misguided notions' regarding the financial implications of what a scholarship offer entailed. All coaches reiterated that they 'sold' their team as part of the wider educational package that their university offered. Education and the career mobility that a degree at their institution presented were emphasised as the priorities for any student player.

Previous work by Garcia and Bayer (2005) has established that 'family variables' play a crucial role in shaping the level and perception of educational accomplishment. Similar findings are replicated within this study. The impact of parents' occupation and education are key factors in effecting the career aspirations of the student-athletes. Additionally for students, the issue of the father's level of cultural assimilation or 'Americanisation' was reinforced. In this section a discussion will be presented of the family characteristics (educational achievements), family structure (single or two parent household) and occupation (socio-economic indicators) of the players.

### **Parental Expectations**

'Prior research on educational attainment has shown that parental education is a strong predictor of children's education' (Wojtkiewicz and Donato, 1995, p. 560). The pattern that emerges reveals that parents who themselves are highly educated recognize the importance of education and reinforce the goals of higher education within a philosophy of deferred gratification. As role models of educational success they aim to establish a context in which educational attainment is encouraged. This view is supported by Teachman (1987) who stated that 'parents with a higher level of education and income probably have more ability and motivation to create educational resources ... which facilitate the academic development of a child' (p. 549). In their study of Latino groups, Wojtkiewicz and Donato (1995) identified that:

Almost all respondents with college-educated parents graduated from high school... [While]...less than two-thirds of those with high school dropout parents completed high school (p. 565).

The above study provides persuasive data to support the belief that parental educational attainment has a profound influence upon that of their child. However, the study also reveals that members of certain Hispanic subdivisions (Puerto Ricans and Mexicans) were more likely to have parents with educational levels of achievement 'considerably less than whites' (Wojtkiewicz and Donato, 1995, p. 565).

## **Family Structure**

An additional variable that is worthy of discussion is the composition of the family unit. Although this typically includes the number of siblings and the impact that has on educational attainment, for the intention of this thesis, the impact of whether or not both parents are present; i.e., single parent household is discussed. Previous research, most notably, the Moynihan Report (1965) stated that the:

The absence of a father is destructive to children, particularly boys because it means that children will lack the economic resources, role model, discipline, structure and guidance that a father provides (cited in Biblarz and Raftery, 1999, p. 321).

Critics of the generalisability of the Moynihan report identify that its analysis is restricted simply to considering the context of female matriarchal African American households. However, Biblarz and Raftery (1999) claim that it can apply to wider society due to the impact of the divorce rate in the late twentieth and twenty first century. There are strong similarities here with the work of Beck (1992). He argues, 'The need for a shared inner life, as expressed in the ideal of marriage and bonding, is not a primeval need. It grows with the losses that individualisation brings as the obverse of its opportunities' (1992: 105, emphasis in original). He goes on to argue that conflict within the modern family reflects those inherent within modern society at large. Structural change has led to intensive individualisation in all spheres of western culture, including career aspirations. Giddens defines this idea as the 'project of the self' in which modern individuals require constantly to improve or remake themselves. Within such a system, Smart (1997) hypothesises that relationships need to be constantly reappraised, remade or remaindered. Evidence of the dynamic nature of evolving relationships can be seen in the majority of the subjects' interviews. Of particular note is the dynamic nature of debate that exists both between family members and the children regarding career aspirations.

Typically, what defines a conventional family background has changed to include single and blended family hierarchies. At issue, though, is whether or not educational attainment is effected by which parent is the head of the household. This variable is further complicated when consideration is given to parental occupation and perceptions of poverty. According to Garcia and

Bayer (2005), children are frequently exposed to a dynamic range of cultural and socio-economic factors within any household. The impact of which according to Biblarz and Raftery (1999) is that children in families with incomes defined as being 'below the poverty level' are nearly twice as likely as their more advantaged classmates to be held back a grade level. The problem is particularly of concern when families are headed by parents 'who are non-white and Hispanic' (Garcia, 2001, p. 27). Garcia adds that '...poor students are three times more likely to become dropouts than students from more economically advantaged homes' (2001, p. 27).

A number of researchers have theorized that female-headed households are stereotyped as dysfunctional. As a result of this label, a self-fulfilling prophecy of low educational accomplishment is inevitable (Chenevert, 2004). Battle and Scott (2000) within this context posit:

...educational achievement levels of African American males living in single parent families differ depending on the gender of the parent with whom they live (p. 95).

Battle and Scott (2000) argue that there are a host of factors working against the educational attainment of young Black males, only one of which is parenting. In evaluating the educational attainment of Black males, they argue that one must also consider the discriminatory impact of policies and procedures within the school system. For those students who choose to engage the system, discrimination in access to education is evident (Garcia and Bayer, 2005). In addition, self-esteem and self-concept appear to be affected by discrimination and this too can impact educational attainment.

Battle and Scott (2000) make a valid point in considering the many factors leading to low educational attainment for children from single parent households. What is revealing from this section is the emphasis that students placed upon the relationships with their parents and not simply upon their family structures. There is also an interesting focus on the way in which the students adapt and change rather than their parents or their family. Many of the changes are portrayed by the students as positive i.e. exercising choice and their independence, although the students interviewed also recognised the potential to feel 'trapped' by being sensitive to parental feelings.

## **Education**

Since 1983 when the NCAA first set minimum standards for first year students to be eligible to play on Division One college teams, there have been many attempts to make intercollegiate programmes more academically responsible (Coakley, 2007). All three NCAA divisions have claimed that education is a primary rationale for their existence. However, graduation rates traditionally amongst student-athletes have consistently failed to match those of their non-scholarship peers (Bowen and Levin, 2003; Knight Commission, 2001).

The most recent rules for eligibility went into effect in 2003 and according to critics of the NCAA can be interpreted in any number of ways therefore opening the door to abuse and corruption. Advocates of the current ambiguous structure argue that the university experience allows student-

athletes to fund their higher education and creates opportunities for future employment.

A related issue is whether involvement as a student-athlete facilitates desirable character attributes that are recognised by future employers. This idea has its origins in ancient Greece and the belief that health and well being was a function of both a sound mind and a sound body (i.e., *mens sana in corpore sano*). This view is reinforced by the athletic directors at both institutions who emphasised the role that their sports programmes played in facilitating character development through high standards of sportsmanship. Both universities had in the last three seasons been awarded 'fair play' awards by their soccer conference. Coaches at both universities stressed that their strict codes of conduct ensured that players wanted to win, but not at any cost to the values of fair play. The athletic director at East University was clearly proud of the graduates and the role that they had in the local community and spoke in positive terms of how several former players had gone on to become high profile members within the local chamber of commerce. Both programmes emphasised that a degree from their university afforded graduates a platform for future success in whatever their chosen field was.

