

Street Soccer USA Cup: Preliminary Findings of a Sport-for-Homeless Intervention

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Abstract

Over the last decade, the emerging field of sport-for-development (SFD) has advanced global efforts of related and applied scholarship and programming. While most of the existing SFD body of knowledge addresses social challenges of the “global south”, today’s economic global recession spreads challenges beyond these regions. Scholars and practitioners of this emerging field are called to address this gap with related and applied scholarship and programming in the “global north.” Thus, the purpose of this preliminary study was to investigate the perceived impact of the U.S.-based Street Soccer USA Cup on its homeless participants and identify the event’s structures and processes that can facilitate positive outcomes. Data collection consisted of conducting focus group interviews with 11 players and six coaches, and engaging in direct observations. Data were analyzed through the process of open, axial, and selective coding. Results indicated positive perceived impact on participants through building a sense of community, creating hope, cultivating an outward focus, fostering goal achievement, and enhancing personal development. The Cup was effective in achieving positive impact through creating a celebratory and festive space for social interaction, and by creating an inclusive climate where achievement was celebrated. Findings derived from this research provide intriguing foundations for further research and development of the SFD field.

Key words: sport interventions, sport-for-development

Across the globe, there are a great number of sport-for-development (SFD) initiatives working to facilitate personal and societal change at the local, national, and international levels. SFD is the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialization of children, youth and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and peace (Schwery, 2003). One area within the SFD field that is beginning to generate attention among scholars and practitioners is the use of sport to address issues of social inclusion (Bailey, 2005; Sherry, 2010), as social inclusion has been recognized as a fundamental step in improving the social situations of disadvantaged people (Jarvie, 2003). While most of the SFD literature refers to projects and initiatives in the global “south”, given the global economic crisis, Lyras and Welty Peachey (2011) suggest that more research and interventions are also needed in the global “north.” In the U.S., homeless individuals have been marginalized and socially excluded from civil society. The number of people experiencing homelessness on a single night in the U.S. was approximately 643,000 in 2011, with the homeless population continuing to rise (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). Although shelters and soup kitchens are valuable resources that aid thousands of

people, they are often just Band-aids and cannot prevent the issue from continuing and expanding.

Feelings of being outcast, unwanted, and having minimal access to social outlets can lead to social exclusion (Sherry, 2010; Spaaij, 2009) and a lack of desire to improve one’s homeless status (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2005). However, some sport-related research has focused on how sport can be utilized to empower and support marginalized, disadvantaged, and socially excluded groups such as the homeless (see Frisby, Crawford, & Dorer, 1997; Sherry, 2010). There has also been only a little research on the sufficient conditions, processes, and structures needed for achieving positive outcomes through SFD programs in specific settings (Coalter, 2007; Jarvie, 2003). Given this backdrop and gap in the literature, the purpose of this study was to conduct a preliminary investigation of the perceived impact of one sport-for-homeless intervention (the Street Soccer USA Cup) on its participants and to assess the structure and processes of this initiative that may leverage positive outcomes. Through this research, which was supported by the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) Research Grant Program, we addressed the following questions: (a) What is the perceived impact of the Street Soccer USA Cup on its participants?; and (b) What are the structures, processes, and program components of the Cup that contribute to its potential impact on participants?

Theoretical Framework

To understand and explain the outcomes, structures, processes, and program components of a sport-for-homeless initiative, we adopted a theoretical grounding that utilized sport-for-development theory’s (SFDT) elements of effective programming (Lyras, 2007, 2012a, 2012b; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011) coupled with Chalip’s (2006) social leverage theory. SFDT’s framework is useful for assessing the impacts, structures, processes, and program components of SFD interventions and social leverage theory helps us understand how sport events can foster positive outcomes.

Sport-for-Development Theory

SFDT (Lyras, 2007, 2012a, 2012b; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011) was developed to help understand the structures, processes, conditions, and program components of SFD interventions that can facilitate impact and produce liminality and *communitas*. Using grounded theory methodology, SFDT was developed out of the Doves Olympic Movement Project in Cyprus (Lyras, 2007, 2012a, 2012b), a SFD initiative that aimed at addressing issues of social exclusion and inter-ethnic conflict among Greek and Turkish Cypriots. SFDT proposes that Olympism, blending sport with cultural enrichment activities (e.g., arts, dance, and music) and educational activities (e.g., life skills, goal setting, global issues awareness, human rights) can provide a platform to help address various social issues and challenges in different contexts (Lyras, 2007, 2012a, 2012b; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). SFDT and social leverage theory (Challip, 2006) suggest that the blend of

sport with an educational, festive, and cultural dimension creates conditions of belongingness, fosters a creative sense of community, and promotes peak experiences, all of which are essential foundations for personal development and well being. When individuals interact in such conditions, individual psychological needs are being fulfilled (self-esteem and self-confidence, altruism and sense of belonging, hope, and trust). This fulfillment transcends individual thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to a more outward focus and perspective, and allows individuals to think, care, and act beyond self (Bandura, 1989; Lyras, 2007, 2012a). Lyras (2007, 2012a, 2012b) suggests that SFD interventions can be effective if they utilize five components: (a) impacts assessment, (b) organizational, (c) sport and physical activity, (d) educational, and (e) cultural enrichment. These components encompass the organizational aspects, the environmental setting, and the conditions and the quality of the experience (e.g., process, content, and outcomes) (Lyras, 2007, 2012a, 2012b).

