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Success of Small Football Nations

Students:

Mathias Hørup Mauritzen - xxxxxx-xxxx

Ivan Ivic - xxxxxx-xxxx

Supervisor:

Sven Junghagen

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Abstract

This thesis studies the phenomenon of small but successful footballing countries who are able to compete and produce talent on the highest international levels. Countries with small populations are often marvelled during successful performances in sporting events. Therefore the driving forces behind these successes in the context of football will be researched.

The countries of Croatia, Uruguay and Belgium will be investigated through a case study approach. Each country will have its own individual case followed by analysis. Current literature, as well as other qualitative and quantitative data will be used in an attempt to explain the phenomena and gain insights in relation to the 'how' and 'why' questions at hand. Following each case country and analysis, will be a cross case analysis that identifies themes, patterns and similarities amongst each case country. Furthermore, primary data through the use of expert interviews from the field will be incorporated in the cross case analysis in order to corroborate and shed light on the findings that were prevalent amongst the case countries. Each country was found to have its own unique competencies pertaining to their success. In addition, similarities amongst the case countries were found to be present, which may suggest areas of improvement for other countries.

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Introduction

One ball, two teams and 22 players gathers millions of spectators around the world. The ways to describe the most popular sport the world has ever seen are numerous (FIFA, 2010). Football is in many ways much more than a sport, as it has had an impact on the world in a multitude of fashions. During the First World War, a group of British and German soldiers decided leave their trenches and instead of shooting at each other, elected to play a game of football before they got back to fighting. Another example of the power of football from recent times includes when Ivory Coast's Didier Drogba fell down on his knees and begged his fellow countrymen to stop fighting each other in a civil war back home during the 2006 FIFA World Cup, which soon ended a five year civil war (Goldhill, 2014). Football is much more than just a sport, as the legendary Liverpool coach Bill Shankly once explained the meaning of football:

> "Some people believe football is a matter of life and death. I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that"

It is safe to say that football is a sport that brings with it a huge range of emotions as many football fans love a good story. It is not uncommon for neutral fans or simple spectators to cheer for the underdogs of a tournament, this can be seen across all sports. Few stories are better than the tale of David vs. Goliath which for many is regarded as the original underdog story in human literature. The best stories in football often involve a small team going against the odds and upsetting more powerfully perceived teams. These instances have occurred several times over the history of football and have made for quite attractive entertainment. A few examples include Denmark as the European Champions in 1992, Greece as European Champions in 2004, Leicester City as Premier League winner of the 2015-2016 season etc.

The European Football Championship of 2016 ended under a year ago and fans can now look back in hindsight at the 'magic' that swept football fans worldwide. The smallest country to ever qualify for the European Football Championship not only qualified but surprised everyone by eliminating England, maybe the biggest football nation on earth, in the round of 16. That country was Iceland and their amazing run during the tournament shocked anyone watching. Iceland has a low level of professionalism in their top domestic league, their national coach works as a dentist for a living (Smith, 2016), and has a

population of only 330,823 in 2015 (WorldBank, 2015; every population reference hereafter is accurate as of 2015 and from the WorldBank, 2015). England on the other hand has the biggest football league in the world measured on revenue (UEFA, 2017) and a total of 72 professional football teams (Chalk, 2016), as well as their national coach being the top earning manager at the Euro Cup 2016 (Brus, 2016). England had a population of 54.7 million in 2015, or 165.6 times bigger than Iceland. Iceland making its surprising run and upsetting England could be considered a coincidence or a matter of luck, however the tournament that year came with even more surprises as Portugal, another relatively small populous country ended up winning the tournament. The phenomena of the underdog prevailing against mightier opponents is riddled in human history and in archetypal behavior. The phenomenon is most certainly prevalent in the domain of football, where teams are not always evenly matched.

In 2006 FIFA published a report called 'Big Count', showing that there were 265 million active football players in 2006, of which 238.6 million were male (FIFA, 2006; every measurements of players, number of teams, clubs in a country references hereafter to FIFA, 2006). These numbers show that the popularity of football and the general interest from the public is huge across the globe resulting in high levels of competition. The FIFA top 10 ranking of 1st April 2017 contains big teams both in terms of their national football success but also in terms of their population (FIFA, 2017; every FIFA rank reference hereafter is from FIFA, 2017, April 1st). Countries like Brazil (FIFA rank: 2 – Population: 207.847.530), Germany (FIFA rank: 3 – Population: 81.413.150), Spain (FIFA rank: 10 – Population: 46.418.270) are all in the top 10. Smaller countries are currently also to be found in FIFA's top 10 ranking list. These countries include Belgium (FIFA rank: 5 – Population: 11.285.720) and Uruguay (FIFA rank: 9 – Population: 3.431.550). In 2006, China, USA, India, Germany and Brazil all had more active football players than Belgium and Uruguay had citizens. However USA (FIFA rank: 30 – Population: 321.418.820), China (FIFA rank: 86 – Population: 1.371.220.000) and India (FIFA rank: 132 – Population: 1.311.050.530) were all ranked considerably lower than these small countries on FIFA's ranking. We find this to be an interesting paradox and have therefore decided to investigate why some small national team are more successful than others and how small nations can compete with larger ones.

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to investigate the success of relatively small populated football nations. It is no secret that big nations have had the most success measured on accolades, however supporters of small nations often believe they have the chance to win a match or even an entire major international tournament, even with significantly lower odds. It may seem like an impossible endeavor, however the success of small nations at major tournaments has indeed been seen. To date, there is no current literature specifically analyzing the phenomena of small but successfully performing football nations. Football as previously mentioned is the most popular sport in the world, making it highly competitive amongst the nations that are interested in becoming successful at football, which makes this study more relevant than ever.

Therefore, the research question of the current study will be as follows:

How do small successful footballing nations effectively produce talent and what can these nations do more efficiently to compete on a global scale?

In addition to the research question, other areas of interest will be analyzed;

- What factors determine success of small football nations?
- Why do some nations have more football success than others?
- What can small football nations do to improve their level of competitiveness?

Methodology

To begin the process of understanding how small international football countries are successful and the things they do well, first requires an investigation into how we will be collecting data and using it most effectively. The chosen approach for the methodological design of this thesis will be the 'Research Onion' as outlined by Saunders et al. (2012) as a guide into investigating the phenomenon. The Research Onion itself consists of 6 layers that flow into one another to describe the research process. They include philosophy, approach, methodological choice, strategy, time horizon and techniques and procedures. The layers help to provide a better understanding of the research design, as well as setting up an environment where the boundaries of the research are consistent as well as setting the study into a new context (Saunders & Tosey, 2012).

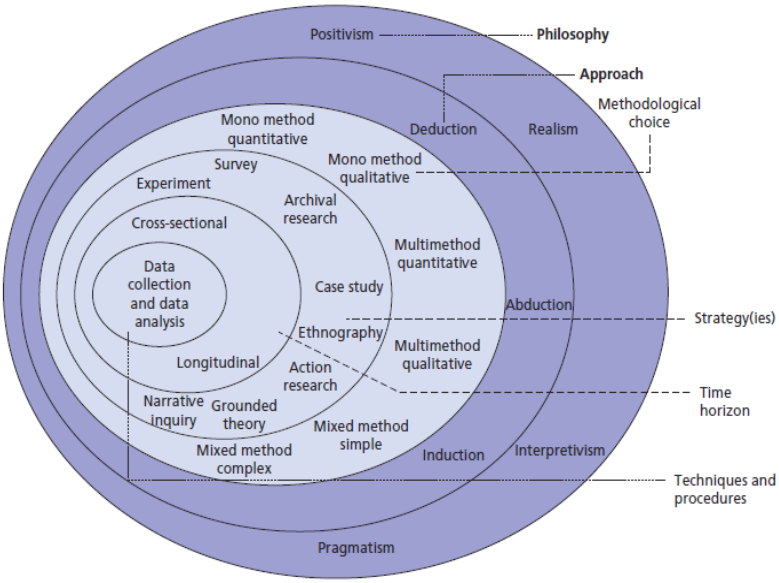

Figure 1. The Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2012, p.128)

Philosophical Standpoints

To begin, it is quite obvious that during our research we will be making assumptions. However, the assumptions that are made in relation to human knowledge and the nature of reality will shape the understanding of our research question, the methods used and the nature of our findings (Crotty, 1998).