## **Goals**

When interviewing the participants regarding their career goals, most of the answers were discussed in general terms (Moon, 2001). The majority of



the participants had a vague idea of goals, but not concretely. Most participants mentioned that they have short-term goals, and some talked about long-term goals too. Long-term goals included maintaining their scholarship and ultimately obtaining a 'good job', and making money. Short-term goals included doing well academically at university and working hard to improve their personal performance levels in soccer. This not only demonstrates future-oriented goal setting, but it helps establish personal responsibility and individuation. Evidently, if players only set and strive for goals that their parents set for them, then there is the potential for disappointment to follow, and possibly resentment to set in.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) identifies the importance of individuals being able to set their own goals independently of their significant others. If this is facilitated by sensitive interaction between the parent(s) and the player a state of 'flow' may be achieved in which intrinsic motivation for the player is promoted. The observations of this study suggest that the subjects were not in most cases the sole goal makers, but rather that there was evidence of mutual goal setting, as well as individual goal setting. The interaction between parent(s) and their child in terms of their motivation for selecting a soccer scholarship is evidently an important factor. Communication between the player and his or her significant others clearly impacts upon goal-setting for the scholarship. Within the context of 'significant others' players discussed the role of their parents, siblings and previous high school coach as significant in helping to shape their aspirations. Feedback from those individuals that are respected was a critical component in student goal-setting. The role of such 'informative feedback' is important according to research, so goals can be

adjusted and readjusted to fit skills and challenges of experiences (Colman and Carron, 2001). All players commented that from an early age their performance in games was compared to others in the team. This form of personal comparison by their parents and coaches allowed them to set goals and in most cases was seen as a key reason why they had been offered a scholarship in later life. The setting of personal goals at a young age was seen by the subjects as facilitating their drive or intrinsic motivation to succeed. According to research, this technique allows the child to feel more in control of their actions and goals and facilitates an internal locus of control (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000; Davis and Duncan, 2006). This locus of control was inadvertently promoted by all the coaches when organising their team and individual goals for the season. Each coach emphasised that players should not compare themselves to other teams and outside sources that they had no control over. This they believed de-motivated individuals and often led to player frustration and in some cases acquiescence from the team and their degree. To avoid a sense of 'powerlessness', coaches discussed at length the mechanisms by which they negotiated and agreed personal performance goals with each player. This they felt ultimately empowered the player and in doing so helped them to formulate realistic goals on and off the field.

## **Expectations**

Expectations as regards student career aspiration fit closely with goal setting. The impression from the results is that many players assimilated their parents' expectations. Family interaction, goals and expectations can be traced back to the importance of communication between the subjects and their families. The discussion presented so far has revealed the impact of family and perceptions of social class upon student motives for undertaking a soccer scholarship. The different forms and compositions of family represented by the subjects within this study demonstrate that the family is not necessarily 'functional' to the social well-being of the student. As such the family may in fact be a problematic variable with the decision-making strategies of the student. The next section provides a treatise of the diverse range of opinions regarding social mobility and notions of student career development.

### **Social Mobility and Career Development**

A number of case studies over the years have examined the occupational attainment of former college athletes (Eitzen and Sage, 2003; Loy, 1969; Sack and Thiel, 1979). Schrupp (1952) compared lettermen and non-athletes at the University of Minnesota and found that lettermen entered

careers that paid higher incomes. Husband (1957) found the same to be true of Dartmouth graduates. Litchfield and Cope (1962) studied members of the University of Pittsburgh's 1963 football team and found that, as a group, they had been very successful after graduation. Not surprisingly, Crawford (1962) found Yale football lettermen over the years to have pursued a wide variety of lucrative and influential careers.

Detailed studies of the effects of college sport on social mobility are few in number and there are no studies which are based on a representative sample of athletes from a wide variety of athletic programmes. Loy's (1969) study of 845 UCLA athletes is one of the few that considered occupational attainment while controlling the socio-economic background of the athletes' parents. Loy found that athletes in all sports had moved well beyond their fathers in occupational prestige and educational attainment. Loy's study provides convincing evidence that star athletes at UCLA have experienced significant occupational mobility. Loy's study however does not make comparisons to other schools, nor does it compare star athletes with 'journeymen', or athletes with non-athletes at UCLA.

Sack and Thiel (1979) compared football players with non-athletes who graduated from Notre Dame between 1946 and 1965. They found that there was little difference between athletes and the general student population in terms of occupational mobility. In other words, there was no evidence that playing football was either a help or a hindrance to subsequent occupational success. There were a number of differences however. Among athletes and non-athletes who came from similar SES backgrounds, the non-athletes had earned far more advanced degrees. It was also found that first team athletes

had experienced far more income mobility than second team members and reserves. The major implication of the Loy study, as well as the Sack and Thiel study, is that if athletes can graduate from a school with a reasonably good reputation, they are likely to experience considerable social mobility. There is little doubt that college sport (in some universities) has served as an avenue of social mobility for large numbers of Americans from lower social class backgrounds.

With the forecast of fame and fortune it is no surprise that the dream of many adolescents in the United States is to become a professional athlete, the route for many aspiring to this goal is via intercollegiate athletics. Seemingly, such a career path fulfils the ideal of uniting a vocation with an avocation. To play the sport that one loves, to be paid an extraordinary salary, and to be treated as a celebrity certainly has its appeal. The narrative of the American Dream, presented in Chapter One, detailed the fascination of the U.S. public with stories of athletes turning defeat into victory and in doing so securing upward social mobility. The question arises however, whether the subjects within the study regard a career within soccer as viable and realistic mechanism by which to pursue the American Dream.

The results of the study clearly demonstrated that students have adopted a pragmatic approach to their scholarship. This view was possibly best summarized by Tracey who said that:

I don't think that being enrolled as a student-athlete as opposed to simply being a student is problematic. In theory, I get the best of both worlds. My family are firm believers in the value of sport and how it can

help to teach you things about yourself, such as toughness and determination. I like to think that I'm a well-rounded individual who can balance the priorities of when to focus on my studies and when I can target soccer. I think when I graduate my efforts here will be appreciated by any employer.

However, students also acknowledged that by accepting a scholarship they would be potentially making sacrifices in other areas of their academic life. Many educators and observers of Division One college athletics have expressed concerns that the time and energy spent on athletics prevents student-athletes from having a balanced college experience (Abowitz, 2005; Dubois, 1980). The literature surrounding the scholarship commitment often refers to students being asked to make a decision whether to take part in curricular or extra-curricular commitments. The surveyed student-athletes in this study however perceived their experience differently. The majority of respondents estimated their college experience as 'excellent' or 'good.' In addition, the majority of student-athletes stated that their college experience was balanced even though, as is evident from responses to other parts of the questionnaire, they recognize that they are precluded from having all the experiences they would like while in college.

The commitment to a university education was emphasised by all subjects within the study, as evidenced by Paul when he stated, 'I only have one priority; my degree is the reason why I'm here.' Athletic scholarships have frequently been cited as key inducement that attracts students to higher education (Eitzen and Sage, 2003; Giardina and McCarthy, 2005). Three-

quarters of the students in this study stated that they would attend college even if they were not awarded a scholarship. A majority also stated that they would participate in soccer without a scholarship if that were financially possible. Such responses undermine but help to integrate education and sport towards social mobility and simultaneously reinforce the claimed importance of athletics in attracting to college individuals who otherwise would not attend.

When the student-athletes were asked during their interview to evaluate the importance of graduation to them 92.5% responded that it is very important (99.3% if the comparison includes important and somewhat important responses). Students within the study believed that their scholarship provided them with a broader view of life which would be recognised by future employers.