The first component of SFDT, impacts assessment, posits that SFD researchers should use scientific assessment procedures to identify the program components that lead to positive outcomes. Within the impacts assessment component, SFDT suggests that macro, meso, and micro levels of change should be evaluated to assess the impact of sport programs that promote positive social change (Lyras, 2007; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). Macro refers to changes in infrastructure, economic resources, socio-economic indicators, and systems that provide opportunities to poor and underprivileged communities. Meso addresses changes in social networks, inter-group relationships, values, norms, group cohesion, social integration, and social capital. Finally, micro refers to psychological impacts such as self-esteem, perceptions, stereotypes, and empowerment (Burnett, 2006; Burnett & Uys, 2000). SFDT suggests that these indicators can be best facilitated and evaluated by utilizing the impacts assessment component and the remaining four components as building blocks for sport interventions (Lyras, 2007; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011).

The other four SFDT components refer to the process, structures, and conditions of sport interventions. The second component (organizational) proposes that participants in an SFD program should be actively involved with organizers in shaping and helping lead interventions, thus, merging top-down and bottom-up management. For example, in the Doves project coaches, youth, and organizers worked together to plan the structure and programming for the event (Lyras, 2007). The third component of SFDT is the physical activity/sport program, which should be based on five principles: (a) an inspiring moral philosophy, (b) educationally oriented engagement of the sport experience, (c) inclusive teams, (d) quality experiences, and (e) linking sport with cultural enrichment activities and active citizenship (Lyras, 2007; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). The educational (fourth) component of SFDT is based upon social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989), flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), and problem-based learning (Brown & King, 2000). SFDT holds that an interdisciplinary curriculum can provide situated learning environments to help participants transfer knowledge to the real world that was gained through the sport intervention. Finally, SFDT suggests that the cultural enrichment (fifth) component can provide opportunities for recruiting individuals with diverse interests and backgrounds

(beyond sport) and provide opportunities for liminal experiences (Chalip, 2006). In short, SFDT posits that in addition to using sport and physical activity to engage participants, SFD initiatives should provide educational and cultural enrichment designed to help participants make positive changes in their lives.

While conditions facilitated by the five building blocks of SFDT can provide positive and pleasant emotional, cognitive, and social experiences (e.g., satisfaction, *communitas*, sense of belonging), SFDT advances that SFD initiatives should aim for transferability of positive outcomes over time and space (e.g., into participants' everyday lives in their respective communities) (Lyras, 2007, 2012a, 2012b; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). Thus, SFDT's contention that sport can develop community and peak experiences that transcend the self complements Chalip's (2006) social leverage theory, which advances that the liminality and *communitas* evinced through sport events can serve as catalysts for building social capital and facilitating social change.

Social Leverage Theory

In social leverage theory, Chalip (2006) positions sport events as having the ability to build social capital and strengthen the social fabric through two interrelated themes of liminality and *communitas*. Liminality is the concept that something more important than sport is taking place at an event, that there is a collective energy and vitality that makes social rules and distinctions less important and which transcends sport. This liminality, also known as peak or optimal experiences, enables discourse and brings together divergent groups that might not otherwise come together, which facilitates the formation of new networks that can have both cognitive and affective impacts. It thus creates a safe space for sensitive issues to be explored, symbolized, and considered. The sense of community that is engendered through liminality is then labeled *communitas*. To enable and facilitate the development of liminality and *communitas*, Chalip (2006) recommends that event organizers can foster social interaction and evoke a feeling of celebration by employing several structural and process elements. Organizers should enable sociability among event visitors, and create event-related social events, such as parades and concerts, to produce a celebratory atmosphere. Organizers should also facilitate informal social opportunities as well as incorporate ancillary events, such as arts and music activities, as a complement to the sport programming. Finally, organizers should theme widely, using symbols, colors, decorations, rituals, narratives, and stories to "make a visual statement that something special is happening" (Chalip, 2006, p. 117). Chalip then suggests that the celebratory nature of sport events creates the link between liminality and *communitas*, which facilitates the development of social capital and which can be leveraged to address social issues, build networks, and bring community action.