Because of this, it is imperative that we outline the frameworks and approaches used when conducting our research, in order to provide the best possible transparency in how our research topic was viewed and conducted. The philosophical approaches available to study any topic are quite extensive. Observers may see a similar phenomenon through multiple subjective realms, each adopting their own philosophical perspectives. Due to this, the aim of our philosophical section will be in accordance with a viewpoint Johnson & Clarke (2006) mention in that importance does not lie too heavily on being philosophically informed, but rather being able to justify and reflect the philosophical choices taken as opposed to the alternatives which could have been adopted.

The topic of study in this particular thesis heavily lies within the sport of football. Football at first glance may be seen as quite an objective game. The winner of a game is always quite objective, goals are usually seen in the same manner, the amount of players on each squad is quantifiable etc. Therefore, the game of football will indeed produce empirical results, with empirical inferences being readily available in its domain. However when investigating the concept more thoroughly its objective factors can almost always be broken down into social constructs. Social actors have indeed influenced every aspect of the game by creating and adapting over time a certain set of rules and regulations that each team is to adhere by in their given competition. Furthermore, these rules and regulations are all upheld by a team of officials who judge whether each team is in accordance to the rules based on their own subjective interpretation of official rules and regulations. Therefore, the game of football can also be viewed as highly interpretive. There are social actors at almost every level of the game, starting from global football federations all the way to the players and fans. Lastly, a big portion of this thesis is concerned with the *success* of small footballing countries. Football fans are also subject to the social constructs we have on success in the game of football. International football competition has set up its own socially constructed parameters on how international seeding and playing should be conducted. For the most part, fans worldwide have accepted these parameters and judged football performance accordingly. However different actors experiencing football may view success on an international stage in a different manner. Fans of a country without a footballing pedigree may regard a performance of their team in a totally different respect than fans of another. Therefore, it is also worth consideration that the assumptions made in regards to success in this thesis may not align with other observers. Due to these differences in regards to evaluating success, we use appropriate measures in our research question to define the success parameters taken into consideration. Yin (2014) identifies this as being a crucial step in the construct validity of the research

undertaken. Because of the aforementioned, our ontological and epistemological views on the phenomena being studied can be analyzed at in a multitude of ways. Some inferences will allow for more objective and positivistic views, while others will be more centered as subjective and interpretive.

In regards to our research question, our aim is to find whatever insights we can by any means necessary. Therefore we will approach research from a pragmatic standpoint, adopting whatever approach best illuminates insights in relation to our research question. Creswell & Plano Clark (2007) comment that pragmatism is an approach tailored to accept both singular and multiple realities that are open to empirical enquiry. Creswell & Plano Clark (2007) go on to add that this approach allows researcher to be free of mental and practical constraints imposed by both constructivism and positivism. This is to say, that pragmatism will allow for the research data to be collected in whatever philosophical approach seems best fit. Furthermore, a pragmatist view will fit well with a mixed methods research approach where we will be collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. This will allow us the opportunity to approach each data set uniquely and accordingly. Lastly, a pragmatic approach also accounts for the fact that other researchers conducting the same or similar research may come to different conclusions. The ways in which a researcher views such a complex social phenomenon can yield different results. Due to the use of a pragmatist philosophy there will be subjective judgment that may bias our findings and damage the reliability of the study however we will try to make up for this by securing transparency of our study. This is secured by always showing the reader what we have done and how we have analyzed our findings.

Approach

The reasoning to the research requires analyzing the phenomenon of successfully performing but small footballing countries. Data collection will require exploring this premise by collecting data and theory to then identifying themes and patterns which will produce something akin to an insight or conclusion on how the observed phenomena came to be. Thus, we will be starting out from a premise and drawing upon existing theory in order to make inferences about the observed phenomena. This approach makes our research deductive in nature. It should also be added however, that in the analysis and discussion sections of this thesis, there will be instances where somewhat abductive approaches might be used to infer something unusual that our literature had not pointed us to. That is to say, a lack of current theory or applicability thereof, may lead to abductive thought processes in the analysis and discussion section in the

report. Therefore, inferences may be brought to light by ways of reasoning other than current literature available.

Methodological Choice

Due to the unique and specialized cases of each country, a mainly qualitative approach will be undertaken during research collection. However, certain parameters set in place will allow for some degree of quantitative research. Because of this, the design can be viewed as a simple partially integrated mixed methods research approach, in that we will be using both qualitative and quantitative research in an embedded approach, in whatever manner seems fit. In regards to the timing of the data collection, the concurrent mixed method research approach will be taken. Saunders et al. (2012) define the approach as using both quantitative and qualitative methods within a single phase data collection period. This method will allow for data to be analyzed together for a more comprehensive and in depth understanding of the phenomena.

The research that will be conducted itself will be mainly exploratory. Saunders et al. (2012) define exploratory research as "a valuable means to ask open questions to discover what is happening and gain insights about a topic of interest" (Ibid, p.171). This definition describes our endeavor quite well. We wish to explore a topic mainly to gain insight and provide some type of direction for what might be future research to someone studying in the same field. Furthermore, the authors note that an exploratory approach allows for adaption and change. The use of an exploratory approach will allow for the change of direction and efforts into new insights discovered from research and data collection.

Research Strategy

In order to effectively study the phenomenon of small successful footballing countries, we decided we need to take an in depth investigation of three individual countries. Originally, the aim of our research had started out as something akin to a cross sectional case study where certain parameters and figures would be compared to one another in order to be able to quantify the performance and success of a multitude of countries. Our original attempt was to come to conclusions that resembled something closer to a more positivistic stance in which we could infer more concrete measurable results and conclusions. We quickly realized that this was not the best approach to studying the topic. Not only was it extremely difficult to be

able to put a multitude of different quantifiable measures onto countries, but we also caught ourselves in the middle of self-confirming biases. Flyvbjerg (2006) and Ruddin (2006) both criticized the case study approach, stating that it fails to set an operational set of measures while subjective judgements which are in align with the researcher's preconceived notions are used to collect data. In addition to these challenges, we were finding that each country possessed unique competencies that were not quantifiable and applicable to be compared with. As researchers we decided that this was not the correct strategy to take. To account for all of this, we then decided to change our philosophical views on the research entirely. This in turn resulted in our views in relation to ontology and epistemology to be pragmatic. We would adopt whatever approach seemed to best infer or shed light on our research question. Subsequent to our philosophical changes, we then adapted a multiple case study strategy where three separate unique cases were to be studied separately as their own counterparts as well as adapting more situationally relevant views in regards to our epistemology and ontology. We felt this approach would eliminate us of any preconceived biases we had. We were now not analyzing our data collection to line up and correlate in anyway, but merely investigating each case with a blank canvas. Yin & Davis (2007) note that case study research is effective because it allows researchers to "understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to your case" (Ibid, p.16). The use of the word 'real-world' in the definition may imply that a case study strategy assumes a more realist philosophical view. Yin (2014) comments on this topic saying that a case study strategy can adopt both a realist and relativist stance, being aware of multiple realities with multiple meanings that are observer dependent, which we felt our pragmatic views would complement effectively. Yin (2014) goes on to note the importance in selecting the right cases for research, stating that the cases should provide sample access to data and illuminate the research question to a great degree. For our three individual cases, we selected the countries of Croatia, Uruguay and Belgium. We felt that Croatia provided a good insight to the phenomenon due to their overall steady performance and quick rise to prominence following their independence in the early 1990s, as well as their high export of players. We saw Uruguay as a great example of a small footballing country from South America with a long and rich history in football. Lastly, Belgium was chosen due to their recent turnaround on the international stage. After an overhaul and redirection of strategy at almost every level, Belgium was able to successfully change their fortunes and rise to global prominence quite quickly on the international level. Furthermore, the essence of our research essentially boils down to the 'why' and 'how' questions of how these footballing countries operate. Yin (2014) mentions that case study research is well tailored to explore these 'how' and 'why'

questions.