The scholarship has allowed me to travel extensively. Playing soccer at university has certainly taught me some 'life lessons' that cannot be picked-up in a tutorial. I think I'm more confident as a person. My folks certainly think I've come out of my shell. I think they appreciate my commitment to the scholarship. It's been hard work, but I feel they respect me for persevering with it (Christopher).

I'm someone who has had to struggle for everything that I have achieved. When I put on my curriculum vitae what I have achieved to date I'm sure any employer will recognise my accomplishments, especially if they are familiar with the neighbourhood that I came from.

The scholarship has been tough balancing my studies and playing requirements. If you aren't committed to both then the coach and your professors will give you a rough ride. My ideal boss would be someone who has been through a sports scholarship themselves and that way they will appreciate my commitment on and off the field (Mikael).

Another matter much discussed within the interviews was whether being enrolled as a student-athlete in a Division One program was perceived as an asset or liability in terms of their personal development (Heck and Takahashi, 2006).

The study results show that over 60% of the players identify themselves more as athletes than as students. This result is not surprising given the limited interaction that scholarship students potentially have with their peers outside of athletic environments. According to the student athletes a 'typical day' would require soccer practice from 8am to approximately 10.30am. Academic classes would then run from 12pm to 3pm. Strength and conditioning sessions would be scheduled from 3pm until 4.30pm. Following the completion of the gym session, students would then return to the classroom from 6pm until 7.30pm. The majority of the soccer games were played on a Friday evening or Sunday afternoon with the occasional game taking place on a Wednesday. If the games on a Sunday took place away from campus then the team would normally leave on a Thursday morning and return after the game on a Sunday evening. Not only did players express concerns on how this timetable impacted upon their available time to complete their academic assignments, but also on the time available in which



they could obtain a part-time job to supplement their scholarship.

Student athletes are according to the NCAA (2007) subject to the '20-hour rule.' This means that they are only supposed to practice for a maximum of 20 hours, excluding the time spent during games. However, what became apparent from interviewing the players was that after they had allowed for 'optional' or 'voluntary' weight-lifting and practice sessions then their commitments both on and off the field clearly became demanding. Players felt obliged to take part in all of the 'voluntary' sessions in order to avoid being criticised by their coach.

According to Mikael, 'we were not about to complain, because we knew we would be yelled at by our coaches and also we were sure that the other teams were doing this as well. So, to stay on the same level of everyone else, we felt like we had to comply with this.' The 'stigma' associated with being a student-athlete was noted by Tracey when she observed that:

... the seclusion of the athletic culture was something that I had to face. It is often hard to meet other students and/or join other organizations because of their reputation/stigma that athletes have amongst the student population as well as amongst professors. I only faced one anti-athlete professor once and I immediately dropped his class. I knew that regardless of the quality of the material that I handed in I was going to be graded unfairly. There would be no exceptions if I had to miss a class/quiz or exam due to a travelling date and or a game.

The pattern that emerges from the majority of those studied however is a generally positive picture of college life as experienced by a very large majority of student athletes.

The responses for the majority, clearly contradict the often stated claims of commentators that student-athletes are exploited or denied the opportunity to be 'real' students. It may be, of course, that student-athletes misrepresent or inaccurately perceive their college experience and that their responses belie the reality of that experience. Equally, it may be that their responses reflect what educators and others see as false values or as a failure to attach the appropriate importance to various aspects of college life. These claims, however, which are predicated upon the rationale that there are clear components of an undergraduate education that should be imposed on all students without regard to particular predilections or career goals. The concern that involvement on a scholarship had a negative impact on their career potential was also raised. As noted above with Tracey and Mikael, the commitments necessary to maintain a soccer scholarship were highlighted as an issue. The requirement to attend training sessions every day meant that student-athletes were prevented from taking part in programmes such as internships, foreign study exchanges and from joining other social/recreational groups. In the view of two players who have declared aspirations to pursue a career in professional soccer this requirement was rationalised as a necessary sacrifice if they were to achieve their dream.

The data examined here looked at the American Dream from the perspective of students on a soccer scholarship. As a group, college students

in this study believe in the American Dream. Like their parents and grandparents before them, they believe that people can 'live well' in America.

## **Chapter Summary**

One salient outcome to be drawn from this research is the magnitude of parent's impact upon moulding the career aspirations of their child. The parent was recognised by all interviewees as highly significant and potentially problematic influence in moulding their decision-making and motivation for embarking upon a soccer scholarship. This process appears to be established at a young age and evolves throughout their life. The majority of the students had a great deal of enthusiasm for taking part in soccer at university, many of whom declaring that they would play soccer regardless of any potential financial incentives that they may or may not be offered.

Families within the study were categorised according to the specific themes of (a) Family interaction, (b) Communication, (c) Expectations, and (d) Goals (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000). The dynamics that emerged revealed that students fell into the typology of High Challenge / High Support, High Challenge / Low Support, Low Challenge / High Support, Low Challenge / Low Support.

The results of the study clearly reveal that the majority of students embarking on a soccer scholarship are motivated by the need firstly to finance their higher education and secondly to take part in a sport they have played since childhood. The students clearly identified that their career orientation

was established by parents who were both highly challenging and highly supportive.

The study has also revealed a varied relationship between family, individual agency, sport, education and some sense of aspiration for the players. All of which are underpinned by a desire to facilitate upward mobility. The concept of the 'American Dream' is arguably reflected within the students sampled for this research. Student athletes have embraced the narrative that identifies hard work and dedication as factors for both social and monetary success (McDonald, 2005). From a macro perspective the study recognised the broader socio-cultural environments, their educational structures, family processes and value systems which impact upon their social lives. The complex interplay and transmission of presented an overall 'feel' of the culture in which the players operated.

From a micro perspective, the study presented a broad spectrum of individual needs for undertaking a scholarship. At this more intimate level the participants generally were in agreement that the concept of the American Dream was for them real, tangible and achievable via the vehicle of their scholarship.

The foundation for soccer to enter the consciousness of the American people has been clearly demonstrated by its traditional popularity amongst 'grass roots' participants of both genders. However, the increasing number of spectators and subsequent commercial interest in the professional game now allows it to 'challenge for acceptance' within the broader lexicon of American sporting and educational culture. The Dream and thus the central drama of

U.S. culture appear to be the dynamics of status advancement. Soccer scholarship students appear to reinforce such philosophical traditions.

The education system in the United States has been consistently identified as the most effective, efficient and non-discriminatory mechanism for all citizens to improve their economic standing (McMurrer and Sawhill, 1998; Sack, 1987; Stempel, 2005). By undertaking a degree, individuals with low socio-economic status are encouraged to believe that they can increase their income potential and therefore earn more than their parents. The challenge of the American Dream is then to exceed the achievements of their parents and challenge those in the upper income quintiles. Generally speaking, each supplementary level of education an individual achieves, whether it is as a college graduate or ultimately via an advanced post graduate professional degree, is pre-supposed to add greatly to income levels (Barnett and Belfield, 2006). Education could therefore be regarded as a ritual affirmation of American social mobility and arguably a conduit for status advancement. The subjects within this study appeared to have internalised such values and status markers from their parents. However, what is also apparent is that the process of socialization within the concept of the Dream appears to have become a two-way transmission process in which the children have socialized their parents into recognition of the role that soccer can play in the goal of upward mobility.