Street Soccer USA Background Information

Given the empirical gap in investigating how sport can be utilized to combat homelessness, we chose to situate our investigation within the Street Soccer USA (SSUSA) Cup, the premier event sponsored by SSUSA, a non-profit, SFD organization that uses soccer to provide a support system to homeless men, women, and youth for making positive life changes. SSUSA was founded in

2005 by Lawrence Cann in Charlotte, North Carolina. Cann has since expanded the initiative to 19 more cities across the U.S. SSUSA has three goals: (a) build community and trust through sports, transforming the context within which homeless individuals live from one of isolation, abuse, and marginalization, to one of community, purpose, and achievement; (b) require participants to set 3, 6, and 12-month life goals; and (c) empower individuals by marrying clinical services to sport programming and providing access to educational and employment opportunities (SSUSA, 2012).

The four-day tournament called SSUSA Cup is held each year in Washington, D.C. or New York City and brings together teams of homeless individuals from the cities in which SSUSA operates. Twenty-three teams (two cities fielded two teams), including one team from Russia, took part in the 2010 Cup in Washington, D.C. Each team was guaranteed five games in pool play, and the results of the pool play were used to create four different brackets for a championship tournament, with teams of similar skill level competing for one of four Cups. Kicking off the event was an opening ceremony, where the participants and their coaches paraded into the stadium in front of a large crowd holding signs representing their respective cities. The ceremony also featured guest speakers such as the mayor of Washington, D.C., as well as musical performances. Other celebratory concerts and activities were also held, along with 12-step meetings for individuals recovering from substance abuse. At the closing ceremony, trophies and medals were awarded, which included the MVP and Fair Play team award for sportsmanship. Also, the men's and women's national teams were announced. These national teams represented the U.S. at the 2010 Homeless World Cup in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Methodology

This study is part of an ongoing, multi-year, research and capacity building partnership between the authors and SSUSA designed to assess the long-term impact of SSUSA on its participants and other key stakeholders, and to evaluate the programming, structures, and outcomes of the initiative. For the current study, we used a qualitative research design - specifically, focus groups - to provide preliminary data for further validation of an applied instrument design. Qualitative data collection is often used to understand the experiences of marginalized groups involved in intervention programs (Burnett, 2001, 2006; Sherry, 2010; Spaaij, 2009). Focus groups were utilized primarily because this method gives researchers the ability to explore topics that may not be understood well or fully developed in the literature (Morgan, 1997), and interactions among participants enhance data quality because participants can serve as checks and balances on one another (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Participants and Data Collection

Participants were 11 players and six coaches and administrators who represented the geographic areas served by SSUSA. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants from cities representing different geographic areas and with varied lengths of involvement in the SSUSA program. Selecting both coaches and participants and drawing our sample purposively from teams located in the West and Midwest and on the East Coast served to increase data

dependability. As recommended by Neuman (2006), focus groups consisted of four to eight participants, thus giving each participant adequate time to talk and interact with others. The 11 players came from six different cities and ranged in age from 17 to 54. Their length of involvement in SSUSA varied from six months to two years. Three were female, four were White, four were African-American, two were Hispanic, and one reported a mixed race. There was a lower percentage of females involved in the Cup, so it was not unusual to have more males in the player focus groups. Two pre- and two post-focus group interviews were conducted with the players. In the coach/administrator focus groups, the six participants came from five different cities. One was female, five were White, and one was Hispanic. Five participants were coaches and administrators while one participant was a volunteer who had worked at the SSUSA Cup for the past two years. The years affiliated with SSUSA ranged from three months to three years. One pre- and one post-focus group interview was conducted with the coaches and administrators.

Participants were asked to consent to two focus group interviews, one the day before the SSUSA Cup began, and the second on the last day of the four-day event after their participation ended. The pre- and post-focus group interviews were conducted to assess possible changes in participants over the event. The research team conducted the interviews immediately before and after the event to minimize the potential for intervening variables. The focus group discussions lasted 60-90 minutes and were audio recorded with participant consent. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The focus group interview guides were semi-structured and based upon the tenets of social leverage theory (Chalip, 2006) and SFDT (Lyras, 2007; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011), and they were examined for face validity by SSUSA administrators prior to finalizing the guides. In addition to focus groups, field notes were collected, which included informal conversations with other key stakeholders, such as referees, others coaches, administrators, and psychologists. Direct observation was also utilized as the researchers witnessed approximately 50 matches and observed study participants' involvement in many facets of the event.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process consisted of open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Numerous codes were created through the open coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994), with some of the open codes assigned a priori based on the tenets of SFDT (Lyras, 2007; 2012a; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011) and social leverage theory (Chalip, 2006). Following the open-coding process, similar codes were grouped under one category for ease of analysis, and then codes mentioned by fewer participants were winnowed out. The data were then reduced into a few general, emerging themes (axial coding). Finally, in the selective coding process, two of the researchers put "side by side" the stories of the participants to pinpoint similarities and differences between their experiences that fell under the emerging themes. Using this selective coding, quotations from participants were identified that illustrated the themes that emerged in the axial coding phase. Triangulation of measures and investigators was employed to enhance the dependability and credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers kept field notes of direct observations

and informal conversations with referees, volunteers, and SSUSA staff members. Further, information was collected through pre- and post-focus group interviews. Additionally, member checks were conducted with participants, where they were asked to review transcripts and interpretations and provide feedback.