The choice of conducting a multiple vs. a single case study was due to the advantages and conclusions that arise from a multiple case perspective. The literature on the differences between multiple and single case studies does not come to any concrete conclusions. Eckstein (1975) and Lijphart (1975) both note that a multiple case study is something closer to a 'comparative' study, while Yin (2014) sees no difference between the two methods. Herriott & Firestone (1983) comment on the multiple case study, stating that it tends to be more compelling and robust relative to a single case study. Yin (2014, p.57) also adds that single case studies tend to involve more unusual and extreme cases. In our domain of research, each country under study is indeed unique and can be considered unusual. However they all seem to be able to produce success in international football. Therefore it is in each unique case that we are studying how a country might come to the end result of being successful. That is to say, our study will be one of literal replication. Each case will predict similar results, which in our research is international football success. It should be of note however, that each case will be conducted with its own style and factors relating to football success. The countries investigated possess unique competencies, therefore the fashion in which each case is performed will focus on different influential factors pertaining to each individual country. The number of cases chosen in our research was discretionary. Yin (2014) comments on the use of discretion in situations such as these and states that discretionary choices come up frequently in research, such as setting criteria for 'significant effect' in experimental science. However Yin (2014) does provide some guidance into the matter, stating that two or three literal replications will suffice if research is straightforward and the question does not demand an excessive amount of certainty (figure 2).

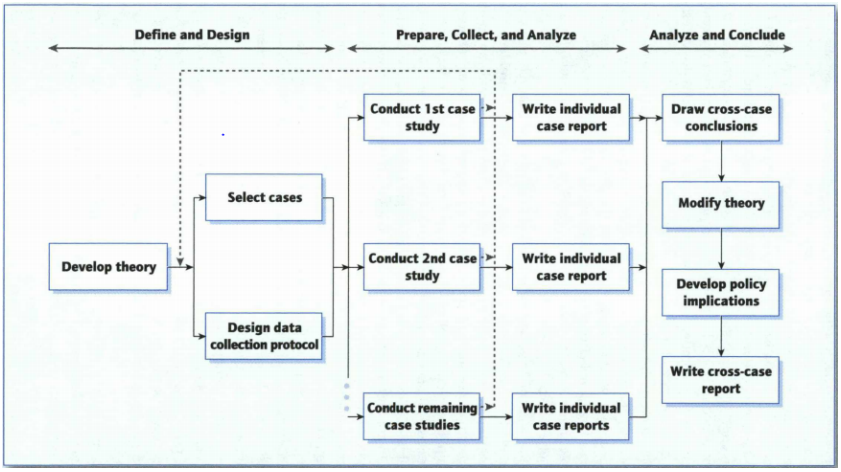

Figure 2. Multiple-Case Study Procedure (Yin, 2014, p.60)

Time Horizon

The nature of our study in regards to its time horizon will be cross-sectional. Although we will be analyzing the footballing history and development of countries, our main goal will be to infer how these countries got to the position they are in currently. Furthermore, the status and ranking of a footballing country can vary heavily on the time period taken into account. Therefore we will be analyzing countries that in this particular time frame can be regarded as successful, and investigating what they have done effectively to enjoy the prominence they do today.

Techniques and Procedures

During this thesis we will use secondary sources to research the case countries and the success of small football nations, but also to understand and investigate our case countries. Primary data will be used to verify our findings and elaborate on them. A large portion of the research conducted will be collected through the means of secondary data. Each data set was analyzed to ensure validity. The secondary data collected will be mainly qualitative, as mentioned before, although some means of quantitative data will be used. The data will also come in forms of raw data as well as compiled research. A large portion of the secondary data collected will be documentary data. The field of study possesses a great deal of data through means of books, web pages, newspaper articles, magazines and public records to name a few. Blogs have also been used too, but blog posts and similar data has mostly been used for factual causes. Reports from football federations and associations (e.g. FIFA Big Count, 2006), development agencies (World Bank, 2015) and academic journal articles that have been studying football culture and similar phenomena have made up a large majority of our data. Also, there will be non-text secondary data collected through means of video interviews available online. In addition to these resources, a large part of the theory derived and taken into account will come from academic peer-reviewed journals. As with any secondary data, the measurement validity will need to be thoroughly examined as the data originally collected was not always in accordance with our research question. The most recent secondary data will always be used whenever possible. The use of peer reviewed journals, as well as any documentary data available on our research question will help to strengthen the internal validity of the study. Each data set was carefully analyzed prior to its use in the study.

Primary data will be collected through means of interviews with various experts in the field. In order to effectively analyze the phenomena we felt it would be best to approach the topic by interviewing experts from different aspects of the sport of football. Interviews were used to explore findings through analysis to get a more in-depth understanding of our findings from primary sources that work on a professional; Interview 1: Organizational football insider from Uruguay and physical coach; Interview 2: Developmental coach and former professional player; Interview 3: Youth level coach and former player. The interviews themselves will be semi-structured in nature. There will be certain themes and topics that will be discussed, but respondents will be able to elaborate and answer as they see fit. Furthermore, the use of a semi-structured approach will allow for the exploration and investigation into other topics the respondents bring to light. Saunders et al. (2012) point out that exploratory research is best suited towards using a semi-structured interview approaches. The authors also advocate for a semi-structured approach stating that it allows for probing and exploration of certain topics and domains unfamiliar to the researchers. The interviews were conducted in person or over internet video conference calls according to personal preference and convenience of respondents (Interviews can be found on the USB in same order as mentioned above).

Analysis

As previously mentioned, the research strategy chosen was a multiple case study approach. Yin (2014) states that a multiple case study approach will tend to favor individual case study analysis in order to yield best results. Subsequent to the individual analysis will be a collective analysis in order to identify any overall themes and patterns that may have been found.

Each individual case will have its own analysis which will incorporate a thematic approach to the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) define a thematic analysis as an approach which entails identifying and reporting patterns and themes within the data researched. Furthermore, each case will then use an approach Yin (2014) refers to as explanation building. Although our research is mainly exploratory and does not seek to find concrete conclusions, an explanatory framework will be used in the analysis. Yin (2014) also mentions that a parallel analysis technique is prevalent in exploratory research, however the goal is merely to provide aims of potential future research. Yin (2014) goes on to add that explanation building is well suited to analyze topics containing ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, while stipulating a presumed set of links in the data. Following the individual analysis of each case will then be a collective analysis with

primary data included, which Yin (2014) refers to as a cross case synthesis. In a cross case synthesis, each case is treated as a separate entity and then compared and contrasted to aggregate findings across each study. Yin (2014) comments that this approach helps in the validity and robustness of the findings. The interviews conducted will be analyzed and applied in the cross case synthesis in order to corroborate our findings and test reliability of the data and inferences that came to be. Subsequent to this will be the discussion and conclusion portion of the section which comments on the findings made and their implications.