The concept of 'commitment' to both academic and playing responsibilities was a common feature of the students interviewed in the study. As identified by Grey (1994) new careers such as in this study, those facilitated by athletic scholarships, are defined by individuals taking

responsibility for their own careers. As such the soccer scholarship was potentially what Grey would refer to as 'a project of the self' (p. 479). Within this context students frequently referred to the role of their parents in providing the necessary supportive environment and where necessary the challenge to maintain the commitment and energy to their scholarship. Students within the concept of commitment also referred to their playing position within their team, roles and functions they had. This sense of 'loyalty' both to their team mates and families was evident in their commitment to what was evidently a highly time consuming and demanding role of both student and athlete. The family was crucial in maintaining the dedication of the individual to their scholarship and as such represents a distinctive dimension to their occupational identity. Soccer within this context represented a frame of reference and distinctive self-image that was clearly acquired during childhood.

Soccer, in this study, enabled students to both maintain a definitive self-image and fund their education. This finding somewhat contradicts the earlier research of Veblen (1914) who has previously observed that one's training and socialization into a distinctive role may lead to 'trained incapacity' or likelihood that possibilities in other occupations are neglected. In fact, the results of this thesis reveal the opposite; that students are acutely aware of the upward mobility possibilities that can emerge from their athletic scholarship. A more adequate explanation, sociologically, is that students are aware of the enabling and constraining features of the network of relationships that emerge from successful completion of their degree and the role that a scholarship plays in facilitating that goal. The students appeared to

be fully aware of the uncertainty of a career in soccer after graduation from university. The highly competitive labour market in which both domestic and international professional soccer operates had resulted in the subjects presenting a pragmatic perspective towards ambitions of pursuing a professional career in soccer upon graduation. Students were aware of the uncertainty of the marketplace and the limitations of their own technical ability. As such their participation in the scholarship could be considered to be a pragmatic adaptation of a 'labour of love' (Roderick, 2006). Typically, this adapted definition would explain the subject's clear enthusiasm for the game mixed with its use as a vehicle of upward mobility.

The next and final chapter will provide an analysis of the cultural implications of the study from both a micro and macro level.

## **CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSIONS**

The data examined in this study considered the American Dream from the perspective of student-athletes undertaking a soccer scholarship at two liberal arts universities. As a cohort, the athletes reflected the traditional view echoed by their relatives and predecessors that success in life is a reflection of determination, hard work and initiative. The sacrifices that are entailed by pursuing higher education will lead to upward mobility and material rewards. Failure to achieve in life is not a reflection of family circumstances, but a reflection of a lack of endeavour on the behalf of the individual.

In comparison to previous research, the impact of status variables was of little significance to student philosophy regarding perceptions of the American class system. A potential concern regarding the study could be raised in relation to the selection of 'a-typical' student-athletes sampled. The selection of soccer scholarship students from two elite liberal arts institutions was mitigated by sensitivity towards controlling the selection of participants from a range of socio-economic family backgrounds. The pilot study revealed minimal differences in terms of participants' attitudes toward any perceived class orientation, thereby reducing potential concern regarding sample bias.

The implications of this study potentially touch upon a few contentious issues relating to beliefs and values in contemporary America. As identified by Greenberg (2003) current undergraduates and recent graduates represent the vanguard of a new generation. The current millennial cohort of 'Generation Y' according to social theorists is caught between the values and ideals of the more politically contentious 'Baby Boomers' and the more disenfranchised 'Generation Xers' (Abowitz, 2005; Greenberg, 2003). The current 'Generation



Y' sampled within this study arguably represent a departure from their predecessors in terms of their scholarship decision-making. By opting to pursue a soccer scholarship they are displaying a difference in aspirations and values from previous patterns of behaviour displayed by 'Baby Boomers' and 'Gen Xers.' As a result their choices may challenge existing schools of thought regarding the position of soccer within mainstream American culture. The cohort however represent a degree of continuity with regards their philosophy towards the American class structure. This sample demonstrates a continued belief in the ideology of achievement at the core of the American Dream. As a result they appear determined to keep faith in the vehicle of higher education as a mechanism by which to achieve upward social mobility.

For the college personnel interviewed in the study, the conclusions reinforce that this is not a cohort of apathetic individuals who have an expectation of success founded on privilege and family background. The student-athletes evidently aspire to live the American Dream and have the expectation of achieving it. The economic reality of funding a four year undergraduate degree in modern America is not lost on the students sampled in this study. Clear evidence is provided that success in higher education requires individual effort both on and off the field for the student-athletes.

### **Cultural Implications: Expensive Dreams**

Social class and class relations are clearly integral to the shape and content of U.S. sport in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The meritocratic ideology that underpins the Dream drives a combination of individual achievement and consumption. But do students always 'get what they deserve and always deserve what they get' via the current system?

The above rhetorical question represents the concerns highlighted in Chapters Four and Five and highlights a number of issues, which may help to contextualise how universities operate the sports enterprises they created.

### **The 'Amateur Student-Athlete'**

Intercollegiate sports began in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century; a time of rapid industrialization as well as rapid growth in higher education. However, its development into a business enterprise and part of the entertainment industry did not take part until the first part of the twentieth century. During this period, intercollegiate sport, especially basketball and football attracted thousands of spectators to newly built stadiums. Aggressive marketing and television coverage have all combined to incorporate 'big-time' collegiate sport into one of the most popular components of the national sports industry. Contemporary college sport is a business enterprise and also part of the entertainment industry. But, the official ideology of the universities and their controlling organization, the

NCAA, is that college sport is amateur sport. Within this structure students are awarded a scholarship as compensation for their athletic endeavours.

In college sport, the ideology of amateurism constructs a surface reality that denies the existence of corporate influence while at the same time serving as one. As a consequence, elite Division One athletics has been protected by the media and its marketplace. As a result critics of the NCAA (Slack, 2003) argue that it has presented itself as a hybrid education/amateur sport association rather than an athletic corporation. The 'veil of amateurism' that Slack and others refer to serves to obscure the corporate functions at the core of college sport while simultaneously presenting the image that college sport is about students and education. The gap between the principles of what Sperber (1990) has called 'College Sport Inc' and the primacy of education has led to a consensus of belief that reform is necessary in order to protect the integrity of higher education. The challenge for such institutions however is in the financial sacrifices that separating from a professional sports model will have upon higher education.

The philosophical debate surrounding collegiate sport and its relationships with commercial forces can be traced to a landmark court ruling in 1953. The challenge surrounded confusion regarding the definition of employee-employer relationships that had been established when athletic scholarships were first awarded to college athletes for their services on the field of play (Gorn, 2004; Slack, 2003). Until 1953 a college athlete was eligible for financial assistance on the basis of academic performance and financial need. The court ruling led to a change in the criteria used from one based on academic performance to one based on athletic performance. As a

consequence the relationship between college athletics and educational institutions was reshaped.