Findings and Discussion

Our first research question sought to ascertain the perceived impact of the SSUSA Cup on its participants. Findings revealed that the event had a mostly positive perceived impact, which we have crystallized into five broad themes: (a) building community and enhancing social networks; (b) creating hope and positive outlook on life; (c) cultivating an outward focus: trusting and helping others; (d) fostering goal achievement; and (e) enhancing personal development. To address our second research question, we will discuss the structural, process, and programmatic components of the SSUSA Cup, which facilitated these impacts within our presentation of each theme.

Building Community and Enhancing Social Networks

Every participant said the SSUSA Cup helped their teams form closer bonds, build bridges back to society at large, develop relationships with individuals from other teams, and expand their social networks. Thus, at the meso level of impact (Lyras, 2007), the Cup created a sense of *communitas* (Chalip, 2006) and gave participants the potential for increasing social capital development. For example, this was the first year that a team from one West Coast city came to the Cup. The team only practiced together once a week for two months before traveling to the Cup, so there was little opportunity for strong bonds of friendship and support to develop between team members. Early in Cup play, the team was losing and frustrated, and players were observed shouting at each other and expressing varying degrees of anger. However, as the days progressed, they began playing better and supporting and encouraging each other, and actually ended up winning one of the four Cups. In his post-event interview, Carter commented that the Cup “has built a better connection between me and my team. . . . We have this strong bond now.” In her post-event conversation, one of the coaches for the team, Anne, also spoke about how the team came closer together during the tournament; “When we first got here, we had people that really didn’t get along. . . . They never huddled the first five games. And then the last day and a half, we have a huddle, we have a chant, it’s great.”

Other players made similar comments as to how the Cup brought their teams closer together, built friendships, and facilitated teamwork. We also observed that all of the players and coaches for another team, men and women alike, wore Mohawk style haircuts to demonstrate team solidarity. In addition, many players spoke about how the Cup allowed them to connect with homeless individuals from other cities and helped them realize they were not alone in their struggles. For instance, Ben was an older participant in the Cup who had been homeless for a number of years before connecting with SSUSA in his city. This was his second year playing in the Cup. As such, he was considered a leader by many of the Cup participants and coaches. He commented that the previous year’s experience was an opportunity to “come here with other people that have the same kind of experience and I get to go

out there and almost meditate with them.” Mitch, one of the oldest participants in the Cup, saw the event as an opportunity to “be in communion with my brothers . . . because I believe everybody is connected.” Mitch was an enthusiastic cheerleader throughout the event, bringing a positive attitude with him to the Cup, due in part to his positive experience with the local SSUSA team that helped create *communitas* with others. Dakota thought the Cup built friendships because “you see the similar experiences [to] what you’ve gone through and what they’ve gone through.”

In addition to fostering community, many players explained how the Cup and their preparations for the Cup expanded their social networks with their volunteer coaches and other individuals different from themselves, which could provide opportunities and open doors for them in the future (i.e., job placement, housing, education). The principal means through which these expanded networks began to emerge was through relationships with the coaches. Many players said their coaches played with them in their practices and games and that this inclusive structural feature, which connects to SFDT’s organizational component of top-down and bottom-up collaboration, helped forge stronger relationships. Dakota, for example, said “it’s just a really good experience because your coach . . . is doing as much work as you are.” Mike, one of the coaches, thought that playing with the participants enabled deeper relationships to form, “being physical with them and communicating on the court and then also doing some coaching. . . . It’s pretty cool.” At the Cup, coaches did not play in matches, but did practice with the teams and were actively involved in team workouts. Thus, connections were formed between participants and their coaches prior to the Cup through the SSUSA local structures, but the Cup appeared to accentuate and enhance these relationships. In our direct observations, we noted a “we’re in this together” mentality between and within many of the teams. Participants and coaches were observed eating together, practicing together, going on sightseeing trips through the city, and sitting in the stands for long periods of time talking, which built upon the relational foundation established back in home communities.