Literature Review

The first problem in conducting research in the domain of international football success, is setting up objective parameters that can accurately quantify what defines success at an international level. Michael Porter (1990), the well-known business researcher was aware of this similar phenomenon in economics. Porter (1990) explains that defining and comparing entire economy competitiveness can be somewhat vague, and adds that "instead of seeking to explain 'competitiveness' at the national level, we must first understand the determinants of productivity" (Ibid, p.9). In the world of sports, this could be anything from Olympic medals, to 6-8th place finishes or even tournament qualification berths. Because of this, it is clear already that coming to any type of conclusion can become quite challenging in the field, due to a lack of objectivity. Researchers alike have come to the conclusion that there are indeed no universal or objective ways to conduct cross national sports studies (Hanafy & Krotee, 1986; Haag, 1994; DaCosta & Miragaya, 2002). Therefore, in conducting a study into the factors leading to success of (small) football nations, the parameters of success are of utmost importance in being able to come to any sort of conclusions. In the study conducted, success will be analyzed through a multitude of different lenses. First and foremost will be the FIFA rankings. In 1992 FIFA introduced an international ranking system that would continuously update nation rankings once a month. Teams are ranked on a points system according to their performance in FIFA recognized matches. The scores are weighted in order to put more value on recent games which displays a more current accurate picture of a team's strength. Also, results against higher ranked teams are weighted more favorably in relation to lower ranked teams. Furthermore the strength of a nation's domestic league will also be taken into question. Many successful footballing nations today are seen by fans as having strong domestic leagues (i.e. England, Spain, Germany, Italy, France etc.). An investigation into how a domestic league might affect national performance may shed light onto the research question. Lastly, the strategies and tactics employed by the nations studied on football

development and how youth are taught the game will also be of relevance. The success parameters defined will bode well to illuminate the factors pertaining to essence of the research question. Therefore, these success parameters will be a starting block for the literature reviewed. By examining a country's performance internationally and number of exported players, we can begin to investigate theory on how these factors are affected and the underlying forces that drive them. These success factors will be the driving forces in the literature reviewed.

Analyzing the World of Sports

According to De Bosscher et al. (2007) success in elite sports can be divided into three levels. These levels include the macro, meso, and micro-levels.

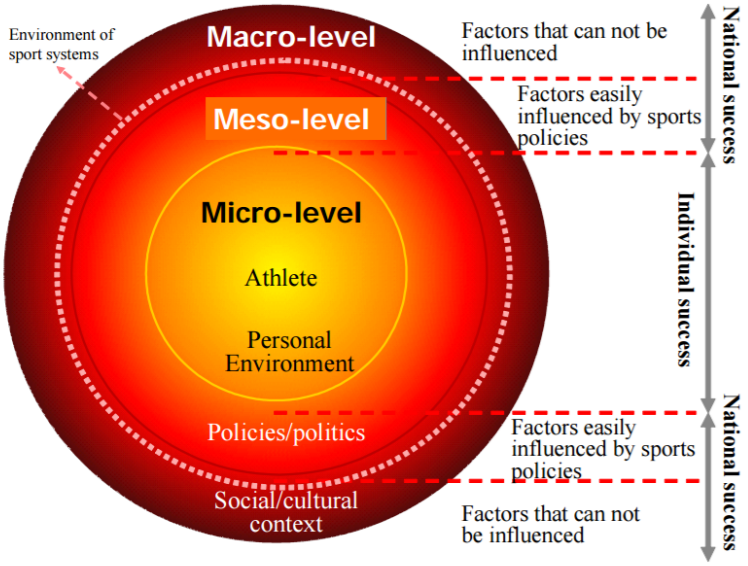

Figure 3. Relationship between factors determining individual and national success (De Bosscher et al., 2007, p.17)

> "Macro-level factors are the social and cultural context in which people live including economic welfare, population, geographic and climatic variation, degree of urbanisation, political system, and cultural system. Meso-level factors are the sport policies of nations (e.g., policies on coach development, policies on talent identification and selection). Micro-level factors relate to the individual athletes (genetic qualities) and their close environment (e.g., parents, friends, coaches).

> At the microlevel, some factors can be controlled (e.g., training techniques) and others cannot (e.g., genetics)" (De Bosscher et al., 2013, p.5).

As seen in figure 3, there are according to De Bosscher et al. (2007) three levels that affect the international sporting success of a country; macro, meso and micro- levels. Where macro and meso-levels are about sporting success on a national level, the micro-level is about individual success that can also affect national success. However individual success can be seen as being heavily dependent upon the implementations at a meso-level. Therefore the micro-level is not of interest for this study because the investigation of football success of the three case countries are about their success as a national team and not why one player opposite to another has gained personal success that improved national performance. Coaches also play a role in individual player success, however the education of coaches happens on a meso-level (Ibid). The macro and meso-level therefore influence the national success of countries. Macro-level factors cannot be controlled but nonetheless still play a role in the success of a country's international success. Meso-level factors on the other hand also influence international sport success but unlike macro-level factors these can be directly influenced and changed to improve a country's future sporting success. Between the macro and meso-levels there are also factors that can determine success, but here policy only has an indirect influence on the long term such as national sports traditions, media coverage and anti-doping culture (Ibid).

Macro-level Factors

A consensus between researchers is building that GDP and populations are becoming worse at predicting a nation's success in international sporting competition, which is in direct contradiction to much of the literature on the subject before (Oakley and Green, 2001). The reason for this view is based on the notion that nations have become more focused on strategies and techniques used to develop elite sport athletes, which put less focus on uncontrollable factors on the macro-level, and more focus on variable meso-level factors affecting the elite sports development 'system' as argued by Oakley and Green (2001). On the contrary, Stamm & Lamprecht (2001) and De Bosscher et al. (2003) still argue that macro-level factors make up for around 50% of the success that nations gain at the Olympic Games.

Socioeconomic Factors Influencing Sports Success

It should be worth noting that a handful of research suggest economic factors as being the most important when predicting sporting success, especially at an Olympic level (Kiviaho & Mäkelä, 1978; Van Bottenburg, 2000; Morton, 2002; Johnson & Ali, 2002; De Bosscher et al., 2003; Bernard & Busse, 2004). More specifically, real GDP has been found to correlate best with predicting medal shares at the Olympic Games (Bernard & Busse, 2004). Bernard & Busse (2004) found that populations and GDP per capita are closely linked to success, and that they 'contribute equally at the margin'. However when analyzing two nations with the same GDP but different populations and different GDP per capita, the countries will still finish the same, implying that real GDP is most closely linked with success.

	Predicted 2000 Medals (1)	Standard Error Estimate	Predicted 2000 Medals (2)	Actual 2000 Medals
Australia	57	5.1	52	58
Belarus	12	5.0	12	17
Belgium	7	5.1	7	5
Brazil	18	5.1	17	12
Bulgaria	11	5.1	10	13
Canada	24	5.1	23	14
China	51	6.2	49	59
Cuba	21	7.1	20	29
Czech Republic	10	5.0	9	8
Denmark	7	5.1	7	6
France	39	5.1	38	38
Germany	66	5.5	63	57
Greece	8	5.1	8	13
Hungary	19	5.1	18	17
Italy	37	5.1	35	34
Jamaica	1	5.1	1	7
Japan	20	5.2	19	18
Kazakhstan	9	5.0	8	7
Kenya	5	5.1	5	7
Netherlands	20	5.1	19	23
New Zealand	5	5.1	5	4
Nigeria	5	5.1	5	3
North Korea	3	6.2	3	4
Norway	7	5.1	7	10
Poland	17	5.0	16	14
Romania	18	5.1	17	26
Russia	62	5.4	59	88
South Africa	6	5.1	6	5
South Korea	28	5.1	27	28
Spain	19	5.1	18	11
Sweden	9	5.1	9	12
Switzerland	8	5.1	8	9
Turkey	7	5.1	7	4
U.K.	18	5.1	18	28
Ukraine	22	5.9	21	23
U.S.	102	5.1	97	97

Figure 4. Country Medal Predictions For Sidney (Bernard & Busse, 2004, p.5)

Although the study of small footballing nations may not line up as closely with this research, it does support De Bosscher's et al. (2007) research suggesting that an input of resources are crucial in order for an association to be successful. Countries with large GDP's are in a position to invest more money in sports development. These resources can go a long way if used effectively. Conversely however, research done by Hoffman et al. (2002) has found the GNP per capita in relation to football can have something akin to diminishing returns. The point at which the authors found a decrease in FIFA rankings according to GNP per capita was at 21,836USD. It should be of note that GNI figures were used instead of GNP throughout the rest of the research conducted. Hoffmann et al. (2002) obtained their figures from the WorldBank, who claim that GNI was formerly known as GNP (WorldBank, 2017). Each GNI statistic hereafter will come from the WorldBank (2015a). "In the context of football, there are additional arguments to suggest that, after a certain point, additional increases should impact negatively on international success" (Ibid, p.259).