Elite athletic ability can be regarded as a rare and a finite commodity, therefore, to succeed colleges have since 1953 competed aggressively for those individuals who as student-athletes can win games (Coakley, 2007; Slack, 2003). The relationship between education and athletics in contemporary America has become so deeply entwined that it is logical to assume this relationship is entirely appropriate and harmonious. Inevitably cultural observers have tended to consider establishments as being part of the cultural fabric of society if they have been in existence for an established period of time. Rather inevitably therefore, intercollegiate sports have become accepted as a feature of contemporary American society and higher education due to their formation approximately 150 years ago (Cousens and Slack, 2002). Collegiate athletics therefore appears to have become an intrinsic element of what takes place in higher educational institutions. Furthermore, some of the most high status and prestigious Ivy League institutions of the United States including Yale, Harvard, Brown, Princeton, Cornell, Columbia and Rutgers are at the forefront of promoting and developing collegiate athletic programmes (Garcia and Bayer, 2005). This approbation by highly prestigious institutions has served to further reinforce the bond between athletics and academics and arguably lends legitimacy to the view that collegiate sport is a central component of American higher education (Lapchick, 2006; Wiggins, 1995). Inevitably, there have been fervent and impassioned criticisms of the marriage between sport and higher education:

What in the hell is a commercial entertainment enterprise doing on a university campus. Big-time intercollegiate sport is a business enterprise...functioning as part of a cartel, and employing athletes ... who are paid slave wages (Sage, 1979, p.189).

The use of the term, 'slave wages' is clearly an emotive one, but is used by Sage and latterly by Farrell (2006) to underline the perceived exploitation of the collegiate athletes. Even so, many educational institutions have achieved national and international recognition for the success generated via the athletic exploits of their students. Ohio State, Pennsylvania and Notre Dame universities are enthusiastic regarding their association with success on the American football field whilst the universities of North Carolina, Duke and Tennessee take pride in the success of its student-athlete basketball teams. The implications of success for institutions are the instant name recognition and connotations of excellence that sporting success conveys. However, the fundamental remuneration for sporting success is how the above relate to financial wealth of each competing institution.

### **Soccer and American Exceptionalism**

It is undeniable that the development of American sport has followed the contours laid down by developments in American society (Bairner, 2001). In particular, the possibility that professional sport franchises could be uprooted and reconstituted in a different metropolis would be unthinkable

were it not for the level of urbanisation in the United States. As Rader (1996) observes, '... aided by jet air travel, sports entrepreneurs moved to exploit the new population centers' (p. 224). The result has been to integrate even more Americans into a national sports system while simultaneously providing them with greater opportunities to celebrate the uniqueness of their own city identities. If one were to equate globalization with Americanization, it would be meaningless to ask how successfully American sport has resisted the former. Conversely, if globalization derives from a multiplicity of sources and travels in many directions, it is reasonable to examine its impact on the United States.

The evidence displayed in this study reveals that soccer from both a participant and spectator perspective is growing at a faster rate than any of the more established sports of the 'Big Four'. The question 'why?' challenges existing notions that soccer has been crowded out of the American sporting landscape as a consequence of the development of indigenous sports. According to Markovits (1998), 'Bourgeois America created a new identity which prided itself on being explicitly different from that found anywhere in aristocratic Europe' (p.128-129). As a result, American football and baseball established themselves as sports and occupied the sports space that might otherwise been occupied by soccer. According to Markovits, 'it is particularly America's bourgeois hegemony and legacy of the 'first new nation' (p. 125) which contributed significantly to the continued absence of the world's most popular team sport as a major presence in American popular culture.

Yet, according to Sugden (1994), in terms of longevity and international competition soccer is the 'elder statesman of American sport' (p. 219). For example, the U.S. men's national team played a series of games against

Canada in 1885 and 1886 (Bairner, 2001), in addition the ruling body of American soccer, the United States Football Federation (USFF) was founded in 1913 and became affiliated to FIFA in the same year. Despite the long history of achievements from both genders on the world stage, there appears to be a determined effort on the behalf of 'American exceptionalists' to favour the view that America is different; according to Mangan (2005) this represents a rather myopic view that he summarises as an 'empire in denial' (p. 1194). According to Mangan, many nations adopt this view, but none so successfully as the United States.

American exceptionalism can be arguably traced to the latter part of the nineteenth century. A combination of insularity and political imperialism have according to Dyreson (2005) created an ironic symmetry which is bound by a national devotion to sport. The paradox created is reflected within the central premise of Markovits and Hellerman's (2001) work and later within Szymanski and Zimbalist's (2005) work entitled *National Pastime: How Americans Play Baseball and the Rest of the World Plays Soccer*. Such commentaries position themselves within the irrefutable stance that most Americans perceive soccer as a foreign game and by deduction, inferior to the home-grown national trinity of American football, basketball and baseball (Cousens and Slack, 2002). However, this fails to recognise the acceptance of ice-hockey as a cultural import from Canada. Arguably, the traditional view of what constitutes American sport has expanded with the inclusion of the National Hockey League (NHL) into the 'Big Four'. The problem with soccer being absorbed within mainstream culture may therefore simply be its perceived national identity. According to Giulianotti (2005) nationalistic

perceptions within the game of soccer encapsulates the strength of national identification of specific peoples, so that particular kinds of identity are celebrated while others are excluded. Yet national identities are never static nor mononuclear (Maguire et al., 2002). Within the views of American exceptionalists there is theoretically a perception of intellectual disdain for sports which have connotations of global and mass identities. Americans self-evidently play exceptional soccer but a perception of American exceptionalism arguably creates a barrier against including soccer in the American stable of national pastimes – a paradox indeed (Dyreson, 2005).

This thesis has demonstrated that the American Dream has at its very core the pursuit of upward mobility. Students within this study who embark on a soccer scholarship clearly demonstrate that their decision is based upon the economic incentives that derive from this higher education career option. Financial pragmatism is evidently the motive and driving force behind their decision making and in most cases not a belief that their experience at university will serve as a springboard to a professional soccer career. However, this trend may change if for no other reason than the economic model upon which America is founded.

The exceptionalist rhetoric has come back into American politics, according to Rodgers, as a reaction to the war against terrorism. But the reality arguably is that America is simply a nation which operates within complex, dynamic and conflicting and shifting domestic and foreign political agendas as any other. Nations exceed their own borders, with archipelagos of presence, power, and vulnerability scattered across the globe. The global



reach of popular culture, of which soccer is an element, is now pervasive and recognisable within virtually every nation in the form of media, and in the activities of its populace.

America traditionally is a country constituted of dreams (Gorn, 2004). Arguably, its validation rests on it being a place where one can, for better or worse, pursue distant goals. The problem with pursuing dreams, even shared ones, is that not everyone sees them in quite the same way. And, as is often the case in America, the gap between what is and what should be is often large. Therefore, the American Dream often exists on the boundary or margin where reality ends and illusion begins. Just as the illusion of Hollywood films melts away into the parting credits, so the American Dream has a tendency to dissolve, to break up into half-truths or untruths. This study has helped in part to de-mythologize the notion of the Dream and the evolving notions of how it can be pursued.

Previous research conducted into the impact of soccer upon the American nation has typically focused on the dramatic increase in participation numbers for both males and especially females. However, this reveals very little of what is happening with regards to the cultural significance of sports participation changes and their influence upon career processes. Nevertheless, past research has indicated that *if* playing sport is connected to career aspirations, it may operate in a variety of ways.

This study has revealed that students undertaking a soccer scholarship are motivated to do so in the belief that playing sport at university is positively related to upward mobility and future occupational success for the following reasons.