Communitas and the potential for social capital development were facilitated through the organizational structure and programming of the Cup. Numerous social activities were planned, such as musical entertainment and group dinners, which provided opportunities for individuals from different cities to communicate with each other. Additionally, all players and coaches stayed together in a youth hostel, which facilitated additional opportunities for networking and bonding. Several participants commented that the hostel experience was a highlight of the event. Thus, similar to Sherry (2010) and Spaaij (2009), we found that participants began to develop the capacity for increased social capital through the event, with the potential for these relationships to then leverage other economic (job attainment, sustainable income, and housing) and cultural capital resources (Chalip, 2006; Misener & Mason, 2006). Skinner et al. (2008) contend that one of the greatest challenges for disadvantaged groups is to find a community in which to belong. Therefore, according to Green (2008), SFD interventions should focus on building community and relationships to facilitate positive outcomes, or a sense of *communitas* (Chalip, 2006), as this would allow for social network expansion and increased social mobility (Darnell, 2010). As SFDT suggests (Lyras, 2007; Lyras &

Welty Peachey, 2011), the Cup included non-sport programming (cultural and educational activities) in its structure, and fostered inclusionary competitive activities (coaches practicing and playing with the players), to facilitate expansion of social capital. One reason the SSUSA Cup was effective, then, is because it developed *communitas* and social network expansion through its structure and programming, which could allow participants to develop linking social capital (Woolcock, 2001) and leverage additional economic, cultural, and social capital resources to make positive changes in their lives (Skinner et al., 2008).

Creating Hope and Positive Outlook on Life

The Cup helped to cultivate a sense of hope and a renewed positive outlook on life among some of the participants – individuals who may have lost faith in humanity through harsh living on the streets or in shelters – through its liminality (Chalip, 2006), where there was a collective energy and vitality that made social distinctions less important and which transcended the Cup. For instance, George was a coach but also a formally homeless individual, who participated as a player in the Cup the previous two years. He reflected on how the Cup could instill hope in participants:

Maybe they've never been in a stadium before in their lives and when they play on that pitch tomorrow and these seats are filled . . . and they walk through this parade, it will instill hope in them that they can achieve something much more off the soccer field.

After the event, Mitch also commented that the Cup “reinforced my faith in the human race. There are some good things going on and we don't always see them.” Mitch had had a difficult life on the streets, moving in and out of shelters. For him, the positive experience at the Cup not only created hope, but renewed his belief that society could change. Ben also spoke about his previous experience at the Cup and how it increased his belief that positive change could happen, saying that, “we can go back there and show that homelessness isn't permanent and that you can change your life through sports.” Finally, Trevor, a player on an East Coast team who was a former college soccer athlete but ended up homeless when he lost his job, said that “I played for the crowd [in college] . . . but I'm playing for something different now. A greater cause. . . I play for self respect and hope.” This renewed sense of hope and positive outlook towards life (micro-level impacts) were engendered by the inclusive nature (bottom-up structuring) of the Cup's programming (organizational component of SFDT), where participants interacted with, and engaged in decision-making processes with, coaches, volunteers, organizers and community members who generally treated participants with respect and as equals. This inclusive focus and liminality (Chalip, 2006) appeared to motivate participants to want to make positive changes in their lives and to work for change at the societal level.

However, we cannot claim that the Cup was effective in generating hope among all participants. For example, one player, Rick, was despondent over his play and had nothing to say in the focus group following the tournament, sitting dejectedly the entire time with his head down. Before the Cup, he was excited about the opportunity to play in front of a crowd, saying, “I'm really looking forward to the experience.” But due to his team's poor play and his

own performance, his enthusiasm was severely diminished. For Rick, the Cup did not cultivate a sense of hope or positive outlook on life, but rather, reinforced his already low opinion of himself. In an informal follow-up conversation 10 months after the Cup with one of Rick's coaches, we learned that Rick had relapsed into depression and substance abuse struggles. While Rick was the only individual in our sample who had a negative experience at the Cup, we can assume that other participants experienced some negative moments as well. In addition, we heard the institutional rhetoric of “I Play for Hope” (part of the SSUSA Cup slogan) repeated many times by participants. Participants may have been reciting institutional rhetoric, and as such, we must interpret our findings with caution. Potentially, though, the enrichment of activities, adjusted to the unique interest and potential of each participant, can create conditions for engagement and “healing” beyond the traditional sporting experience. While sport experts can provide conditions for engagement, sense of belongingness and well-being, it is recommended that social work and mental health experts be included in initiatives for an ongoing, close monitoring of the progress of the condition of each participant.

Cultivating Outward Focus: Trusting and Helping Others

The third impact of the Cup was its ability to cultivate an outward focus in some of its participants, enabling them to trust others again, show empathy, and develop a desire to assist others in similar circumstances. This micro-level impact was accomplished through the liminality and sense of *communitas* that emerged during the event (Chalip, 2006). For instance, one of the process elements Cup organizers used to facilitate these altruistic actions was to give a Fair Play Award at the end of the tournament to the team which best demonstrated sportsmanship and exemplified the SSUSA mission and ideals, embracing the educational component of SFDT (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). Recognition was given to those teams and individuals who displayed good sportsmanship on the pitch. We observed several teams exhibiting better sportsmanship as the tournament progressed, as evidenced by helping opposing team players up after being knocked down, exchanging hugs and handshakes before and after matches, to even exchanging and signing jerseys, and providing opposing teams with gifts (T-shirts, flags, memorabilia from their cities) of friendship before the matches began. These acts of sportsmanship seemed to evolve as the days progressed and players learned to know members of opposing teams and bonded with them.