Hoffman et al. (2002) suggest two reasons for this. The first being that football is a capitally-unintensive sport, meaning that the financial needs to play the game are minimal and children together with families can realistically participate. Secondly however, with rises in GNP per capita various methods of entertainment present themselves to youth. These increases in disposable income gives parents the opportunity to provide kids with electronic forms of entertainment. Therefore in relation to football, a country's GDP is not such an underlying factor as it may be with the Olympic Games.

Cultural and Other Macro-Level Factors Influencing Success

The population size of a country is important for sporting success due to the fact that it is from this talent pool that youth are developed and the more inhabitants a country has the more talent it can develop, ceteris paribus (Hoffman et al. 2002). However Hoffmann et al. (2002) have also found that population in and of itself does not directly translate to a successful national football team. The four biggest populations in the world of China, India, USA and Indonesia have not had success in the world cup which is in contradiction to the notion that highly populated countries in football are the most successful (Ibid). This puts a focus on the ways in which a country develops talent since success on a national level is not only affected by population size but also by youth development (Ibid) which will be discussed in the meso-level section later on. Furthermore Hoffmann et al. (2002) also state that the success of a national team is dependent on the population's interest in football. If a country in general has a low interest in football

fewer people become active players and therefore there is less of a selection pool to develop talent from. Analyzing the literature on footballing success and culture brings up some different religious and socio-economic factors (Ibid). To begin with an overview of culture, nine out of the 10 countries at the time of the current study on FIFA's top ten ranking list are predominantly catholic, the only exception being Germany which also has a catholic minority but is also Christian. In addition to be catholic, nine out of 10 countries currently in the top 10 speak Romanic languages, the most popular of which is Spanish. As Hoffman et al. (2002) hypothesize, these cultural factors have some type of underlying force driving popularity in football. Secondly, one of the more interesting ways to view the effect culture has on football would be to investigate the phenomenon of a host country's performance during major tournaments. In 13 out of the last 20 FIFA World Cups, the host nation has finished within the top four of the entire tournament. This phenomenon was given even more credence when in 2002, host nation South Korea, a relatively unsuspecting team finished 4th place in the FIFA world cup. Hoffman et al. (2002) speculate the reasons for the host country effect: "may include the effect of sympathetic audiences and other home advantages and/or the cultural affinity towards football a hosting history reveals" (Ibid, p.261). Furthermore, they add that hosting an event is an indicator of culture and not only requires financial resources, but also major public support and unity in the endeavor.

Lastly, a note might need to be made about geographical settings of countries and their effect on sports, particularly football. Hoffman et al. (2002) concluded that moderate temperatures are considered the best breeding grounds for sports, especially football. The magic number that is associated with successful sports performance is an average annual temperature of 14 degrees Celsius (Ibid). Any deviation from this temperature, whether up or down, will hinder results. Extreme cold will obviously repel youth away, as will extreme heat and humidity. "Therefore, informal sporting talent development at a young age becomes compromised the more extreme climate and climatic variations are" (Ibid, p.262).

Meso-level Factors

Factors at the meso-level can partly be determined by policies and politics. Athletes have a better chance of becoming successful according to the effectiveness of sporting policies and investments made in that single sport (De Bosscher et al., 2007, p.18). An important factor in the development of athletes has been found to be competition both on a national and international level (Crespo et al., 2001; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Oakley & Green, 2001). Therefore the investigation of a country's domestic football league will help to understand the phenomenon of successful football nations more clearly.

Domestic Football

The sporting quality of a country is largely correlated with the total revenue made by the best clubs in the domestic league (Hypercube, 2015, p.22). Football is much more than a sport played for entertainment, as it is very much a business. The amount of money in football is enormous. Money goes in and out from transfer fees, wages, television right, tickets, sponsorships, merchandise, participation in international cups and more. A team with more success is usually able to attract more fans which then go to the stadium and purchase tickets. This is also supported by (Késenne, 2007) who also explains that on a club level sporting success results in more tickets sold, which turns into broadcasting rights, sponsorship, merchandising and so on. Success of a football club therefore starts with sporting results. Sporting results attracts fans and media. When a club has enough attention sponsors are drawn to the club and the club thereby makes revenues. Revenues are invested in things such as better players and talent development which in the end will affect the performance of the national team (Hypercube, 2015, p.20), therefore domestic club success is crucial for national success. As mentioned, the sporting quality of football clubs is largely dependent on its finances. The more money the best football clubs in a country make, the better statistically the country performs. Thus it is important for a country to have a strong domestic football league (Ibid).

Furthermore Sandgren et al. (2013) have found correlations between the performance of national football teams and player league distribution. Their findings suggest that countries who do not have one of the best domestic leagues need to, from a national performance point of view, distribute their players abroad into better leagues. FIFA has secured an international transfer system so professional football players can be traded freely amongst clubs and leagues (Ibid). This has resulted in a 'prisoner's dilemma' between the clubs. Players will almost always choose to sign with clubs that offer them the most lucrative contracts. This in turn has resulted in clubs aggressively bidding for the best players available. Therefore the most financially backed teams acquire the most talented players. A good example of this happened in the Scottish Premier League for the 2000-2001 season where the two teams with the most aggressive strategies ended up as league winners and runner up, but also ended with a financial deficit. The least aggressive team and the only team in the league with a positive surplus was relegated (Solberg & Haugen, 2010, p.337).

It should be of note that this concept is purely theoretical and there will always be players that are paid higher or lower than their current performance, due to the fact that contracts are not negotiated on a daily basis. There will also be players that not every club is interested in due to differences in playing styles, positions, coaches in charge of team etc. No club needs 10 strikers even if they are the top 10 most talented players in the world, therefore this opens up the opportunity for other clubs to bid for the contract of a player. The literature suggests that players competing in higher ranked leagues will be more talented, resulting in a more competitive national team. However the top five domestic leagues as regarded by most football fans include England, Spain, Germany, Italy and France, which serve as a good indicator of talented players.

League Design and Competitive Balance

Competitive balance (CB) is the uncertainty of outcome in a professional sporting event (Humphreys, 2001). If leagues are balanced the outcome of a match is uncertain. If they are not balanced the outcome is more predictable. A league can be damaged if it is too unbalanced, since fewer spectators are drawn to the matches both in form of stadium attendance, but also in the form of media which will reduce the total income of the league (Quirk & Fort, 1992). The authors explain that in order to keep fans interested, the league has to secure that no team gets to strong or weak relative to one another in order to not become predictable. Fort & Quirk (1995) also explain that if teams are highly unbalanced, it will decrease the overall league revenue.