- It creates in some cases, and facilitates for the majority, the opportunity to undertake an academic degree and develop job-related skills.
- Provides opportunities to make friends and develop social contacts with people outside of sporting organisations.
- Expands experiences in ways that foster the development of identities and abilities unrelated to soccer.

Americans in this study clearly believe that sport is a conduit to upward social mobility. This conviction is based on the narrative that is introduced at birth and sustained via its agents of socialisation. But while the possibility of status and wealth through sport is possible, the reality is that the American Dream of upward mobility through sport is highly improbable. The fascination with sport, however, remains firmly established and this has at least two negative consequences according to Dyreson (2005). Firstly, socially excluded adolescents who devote their lives to the pursuit of athletic stardom are, except for the fortunate few, doomed to failure. Secondly, sport clearly contributes to the philosophy that legitimises societal inequalities and promotes the myth that all it takes is hard work to succeed. Eitzen and Sage (2003) make this point convincingly by identifying that sport is by its meritocratic ethos, facilitates status and rewards and thus provides convincing symbolic support for hegemonic and dominant ideology that pervades the U.S. Ambitious, hard working and dedicated individuals, regardless of social origin, can achieve success while those who don't move upward simply didn't work hard enough. Because the rags-to-riches athletes are so visible in American society, the social mobility theme is perpetuated. The meritocratic ideology

therefore perpetuates the belief that success of a few reproduces the belief in social mobility among the many (Dyreson, 2005).

When examining the question of whether an individual can experience the American Dream of acquiring fame and fortune through the vehicle of a soccer scholarship, this study reveals that the potential certainly exists. The best-paid athletes are among U.S. society's most highly compensated individuals. Even average performers in American professional sports are paid salaries well beyond what highly trained professionals earn in more mundane fields. Furthermore, although the length of a professional athletic career is normally short, individuals can easily earn enough money in a few years to allow themselves to live comfortably for the rest of their lives. Consequently, one would probably conclude that for those strong and talented enough, professional sport provides incredible opportunities for individuals to succeed beyond their dreams.

Yet, there are a number of caveats that need to be considered before advocating this pathway as a course of achieving the American Dream. Certainly, it needs to be acknowledged that while the rewards are great, the opportunities are few. Computing the number of positions in professional athletics and the number of people vying for them, it is unlikely that unless an individual is extraordinarily talented, and lucky, they will not depart from athletics as a success story (Carroll et al., 2007). As previously discussed, dreams, which are not realistic can be devastating. Even if an individual were to secure one of the few positions in professional sport the chances of having a long career are small. There is the obvious requirement of not only having potential, but also improving or maintaining one's level of expertise as new

competitors constantly vie for the limited number of existing positions. There is also the potential for being injured and having to struggle with both the psychological and physical pain of playing hurt, or not being able to play at all (Waddington, and Roderick, 1996). Furthermore, there are the constant pressures of performing well enough to stay in favour with management, the fans, and the media. The pressures of adapting to a lifestyle which demands large amounts of travel, living in the public's eye, and having large amounts of discretionary income all seem to provide challenges to an athlete's psychological health. Such factors have often been identified as contributing to the various types of self-destructive behaviours observed in athletes, ranging from using illegal drugs to terminating one's life.

Clearly, pursuing and experiencing the dream of becoming a professional athlete is a two edged sword. The carrot of fame and fortune exists for those possessing the talent and strength of character to embrace it, but for those less worthy, or less lucky, the penalties for seeking this dream and failing can be quite tragic.

The American Dream that U.S. children are inculcated with is a simple but dominant one: 'if you work hard and play by the rules, you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you' (Bill Clinton, 2000). The American Dream appears to have maintained its currency in contemporary society and is a frequently used metaphor in which politicians have eulogised American exceptionalism. Most recently President elect Barack Obama has cited the poetry of Tennyson's 'Ulysses' in embracing a spirit of hope (Hodge et al., 2008). On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008 the American people unambiguously to embrace that hope. Throughout his campaign,

Obama used Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech of 1963 as a template to parallel his own progress. In his own biography, Obama charts his journey as the son of a Kenyan goat herder who rose to the most powerful office in the world. The election of Obama as the 44<sup>th</sup> President restores faith in America as a land of absolute possibility. However, the use of emotional tropes should not be necessarily scorned as a device of those seeking power. When Obama spoke of 'unyielding hope' in his victory address to the American nation he arguably encapsulated the nation's faith in the capacity for society to improve and reinvigorate itself. The American public meanwhile has proved to its supporters that by electing Obama it is truly the 'land of opportunity.'

Yet whilst it may be feasible to argue that the Dream is not dead, the concept of the Dream as tangible is disputable. For those who believe in the values of America's much vaunted cultural egalitarianism there is an inherent rationalization that those at the bottom of the social scale are by virtue of their position intrinsically inferior. It is worth keeping in mind, however that a great deal of inequality is present in America. Consider the frequently observed socialist belief that there is a correlation between the more highly educated society tend to be more unequal. Sport appears to be perceived as a major avenue by which low socio-economic categories of Americans seek to escape poverty. Despite the weight of evidence, the myth is alive. Many protagonists who embrace the Dream would argue that its ethos encourages and provides a reassuring faith for Americans and there appears to be a widespread desire for it to continue.

Soccer in this doctoral study provides a metaphor for the American Dream and within that a metaphor of the belief that hard work and perseverance make it possible for any person to surmount any obstacles. 'New age' students in contemporary American society have adapted to their environment and clearly made pragmatic decisions that challenge intellectual observations of 'old world societies.' This thesis has shown that soccer, for some, has emerged as a vehicle with which to pursue the Dream, but fundamentally there needs to be change in the economic and political framework for the Dream to become a reality for each American.

In closing, this study clearly demonstrates that scholarship students are by virtue of their athletic commitments, faster and stronger than the 'average' undergraduate and constitute a discrete student identity. However, in common with their peers, students clearly identify that education is the locus upon which all of their aspirations of upward mobility are founded.

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## Appendices

## Appendix 1

### Player Questionnaire (part 1)

Ian Lawrence PhD Student  
“Soccer, Sport and the American Dream”  
Player Questionnaire (part 1)

**Date:**

#### Personal Details

- **Gender:**  
(Please identify): Male                  Female
  
- **Age:**
  
- **Ethnicity:**
  
- **Home Town Size (approx' population):**  
Large (100-500,000)  
Medium (50-100,000)  
Small (less than 50,000)  
Other:
  
- **Family Background:**  
**Which category best defines your home living conditions (family circumstances)?**  
I live with both parents?  
I live with Mother only?  
I live with Father only?  
I live with 'others'?
  
- **Family Income:**  
**Please identify which category you \$ family earnings fall into**  
Above Average  
Average  
Below Average
  
- **Family Socio-Economic Background**  
**Which category best describes your family?**  
Lower Class  
Middle Class  
Upper Middle Class  
Upper Class

- **Mother's Profession:**  
Highest Educational Achievement?
- **Father's Profession:**  
Highest Educational Achievement?
- **Name of former High School / Home town / State:**
- **SAT score:**
- **Current Playing Position (soccer):**
- **Name of University:**
- **Current GPA:**
- **Current status (identify):**      Freshman  
   Junior  
   Sophomore  
   Senior
- **Major course of Study (if declared):**
- **Minor course of Study (if declared):**
- **Date of graduation (predicted):**

**Q1. Which sports did you take part in as a child (0-10yrs)?**

- A. Name of the 1<sup>st</sup> or most important Sport or Activity at this age:  
Why was this sport/activity of significance or insignificant to you at this age?
- B. Name of 2<sup>nd</sup> most important Sport or Activity at this age:  
Why was this sport/activity of significance or insignificant to you at this age?
- C. Name of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or least important Sport or Activity at this age:  
Why was this sport/activity of significance or insignificant to you at this age?
- D. How important were your parents in shaping the above sports choices?