For example, Ben's team in particular had a goal of “winning the Fair Play Award.” Ben also talked after the event about how the Cup helped him develop an outward focus, saying, “It's made me more aware that I need to help other people . . . I need to have responsibility and help someone else come here next year. That's what I want to do. That's where the change is complete.” One of the most talented players at the Cup was Jenny, a former Division I intercollegiate soccer player who fell into difficult times through substance abuse and saw her life unravel, ending up homeless. Before the Cup, she said she was not sure what to expect, but afterwards, she explained how she was amazed at the impact the Cup had on her:

It gives me a lot more faith in people, because a lot of the small things they recognize here, I overlook them – like effort,

getting acknowledgment, and people just coming out to play and acknowledging their effort and spirit.

Jenny also said that “I would love to praise [SSUSA] where I’m from and get my city more involved. . . . make our city more aware of Street Soccer.” Other players mentioned their desire to help spread the word about Street Soccer back in their home communities, and to come back next year to the Cup not as players, but as volunteer coaches to help others make positive changes in their lives.

The coaches spoke about a positive change in good sporting behavior and outward focus among players. One coach observed her team “becoming more supportive of each other” as the Cup progressed, while another coach, when asked if he observed any changes in his team, replied, “Certainly . . . help the next guy up when he falls down. If it’s a hard push, remember why you’re here. Set your ego to the side.” However, not all players displayed good sportsmanship or developed an outward focus. We would observe Lamar, for instance, one of the participants in our study, often knocking opposing players down during matches and not helping them back up, or trash talking. Other players seemed to be focused entirely on winning, neglecting the message of fair play, demonstrating little concern for others.

Nevertheless, on the whole, through its educational focus on fair play (Lyras, 2007) and liminality evolving from the event (Chalip, 2006), the Cup was able to cultivate an outward focus among many participants, re-establishing trust and a sense of empathy that may have been lost while living in the harsh conditions of the street or shelter. This is a critical impact, and a necessary component of re-engaging the marginalized in society (Sherry, 2010), as without a renewed trust in humanity and compassion for others, it would be difficult for long-term sustainable change in the lives of the marginalized to be achieved (Skinner et al., 2008). Scholars advance that trust is a key element of social inclusion programs and must be established first before positive change can be enacted (Crabbe et al., 2006; Skinner et al., 2008). As a psychologist affiliated with SSUSA told us informally at the Cup, on the streets, the homeless lose trust and do not want anyone else to invade “their space.” Kaufman and Wolff (2010) also suggest that the team environment in sport can foster interdependence and a collective conscience, more so than in other environments, while Arnold (2003) advances that fair play learned through sport can help develop a socially conscious outlook such that one acts in a way that is just and fair. Here, then, the Cup’s educational focus on fair play helped to cultivate socially conscious behavior among the marginalized. This also extended into the desire of some participants to continue the legacy of the Cup by wishing to remain involved in the future and help provide other disadvantaged individuals with the same opportunities they had. An altruistic motivation on behalf of participants will be critical for the sustainability of SSUSA, as Skinner et al. (2008) have noted that SFD programs must recycle participants as volunteers and organizers to achieve sustainability.

Fostering Goal Achievement

The SSUSA Cup was also instrumental in motivating many participants to achieve their goals (micro-level impact), both prior to the actual tournament as a reward for making positive life changes, and through the Cup’s inclusively focused competition structure and provision of awards to participants. Many participants

spoke about how the idea of playing in the Cup motivated them in the months preceding the tournament, to attend practices, set life goals, and achieve them. Donald’s response was typical:

It’s going to change my life by playing here. It’s motivating me and making me reach my goals again. When I don’t have goals, I fall behind, and when I fall behind it’s putting my family down. . . . Now it’s time to make it back up. Get my family back and prove something to myself.

Donald also mentioned that, “our team that’s here today, we based it off of who came the most for every time we started doing [practices] two days a week.” He was referring to the fact that selection criteria for participation in the Cup in the various cities was based on who made the commitment to show up at practices, and who was able to set positive life goals and achieve them. Anne described how the Cup was used as a reward for players in her program; “the Cup is like the cherry-on-the-top. . . . It’s just one of those great rewards that they get for their hard work and consistency.” Anne’s thoughts were echoed after the event by George, when he related the experience of one of his players:

We have a guy who’s 20 years old. . . . He didn’t think he would score a single goal in this tournament. He turned out to be the leading goal scorer on our team . . . and he far exceeded his goals. . . . I think that is what this thing is about, to have a tangible goal in mind . . . and then ideally we would succeed and overachieve.