Measurement of CB in sports can be calculated in a multitude of different methods. The two most common are ‘static’ CB and ‘dynamic’ CB (Buzzacchi et al., 2001, p.5). Static CB is the measurement of CB in a match or a season. Dynamic CB measures if the same teams dominates a league championship over time.

The dynamic CB measurement has been found to provide a better picture of the CB compared to the static measurement (Ibid). Two widely used methods to measure the static CB over several seasons are the Hirfindahl-Hirchman Index and Gini Coefficient (Manasis & Ntzoufras, 2014). However due to the choice of this thesis involving multiple case countries with different domestic leagues that have changed several times over the years, championship frequency has been chosen over the last 20 years as a CB measurement, to make matters more comparable and manageable, as well as reliable over a longer period

of time. Leeds & von Allmen (2015) explain that:

> "One can also evaluate competitive balance by looking at the frequency with which teams win successive championships" (Ibid, p.183) [and adds that] "In sum, there are many ways to measure competitive balance, and no single method should be regarded as most appropriate" (Ibid, p.186).

Youth System and Talent Development

As previously mentioned, Hoffmann et al. (2002) have concluded that large population sizes are of value in football, only when the cultural affinity towards football is highly present, ceteris paribus. A study developed around English and Canadian youth development systems in football discovered differences in both attitude towards football but also in the youth systems themselves (Holt, 2002). Attitude towards football in the two countries are quite unlike one another. In England football is seen as a national sport that represent national values. In Canada football is seen as a sport played by children, which shows the lack of passion they have for the sport (Ibid). The Canadian youth development system also lacks a professional structure in their talent development, which amongst other factors is a big part of the reason why England develops better football players than Canada (Ibid). Abbott & Collins (2004) explain talent development as athletes having the most appropriate environment (i.e.; facilities, coaches) to accelerate their performance and learning. Players who are exposed to environments that focus on development and have high quality and intensive training programs will be better prepared later on in their athletic careers (Cobley et al., 2013, p.5). The athletes that attend these programs have been found through the means of some kind of talent identification process which is done to give optimal conditions for future success of athletes.

Cobley & Cooke (2009) have developed a model that summarizes how talent identification and development systems often work. The model is rather general and does not only apply for football directly but instead is an indication of generic trends that happen across team sports.

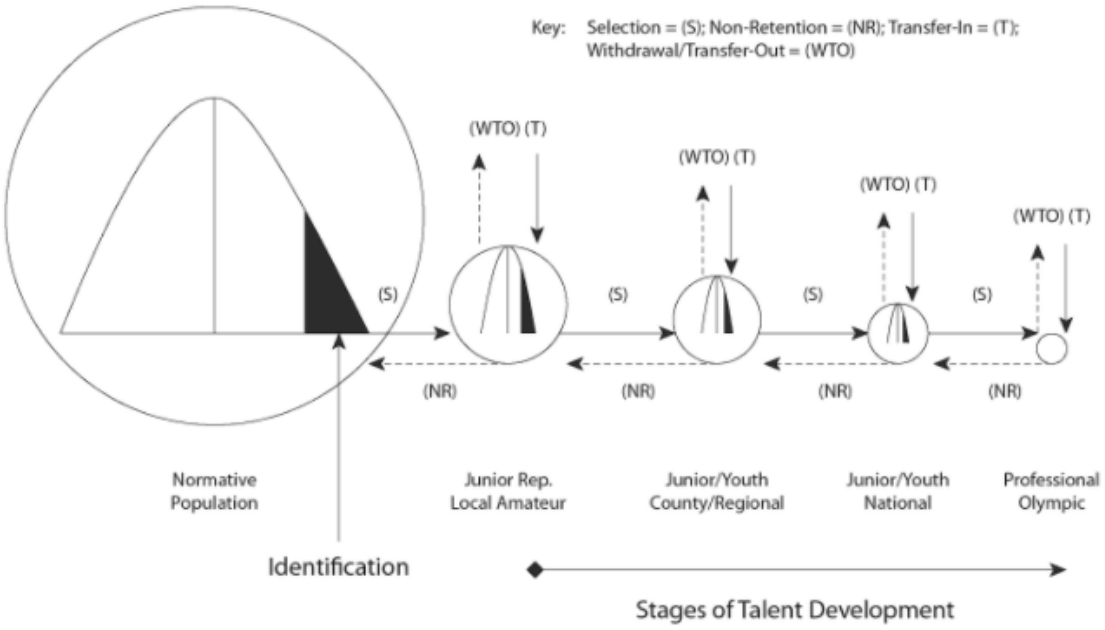

Figure 5. Stages of Talent Development (Cobley & Cooke, 2009)

The stages are followed from left to right, with the beginning of identification often happening during childhood or at a youth stage of development (Ibid). These identifications processes often come in different forms and methods, but are most usually seen in form of tests and other subjective assessment procedures. Players are often chosen because they are the best in their age category or because they show the most potential for future success. After the first initial identification has occurred, the selected group is then separated from the normative population and become more homogenous (Ibid). Mohamed et al. (2009) have also found that early talent identification does not necessarily predict a higher performance at an adult level. As the stages in the model progress, the number of players will be reduced each time due to the weeding out of less talented players and the need for players who possess the highest qualities and skills (Cobley & Cooke, 2009). The players that are not selected for the respective talent groups either decide to play on a normative level, begin another sport or quit their participation of sports all together. The players not selected at each respective stage will be discarded and lack the necessary level of coaching to further develop their skills (Ibid). A concept that may have an effect on players missing out on quality coaching and high levels of training competition is the relative age effect. Relative age effect is the relative difference between kids in same age groups where kids born in the first quarter of the year are more physically developed than kids born in the later quarters. Kids born in the earlier portion of an age group

(often the first quarter of the year) are often seen as better football players and therefore exposed to better training and coaches, only because they are generally physically more developed when compared to their peers born later in the year (Musch & Grondin, 2001). The phenomenon has been documented worldwide in a multitude of sports (Thompson & Barnsley, 1996), especially in ice hockey and football (Verhulst, 1992). Grondin et al. (1984) explain that larger pools of potential talent in a specific sport normally accentuate the phenomenon to a greater degree. Some players may choose to transfer into football later in their life, however the longer an athlete has not been involved with the top level talent group normally results in a less likely chance of the athlete reaching a professional level (Cobley & Cooke, 2009), unless that person has gained similar level of training in another parallel system from another sport with similarities.

Talent development models

There are a number of talent development models that describe the various stages that athletes may go through to reach an elite level (MacNamara, & Collins, 2012). The current literature on the topic has two polarizing stances in regards to talent development. The first being an athletic career *stages* model, where an athlete is analyzed according to different time periods in his/her career in a sequential manner. Most frameworks treat the athlete's career as its own individual life span. The models that are most highly acclaimed in this talent development perspective include Bloom (1985), Salmela (1994) and Côté & Hay (2002). Each of these models is quite similar and describes the athlete's development as different stages in their career. The contrasting literature deals directly with career *transition* models which aim to be an explanatory framework with how the individual athlete deals with their career. The current literature dealing with career *transition* on talent development amongst others (Schlossberg, 1981; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994, 2001; Stambulova, 1997, 2003) is mainly focused on the athlete on a micro-level, investigating how the individual grows and the coping mechanisms used through the different circumstances and nuances in between career transitions. These studies focusing on a more micro-level do not effectively help to illuminate the objective of investigating small footballing nations, due to the individual and unique circumstances of each player. Therefore in order to view the phenomenon from a meso-level the topic will be better suited to be analyzed through a linear talent development lens. This will allow for a more objective and understandable framework from which inferences can be more clearly and transparently investigated. The use of a linear model will also help to set up boundaries and different levels of analyses to approach the topic from.