**Q2. From 0-10 years of age, did you have any role models, either personal or from media/society/sport? If so who were they?**

**Q3. Which sports did you take part in as a 'youth' (11-17yrs)?**

- A. Name of the 1<sup>st</sup> most important Sport or Activity at this age:  
Why was this sport/activity of significance or insignificant to you?
- B. Name of the 2<sup>nd</sup> most important Sport or Activity at this age:  
Why was this sport/activity of significance or insignificant to you?
- C. Name of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or least important Sport or Activity at this age:  
Why was this sport/activity of significance or insignificant to you?

**Q4. From 10-17 years of age, did you have any role models, either personal or from media/society/sport?**

If so who were they?

How important were your parents in shaping the above sports choices?

**Q5.**

**(i) How old were you when you first started playing organised / competitive / league soccer?**

**(ii) What were the reasons you began playing at this age?**

**(iii) Did you have a Sporting Ambition at that time?**

If so, what was it?

**(iv) Did you have a Career Ambition different from your Sporting Ambition?**

If so what was it?

**(v) Have you ever dreamed of playing soccer for the national team?**

**Q6. Identify if you have any of the following levels of playing experience:**

Junior varsity team member

High School varsity team member

State representative

National team:

- Under 18's (number of appearances) \_\_\_\_\_
- Under 21's (number of appearances) \_\_\_\_\_
- Full Team (number of appearances) \_\_\_\_\_

**Q7. Why did you choose to attend this University?**

(Identify most appropriate)

**(i)Scholarship / Financial incentives?**

Explanation:

**(ii)Academic / Degree reputation?**

Explanation:

**(iii)Sporting reputation of the University?**

Explanation:

**(iv) Recruited?**

if 'yes', how?

Explanation:

**(v) Other Reason for choosing to attend this University?**

Explanation:

**Q8.**

**(i) At this stage in your education do you have any role model(s)?**

**if so:**

**Have these changed?**

**(ii) Have they had an impact on your career choices, if you have one?**

Explanation:

**Q9.**

**Are you currently in receipt of an athletic scholarship / financial subsidy towards your soccer participation?**

Yes      \$per semester:

No

**Q10.**

**(i) How much does the financial support influence your decision to continue with soccer at University?**

**(ii) Would you have attended University regardless of having obtained a soccer scholarship?**

**(iii) Has your soccer scholarship impacted upon your academic performance?**

**Q11. What are your ambitions upon completion of your degree?**

**(i) Occupation:**

**(ii) Personal:**

**Q12.**

**(i) Have your career objectives changed since starting at University?**

Yes      No

Explanation:

**(ii) What do you enjoy the most about being a soccer scholar at University?**

**Q13. Do you feel that University has prepared you / helped you to realise these ambitions?**

Yes      No

Explanation:

Thank you, for taking part in this questionnaire.

All information will remain strictly confidential

Please return via e-mail to:

[i.lawrence@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:i.lawrence@yorks.ac.uk)

Ian Lawrence

PhD student

University of Stirling

## Appendix 2

### Player Questionnaire (part 2)

**Please read each of the following 8 statements carefully. After each statement rank your response for each statement according to the Likert Scale:**

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree or disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

Statements:

1. The American Dream is attainable (Rank: )
  
2. Social mobility is a consequence of hard work (Rank: )
  
3. The family is the most important factor in facilitating upward mobility (Rank: )
  
4. One can live well in America today (Rank: )
  
5. Talent always leads to success (Rank: )
  
6. The American Dream is an open and fair contest (Rank: )
  
7. I will achieve the American Dream (Rank: )
  
8. University is the key to achieving my ambitions (Rank: )



## **Appendix 3**

### **Player Interviews (semi-structured)**

*Part One (biographical details: family, social class, perceptions of social mobility and educational goals). Part Two (wider notions of the American Dream and the specific reasons for undertaking a scholarship).*

#### Interview Schedule

Date:

Place:

Student:

#### **Background/Preliminary Questions**

**Can you tell me about your sporting background before starting**

**University? Probe**

**Can you explain the specific reasons/motives for selecting this**

**University? Probe**

## **Family Interaction**

### **What kinds of things/activities do you do with your family?**

- Probes: Does that include your parents being involved with soccer?  
How much time would you say you spend with your family over the course of a week?  
How much time would you say you spend alone?

### **Do your parents play any sports or participate in any activities? Probe**

## **Communication**

### **How much time, on average, do you think you spend talking or communicating with your parents over the course of a week?**

- Probes: Are there times you find yourself talking to them more?  
What type of things/subjects/issues do you talk about with your parents?  
Does this include soccer?

### **Are there certain things (subjects) that you and your parents talk in more depth about? Probe**

### **Do you talk with your parents about your soccer? What do you seem to talk about most in relation to your soccer?**

- Probe: e.g. how you are playing, if you are having fun?

### **Describe your parent's behaviour when they attend a soccer game.**

Probe

### **Do you talk openly with you parents about expectations in general and in relation to soccer?**

- Probe: If not, why not?

## **Expectations**

### **What do you think your parents expect of you in general?**

### **What do you expect of yourself in general?**

### **What do you expect of yourself in relation to soccer?**

### **What are your parent's expectations of you in relation to soccer?**

- Probe: Do you feel these expectations are the same or different than your parents expectations?  
Do you feel you have a choice about your involvement in soccer?

**Describe your parent's investment/involvement in relation to your soccer.** Probe

**How do you see soccer as related to your future?**

Probe: Conceptualisation of the American Dream concept

**How do you think your parents see soccer as related to your future?**

Probe: Conceptualisation of the American Dream concept

## **Goals**

**Do you set goals?** Probe

**What kind of goals have you set?**

Probe: Conceptualisation of the American Dream concept

**What kind of goals do you think your parents have set for you?** Probe

**Have you and your parents established goals about your involvement in soccer?** Probe

**What kind of feedback do you receive about your goals and your parents' goals?** Probe

**Do you feel your parents play a part in whether you enjoy soccer or not? Why or why not?** Probe

**Do you talk openly with your parents about your expectations?** Probe

**Do you talk openly with your parents about their expectations?** Probe

**What can parents do or not do to increase or support enjoyment for you in your soccer experiences?** Probe

**What are your sporting ambition at this point?**

Probe: Conceptualisation of the American Dream concept

**Why did you choose to attend this University?**

Probes: Scholarship / Financial incentives  
Academic / Degree reputation?  
Conceptualisation of the American Dream concept  
Sporting reputation of the University?  
Recruited?  
Other reason for choosing to attend this University?

**At this stage in your education do you have any role model(s)?**

Probe: Have these changed?  
Have they had an impact on your career choices?

**Are you currently in receipt of an athletic scholarship / financial subsidy towards your soccer participation?**

Probes:       How much per \$ semester?  
                  Pragmatic view of scholarship or ambition to compete at a professional level?