For others, just the fact that they showed up at the Cup was an accomplishment, as they had lost motivation and a passion for life as homeless persons. Jenny’s story exemplified how the Cup helped some participants find motivation and learn that they could commit to life again. As a former Division I soccer player, she had visions of playing professionally, but then poor life choices saw her living on the streets, not playing soccer. She related that:

I was intending to go pro . . . and when you don’t it’s just a hard reality check. It’s a blown commitment. I didn’t think I’d ever play again. . . . This to me is more rewarding than any competitive game I’ve ever played in college. . . . It’s already created a lot of opportunities for me.

At the conclusion of the Cup, Jenny was one of the players selected to represent the U.S. at the Homeless World Cup, which she said was thrilling for her, and a reward for her hard work and commitment to making positive life changes. The national team was selected by the coaches, and individuals were chosen for the team based upon not only their performance at the SSUSA Cup, but also their commitment to making changes in their lives.

While it is difficult to disentangle the effects of the SSUSA Cup on goal achievement from the effects of participation in SSUSA at the local sites, it does appear that the SSUSA Cup was used as a motivational tool by organizers at many sites to reward players for achieving goals. At the local sites, participants set 3-, 6- and 12-month life goals as part of SSUSA programming, which were then interconnected with the SSUSA Cup, as the event served as reward for positive change. Without the Cup being positioned as a “carrot” for participants, the efficacy of goal setting and achievement in the local arena may have been diminished. Thus, the Cup did have a positive effect on goal achievement, both before and during the event. In fact, all of our study participants except for Rick spoke about how the event fostered goal achievement. As mentioned

earlier, Rick had a negative experience at the event, but he did not comment either positively or negatively on how the SSUSA Cup impacted his goal achievement, although we can infer that he did not achieve his competitive goals due to his despondency after the Cup. Likely, other Cup participants as well would not have achieved their goals fully.

However, the structure and programming of the Cup did facilitate goal achievement for many participants. Selection of the national team, as well as the Fair Play and MVP awards, were motivators for participants to play well and achieve their life as well as soccer goals (i.e., winning the Cup). Many participants spoke about their desire to win the Cup, and how this motivated them to achieve. Organizers recognized the need to foster goal attainment, and thus, instead of only crowning one champion, they awarded four different Cups, allowing teams to play against similar caliber teams after the round-robin part of the tournament. Medals were awarded to all participants, regardless of a team's win-loss record. This structural component aligned with SFDT's (Lyras, 2007; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011) contention that the sport component of SFD interventions should strive to foster inclusivity and participation rather than exclusionary competitive models. By focusing on inclusion, the Cup enabled many participants to realize goals, which would hopefully be a stepping stone to achieving other positive life goals upon returning home.

Enhancing Personal Development

In the end, the activities, competition, and structure of the Cup, which created the liminoid space of the event (Chalip, 2006), enhanced the personal development of many participants, engendering enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence, cultivating leadership skills, and helping participants make positive life choices (micro-level impact). Consequently, the potential for building greater social capital was facilitated through the event. Almost all of the players in our focus groups noted the Cup increased their self-esteem and self-confidence. At the beginning of the Cup, there was an opening ceremony featuring a parade of participants, where players and coaches entered the stadium as the crowd cheered and clapped. National media also attended, capturing the parade on film and interviewing players. These cultural enrichment activities, as explained through SFDT (Lyras, 2007; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011), subsequently enhanced the self-esteem of the players, providing recognition to individuals who perhaps the day before were sleeping on the streets or in a tent in the woods. For example, Jared commented on all of the attention and how this made him feel:

I've never done this before. I feel like a star right now. I feel like we got a professional team, [being] watched on NBC, playing soccer for the USA Cup. I never would have thought in a million years being interviewed. Man, that's a big event. I've never had it before. It feels good.

Dakota also said after the Cup that she learned "that I'm talented. I can do whatever I want as long as I put my life into it," while Jenny commented afterwards "I feel like we won but we didn't really win." Finally, George provided an illustrative quote as to how the Cup impacted him and those individuals he played with last year:

They [the crowd] weren't staring at me because I was asking for money or they weren't staring at me because I hadn't been

able to shower in a couple of days. They were looking at me . . . like . . . there's this guy out there, or there's this women out there working hard and trying to better themselves. . . . It really lifted their spirits.