Due to high levels of similarity and synchronicity between the career stages models available in literature, an investigation into Côté & Hay's (2002) model will be used, mainly because it is the one of the more recent studies available and shares high similarities with previous models presented. Côté & Hay (2002) along with several colleagues have conducted research on athletes in both individual and team sports (Abernethy et al., 1999; Beamer et al., 1999) and have hereafter identified three stages that talented athletes go through from childhood to late adolescence. These stages include the 'sampling years', 'specializing years' and 'investment years'. For children and teens who do not aspire to reach an elite level is a stage called the 'recreational years' where the purpose is to gain enjoyment from sport and or to maintain a healthy lifestyle (Côté & Hay, 2002, p.496). These traits are similar to the normative level in Cobley & Cooke's (2009) talent identification model. Children that are identified as not being talented enough to participate at a high level will likely participate in sports because of the benefits received in the recreational years. At each of the three levels the athlete has the chance to move on to the next step and either become more serious and invested, or they can choose to participate recreationally because of the enjoyment and lifestyle that sport brings.

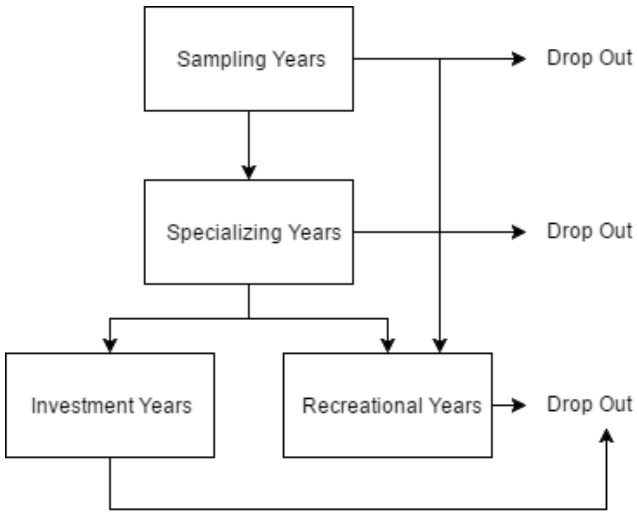

Figure 6. Stages of Sport Participation from Early Childhood to Late Adolescence. Own illustration (copied after Côté & Hay's, 2002, p.488 illustration)

Sampling Years

These years are typically when the athlete is around seven to 12 years old and the focus here is placed on fun and deliberate play (Côté & Hay, 2002, p.498). Deliberate play was introduced by Côté (1999) and later used for Côté & Hay's (2002) talent development model. Deliberate play is an:

> "enjoyment endemic to sporting play that becomes internalized and integrated to the self, may result in increased enthusiasm for sport, which in turn could afford greater opportunities for learning specific skills" (Baker & Young, 2014).

During these years young athletes develop their basic identities, values, motivations and beliefs of what sport should be. Athletes are normally also introduced to other sports without specializing in a particular one during these years (Côté & Hay, 2002, p.488). The typical reason for dropouts during the sampling years has been investigated by several researchers (Gould et al., 1982; Burton & Martens, 1986; Klint & Weiss, 1986), and identified as being "other activities, lack of fun, lack of playing time, too little success, loss of motivation, dislike of the coach, overemphasis on competition and performance, and hard physical training" (Côté & Hay, 2002, p.488). Simply put, if children enjoy the sport they are more likely to continue. During these years activities are something of a marketplace for children to choose between which they enjoy most and which their parents will provide for them. Therefore during the sampling years training and development should be focused on creating an environment where young athletes are allowed to have fun and maintain a positive attitude towards sport, while holding back with competition so it does not take precedence over fun (Ibid, p.491).

During this stage it would also bear credence to introduce a concept in physical education literature known as a 'mastery climate'. A 'mastery climate' can be described as an environment that entails cooperative learning and individual development (Ames, 1992). Students are encouraged to participate through fun and engagement while not being held up to any normative standards. The learning process is highly stressed rather than the outcome. Conversely, a 'performance involving climate' exists, which focuses on competition and minimal effort, where results are valued and the processes in the activity involved are not as stressed (Ames, 1992). The research on the effects of a 'mastery climate' on youth is quite extensive, with the majority of studies finding the effects to be positive (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999).

Ames (1992; 1992a) notes that the main emphasis of the mastery climate is on the learning process. Valentini et al. (1999) also add that in a mastery climate students should not have situations or expectations imposed on them. Rather, there should be a collaborative process between teachers and students. Lastly, Ntoumanis & Biddle (1999) have also found that a mastery climate tends to create students who are more active in the future, suggesting higher participation rates for sports.

Specializing years

These years often occur when athletes are in the ages of 13-16. Fun should still be a factor in this stage however development strategies should begin to introduce sport specific development and secure that teenagers stay interested in the sport and keep being physical active (Côté & Hay, 2002, p.498). The athletes in this stage should not be focused on more than two sports. Athletes that chose to specialize into one sport at this stage over another are often due to positive experiences with a coach, success, enjoyment or encouragement from older siblings (Ibid). These years are important for the child's future involvement. Fundamental skills like running, kicking jumping etc. should already be well developed at this time. It is at this stage where there will be a higher focus on deliberate practice. The concept of deliberate practice was introduced by Ericsson et al. (1993) and is a tool to the development of elite athletes, where the accumulated time with deliberate practice is closely related with elite performance and has been tested in sports by other researchers (Helsen et al., 1998; Ward et al., 2007). Deliberate practice has a higher focus on effort, not only focus on enjoyment, but also a focus to improve the current level of performance. As explained by Baker & Young (2014, p.135): "Deliberate practice refers to activities that require cognitive or physical effort, do not lead to immediate personal, social or financial rewards, and are done with the purpose of improving performance". It is important for the athlete to understand the idea of maximizing performance and effort when deliberate practice is the focus. To achieve expert performance deliberate practice needs to be sustained over a minimum of 10 years for an athlete (Ericsson et al., 1993). According to Ericsson et al. (1993), who is also one of the pioneers behind this well-known concept, success for elite athletes is dependent on the commitment and effort from the athlete while performing and training. Due to the age of young athletes, deliberate practice cannot be the main focus for long time periods without causing physical or mental problems (Ibid). Lastly, successful deliberate practice is also dependent upon coaches, training equipment and facilities. Participation in this instance does not alone secure success. During these years there should be a balance between deliberate practice and deliberate play (Côté & Hay, 2002, p.495).

Investment years

After the specializing years the athletes need to either commit to one sport to pursue an elite level, or decide to enter the recreational years. The investment years can be seen as age groups of 17 and up (Côté & Hay, 2002, p.497). If the athletes at this time are talented enough to become professionals and choose to completely commit to the sport, they then enter the investment years and accept that they will miss out on other experiences due to the requirements of elite athletes. During these years there is an enormous amount of training. Deliberate play is almost totally replaced by deliberate practice.

The talent development model from Côté & Hay (2002) is not universal and applicative to all sports, it is merely an overall framework. Some sports require young athletes to commit at an earlier age than suggested in the framework above such as gymnastics (Ibid). The model should only be used as a guideline to help develop programs that encourage children to maintain their commitment into a sport or activity according to their age.

Capital Experience

Just as youth development is of utmost importance in developing talent, the amount of games played at a senior level at an early age is of importance (Poli et al., 2015). Poli et al. (2015) name the concept 'experience capital'. That is to say how much experience (games played) a player has in relation to the games played before the athlete's 23rd birthday. Poli et al. (2015) have concluded that the use of leagues outside of the 'big five' are crucial in developing talent. Most players currently in the 'big five' did not acquire their early capital experience (matches before U23) in a big five league. The study found that of players currently over the age of 23 playing in a big five, only 5.4% of them have always played in these leagues. Therefore, the role of leagues outside the big five and the experience gained in them is crucial. These early matches in a player's senior career help to further develop and introduce the player to a professional level of play and is in synergy with the previous model introduced by Côté & Hay (2002).