**How much does the financial support influence your decision to continue with soccer at University?**

Probe: Would you continue to play soccer without the scholarship?

**What are your ambitions upon completion of your degree?**

Probes:       Occupation:  
                  Personal:  
                  Sport:

**Have your career objectives changed since starting at University? Probe**

**Do you feel that University has prepared you / helped you to realise these ambitions? Probe**

**What part does soccer have in your future career orientation/decision-making? Probe**

**Is the American Dream attainable in your view? Probe**

**Is social mobility a consequence of hard work? Probe**

**Does talent lead to success? Probe**

**Is the American Dream a fair contest? Probe**

## Appendix 4

### Profession Categories used for the Player Survey

#### Professionals

Architect  
Astronaut  
Attorney  
Certified Public Accountant  
Chemist  
Dentist/Doctor  
Engineer  
Executive  
Lawyer  
Pharmacist  
Professor

#### Professional/Technicians

Coach  
Communication  
Fireman  
Forestry  
Government  
Insurance  
Law Enforcement  
Other Business Administration  
Other Medical Related  
Other Self-Employed  
Professional Golfer  
Real Estate  
Religion Related  
Sales (not retail)  
Supervisor/Foreman  
Surveyor  
Technician

#### Service

Bank Teller  
Beautician  
Blacksmith  
Clerical  
Factory Worker  
Janitor/Maintenance  
  
Nurses Aid  
Restaurant Retail Sales  
Teacher's Aid

#### Management

Accounting  
Advertising  
Banking  
Business Owner  
Buyer  
Computer Related  
Counsellor  
Editor  
Educator  
Financial Advisor  
Librarian  
Manager  
Marketing  
Nurse  
President  
Social Worker  
Teacher  
Writer

#### Craft & Operatives

Animal Trainer  
Coal Miner  
Construction  
Entertainer  
Farming  
Heavy Equipment Operation  
Landscaper  
Mechanical/Machinist  
Military  
Operator  
Secretarial (Executive)  
Service Related  
Transportation  
Travel Agent  
Utility Employee

#### Homemaker/Retired

Disabled  
Homemaker  
Retired

#### Deceased

## Appendix 5

### Major Fields of Study

Business is the most popular major among the student-athletes surveyed. Almost one-third (33%) listed this as their field of study. The next most popular major is social sciences (17%), followed by arts and humanities (14%). Another 6% are undecided.

[Note: The figures in parentheses indicate the percentage of student-athletes in the particular major who have earned a 3.0 or better GPA.]

A Categorization of Majors for the Player Survey

#### Business

Accounting  
Administration  
Advertising  
Computer Science  
Economics  
Finance  
Hotel/Restaurant Management  
Human Resources  
Industrial Relations  
Management  
Marketing  
Mathematics  
Travel/Tourism

#### Natural Sciences

Animal Science  
Astronomy  
Biology  
Chemistry  
Mortuary Science  
Nutrition/Dietician  
Pharmaceutical  
Physical Therapy  
Physics  
Physiology  
Pre-Med  
Rehabilitation Services  
Zoology

#### Social Sciences

Anthropology  
Criminal Justice  
Government  
Human Development  
Philosophy  
Political Science  
Pre-Law  
Psychology  
Social Work  
Sociology  
Urban Planning

#### Arts and Humanities

Architecture/Drafting  
Commercial Arts  
Education  
English  
Fine Arts  
History  
Industrial Arts  
Languages  
Music  
Photography  
Religion

#### Physical Education

Commercial Recreation

#### Engineering

Drafting

#### Communications

Broadcasting  
Journalism  
Public Relations  
Radio  
Television

#### Agriculture

Forestry

#### Undecided

## Appendix 6

### Support and Challenge Dynamics Questionnaire

(Adapted from Moon, 2003)

Answer each question on how you generally feel about your family, with stating 'agree' (**A**) or 'disagree' (**D**).

1. (+ S) Others notice when I'm feeling down, even if I don't say anything.
2. (+ C) We enjoy playing competitive games.
3. (- S) It is difficult to relax and be myself.
4. (- C) We have few interests and hobbies outside of the home
5. (+ S) I feel appreciated for who I am.
6. (+ C) We express our opinions about current events, even when they differ.
7. (- S) The only time I'm noticed is when there is a problem.
8. (+ S) If I have a problem, I get special attention and help.
9. (- C) Others lack ambition and self-discipline.
10. (- C) I don't care if others think I'm "soft" or lazy.
11. (+ S) I do things I like to do without feeling embarrassed.
12. (- S) Day-to-day life is disorganized and unpredictable.
13. (+ C) We ask each other's ideas before making important decisions.
14. (- C) It's hard to find privacy when I need to concentrate and finish some work.
15. (+ C) I'm expected to use my time wisely.
16. (- S) Others can't be counted on.
17. (+ S) We try not to hurt each other's feelings.
18. (+ S) I am made to feel special on birthdays and holidays.
19. (- S) There are many fights and arguments.
20. (+ S) No matter what happens, I know I'll be loved and accepted.
21. (+ C) It's important to be self-confident and independent to earn respect.
22. (+ S) Our home is full of things that hold special memories.
23. (+ S) We are willing to help each other out when something needs to be done.
24. (+ S) We compromise when our schedules conflict.
25. (+ C) Individual accomplishments are noticed.
26. (+ S) We enjoy having dinner together and talking.
27. (+ C) Others expect me to be good at what I do.
28. (+ C) I'm expected to do my best.
29. (+ C) I'm given responsibility for making important decisions affecting my life.
30. (+ C) I try to make other family members proud.
31. (+ C) I'm encouraged to get involved in extracurricular activity
32. (+ C) I'm respected for being a hard worker.

## Appendix 7

## **Athletic Directors and Coaches Interviews**

### **Theme: The role of the family in the decision making of students**

**How often do you encounter parents as part of your role and responsibilities at the University? Probe**

**What is your impression of parental expectations for students who are soccer scholars? Probe**

**Are parent's fully aware of the rules and regulations as they apply to athletic scholarships?**

Probe: NCAA regulations/eligibility

**What role do the parent(s) have during the recruitment of players? Probe**

**What are parental views regarding the academic/sporting requirements of a scholarship? Probe**

**Who/Which is the most influential parent in terms of shaping the decision making of their child? Probe**

### **Theme: The number of scholarship places available**

**Do parents fully understand the level of financial support available? and/or the number of positions available? Probe**

**Is there any relationship/correlation between parental expectations and the requirements of maintaining a scholarship? Probe**

**Do parents attempt to negotiate/coerce you during the scholarship?**

Probe: negotiate increase in \$

**Would you recommend that students pursue an athletic scholarship?**

Probe: why do students undertake a soccer scholarship?

**What is your personal view regarding athletic scholarships and Higher Education? Probe**

**Does a soccer scholarship increase the likelihood of becoming a professional player/career? Probe**

## **The Americanization of Soccer**



**Can you explain the level of popularity soccer in the U.S.?**

Probe: youth recreation to university scholarship positions

**What is the role of the media in promoting the game?**

Probe: Is there an American Model?

**What do you anticipate to be the future of the professional game in the U.S.?**

Probe: MLS/WUSA?