For others, the tournament helped to build leadership skills. Carter, for instance, when asked what he learned through the Cup, said, "I learned that I can become a motivational speaker. I was just amazed at all of the inspiring words I could give to anybody." Throughout the four days, we observed Carter growing in his leadership ability. At first, he was quiet and playing a passive role with the team, but by the end of the tournament, he was a vocal, inspirational leader, helping his team win one of the Cups. Anne also observed the growth of leadership in her team. Early in the tournament, she did not see strong leadership emerging, but then as the days progressed, she noted "the last few games, everyone stepped up. . . . we really had leaders." Finally, personal development was enhanced through the Cup by helping participants learn how to make positive life choices. George shared his perspective about playing at the Cup:

I think for those of us who have made poor decisions in the past, on the pitch I'm not being judged for whatever it is I've done . . . I'm one person, part of a team, trying to accomplish a common goal. . . . It's making the right decisions on the pitch . . . and then that translated off the field, making right decisions off the field.

Jenny commented on how her training for the Cup helped her feel like she was making positive choices again; "I haven't felt like I've been doing the right thing . . . this feels good to be doing the right thing for the right reason. It feels so empowering." However, as mentioned earlier, not all participants had a positive experience at the Cup. We cannot say that personal development was enhanced for Rick, who was highly despondent and disappointed in his play. Lamar was another participant who made a few positive comments about his experience at the Cup, but his demeanor and sarcasm suggested that he was not really taking the experience seriously, and that he was in D.C. more to just have a good time. A few other players were also observed to not fully participate in the Cup programming (not interacting with others, staying to themselves, disappearing for long periods of time).

In spite of these challenges, it was perceived that the Cup did enhance a number of personal development indicators of many participants (self-esteem, self-confidence, leadership, positive life choices) through providing inclusive, competitive opportunities for success, and through offering cultural enrichment activities (such as the parade during the opening ceremony) that provided much-needed recognition. This structure and programming is in line with the tenets of SFDT, which suggest that blending inclusive structures and programming with cultural enrichment activities will create the conditions to facilitate social change (Lyras, 2007; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). Our results are also congruent with findings from other studies with marginalized populations, which have concluded that sport can be an effective tool for building self-esteem, self-confidence, and enhancing personal development among the marginalized and disadvantaged (Burnett, 2006; Frisby et al., 1997; Sherry, 2010).

General Discussion, Implications for Theory, Research and Practice

Through this study, we sought to identify the perceived impact of the SSUSA Cup on its participants and identify the structures, processes, and program components that facilitated positive impacts. We found that the event was perceived by participants to have a positive impact on many, but not all, of the homeless men and women playing in the Cup, which was facilitated by its inclusive programming, and blend of cultural enrichment and educational activities (Lyras, 2007; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). The preliminary findings of this study represent a contribution to the SFD literature given that it is one of the first empirical assessments in the “north” that aims to understand the processes and the impact of a sport-for-homeless initiative. This study also provides the foundation for further instrument design and demonstrates how SFDT can be utilized in various SFD contexts (Lyras, 2007, 2012b; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011).

Further longitudinal studies are needed to ascertain whether or not SFD initiatives have lasting impacts on their participants. Cross-sectional designs, while able to contribute to assessment of immediate impact, do not aid in determining lasting effect. There is need to examine the characteristics and constraints of individuals for whom SFD initiatives have the best (or least) effect. Academicians should begin partnerships to launch new SFD initiatives, as well as work with existing SFD organizers, participants, and policy makers to collaborate on program design and assessment strategies. From a practical standpoint, organizers of SFD initiatives targeting the marginalized should strive to de-emphasize competition and focus on inclusionary activities that build community and provide recognition. Modifications to existing sport structures should be incorporated, such as mandating that all players on a team receive equal playing time, and providing all participants with awards regardless of whether or not they “won” the competition, so that self-esteem and self-confidence can be enhanced. Educational and cultural activities should be merged with sport programming to facilitate positive impact, as suggested by SFDT and social leverage theory (Chalip, 2006; Lyras, 2007, 2012a; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). As Spaaij (2009) reiterated, the transformational capacity of SFD can only be realized when interventions are offered in conjunction with non-sport activities. Finally, those engaging in SFD work should realize that interventions are most effective when partnered with other social services (Crabbe, 2000), and that they must occur within a broader developmental framework for change. Stand-alone SFD programs will have marginal impact if they are not tied into other community resources to facilitate long-term engagement and impact.

Findings should be interpreted with caution due to limitations such as social desirability bias, the pre-post focus group methodology perhaps not allowing time for participants to deconstruct the event, and not ascertaining long-term impact. However, given the sensitivity of the population and the preliminary stage of this research, our study respected both the uniqueness of the group under investigation and the scientific value, without overwhelming the participants with long and extensive data collection processes. SFD interventions should apply a mixed methods approach utilizing multiple sources of information (Lyras, 2007, 2012a; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). Lastly, SFD researchers and

practitioners are cautioned not to oversimplify the complexity of challenges such as poverty and homelessness, since such problems entail institutional, cultural, political, and financial complexities beyond integration of the marginalized into the political economy and culture of a society (Lyras, 2012a, 2012b; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011).

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