Coaching

The quality of coaching especially from the specializing years and onwards is of utmost importance for the development of elite athletes (Côté & Hay, 2002). Sport coaches are essentially teachers that instruct, guide the practice of skills and give feedback to their athletes (Feltz et al., 1999, p.765). To secure

maximum performance and skill development of their athletes, coaches need to take several roles which include anything from an organizer, character builder, teacher, motivator and strategic planner (Gould, 1987). Little attention in literature has been given to coaching at a grassroots level (O'Gorman, 2015), but Brown & Potrac (2009) argue that a grassroots coaching education is becoming crucial due to the roles that coaches take on in motivation, sustaining participation and the development of technical ability. According to Feltz et al. (1999), coaches need to rely on experience, preparation and education to be effective. The experience, education and former success of a coach is a source of higher efficacy. A higher coaching efficacy stems from a solid coaching education amongst other things, which in turn results in higher winning percentages and provides more satisfaction, encouragement and praise for athletes according to research by Feltz et al. (1999) in which 549 basketball coaches were studied. A study by Malete & Feltz (2000) found that coaches who have completed an educational coaching program significantly improved their coaching efficacy compared with coaches that did not attend the program. These findings suggest that a higher level of coaching either by experience, former success or coaching education improves athlete performance as well as athlete satisfaction due to an increase of the coach's motivational competencies (Feltz et al., 1999, p.767). As found earlier in the literature, athletes have different needs according to their stage of development; the sampling years, specializing years and investment years. These athletes need both motivation and technical improvement of their skills which better coaching plays a paramount factor in (Feltz et al., 1999, p.772).

Croatia

Population: 4,203,604

FIFA Rank: 16

Croatia - Case Study

Croatia is a country that has enjoyed success on the international stage since its inception in 1992, despite only having a population of 4.2 million as of 2015. Prior to this, it competed under the Yugoslav Football Federation. With the rise of democracy and the end of Titoism in the Balkans, Croatia successfully split from Yugoslavia in 1992 after being wholly recognized as a country. Due to the lack of timing in acceptance from UEFA in 1993, they did not compete in their first major tournament qualifiers until after the 1994 FIFA World Cup. Yugoslavia had managed to qualify for the 1992 Euro Cup at the top of their group. However due to civil war and UN sanctions they were forced to withdraw from the tournament. Consequently Denmark, who finished second in qualifying behind Yugoslavia were awarded a berth to the 1992 Euro Cup and ended winning the tournament.

The economic well-being of Croatia is not by any means up to par with many of the developed western nations of Europe. Croatia had a GNI of 94 billion USD in 2015, with a GNI per capita that was 22,380USD in 2015. The service sector accounts for approximately 70% of Croatia's GDP (IndexMundi, 2016). Zagreb, the country's capital located in the north side enjoys an annual high average of 15.8 degrees Celsius. Split, the second largest city located in the southern Dalmatian coast, enjoys an average annual high of 19.5 degrees Celsius. Croatia has 365,214 registered football players, accounting for approximately 8.07% of their total population in 2006, 339,882 of which are males. This makes football the most popular sport in the country (Croatia.eu, 2017).

Football is speculated to have been introduced in Croatia in 1873 by English expatriates working in Rijeka and Zupanja. Shortly thereafter, official rules and regulations became translated and registered and the game was officially underway (Croatian Football Federation, 2017). By 1907, clubs had been established and were playing regulated games. On an international level, Croatians were competing under the Kingdom of Yugoslavia until 1939, and then under the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1945 onwards to 1990. Between the years of 1939-1945, Croatia played under the title of Banovina of Croatia, exclusive from its Yugoslav counterparts. It played a total of nineteen games, of which fourteen were FIFA recognized. In 1990, Croatia played its first 'modern international' match against the United States in Zagreb. Although they were still a part of Yugoslavia at the time, this team was the one that would later

come to represent Croatia after it had gained full independence. In July of 1992, Croatia was officially recognized by FIFA and started participating in matches independently again. However, it was not recognized by UEFA, Europe's football governing body, until June of 1993. The timing of this acceptance made it too late to attempt to qualify for the 1994 FIFA World Cup, as qualifications were already underway.

Undoubtedly the highlight and pinnacle of Croatian football was the performance put together at the 1998 FIFA World Cup in France. The team assembled here is considered by many to be Croatia's golden generation. Even though Croatia features more players at more marquee clubs around the world today, they have not yet matched the performance of the 1998 squad. The 1998 squad was coached by Miroslav Blazevic, a coach who enjoyed a modest playing career abroad in Europe. He is today seen as a national icon in Croatia for his accomplishments in football. Croatia managed to make it out of their group in second place, and beat Romania in a round of sixteen game. In the quarterfinals, it met Germany, who were at the time ranked second in the world and had previously eliminated them from the Euro Cup quarterfinal two years prior. Croatia ended up winning 3-0 and shocked the world. They would go on to lose to eventual winners and host France in the semifinals, but beat a good Holland team to secure a third place finish. This result ended up being a unifying and patriotic moment for the entire country and for Croatians around the world who had fled from war. The timing of the performance came right as the war in Bosnia that had affected many Croatians was ending, giving people something to be proud of and a sense of identity. Croatia failed to qualify for the 2000 Euro Cup in Belgium/Netherlands, marking the end of the Blazevic period.

Croatian National Team

As per FIFA rankings, Croatia is currently as of 1st April 2017 situated at 16th place, with an average ranking of 22nd. Their highest ranking to date came after the 1998 FIFA World Cup where they shocked the world and finished third place overall. After their inception and first major tournament at the Euro Cup in 1996 (ranked 122nd in 1993 when they first joined international football), the lowest Croatia has been ranked was 32nd following a disappointing performance at the 2002 FIFA World Cup. Subsequently, they enjoyed a top ten ranking between 2007 and 2012, ranking as a high as 4th place in 2009. Most home games are played at the Maksimir stadium in Zagreb, home of the Dinamo Zagreb. The team's nickname is Vatreni (fire). After qualifying for its first international tournament at the Euro Cup 1996, Croatia has been

a regular participant at almost every Euro and World Cup tournament, only missing the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa and the Euro Cup 2000 in the Belgium/Netherlands. Their performance at each event is as follows;

- 1996 Euro Cup – Group Stage
- 1998 World Cup – Third Place
- 2002 World Cup – Group Stage
- 2004 Euro Cup – Group Stage
- 2006 World Cup – Group Stage
- 2008 Euro Cup – Quarterfinals
- 2012 Euro Cup – Group Stage
- 2014 World Cup – Group Stage
- 2016 Euro Cup – Round of 16

Due to their quite surprising performances in both 1994 and in the 1998 FIFA World Cup, Croatia was awarded the FIFA award of 'Best Mover of the Year', in each of the respective seasons. FIFA presents the award each year to the country exhibiting the greatest movement on their rankings list. To date, Croatia is the only country to have won the award twice. Croatia's performance on an international stage raises the question then as to how they are able to qualify and sometimes even perform exceptionally better at major international events. The makeup of Croatia's national team boasts quite an impressive resume of players playing in reputable leagues. Out of the 23 players that participated at the 2016 Euro Cup, 14 played in 'big five' leagues. Of the nine not playing in a 'big five' league, six were playing in Croatia at marquee clubs at the top of the domestic league, while the remaining three were playing in Ukraine and Russia, both of which are speculated by football fans to be close in competition to the 'big five' leagues. Overall four play in Spain, seven play in Italy, two play in Germany, one in France, two in Ukraine, one in Russia and six in Croatia. The squad assembled for the most recent international tournament, 2016 Euro Cup and games played before the age of 23 can be found in appendix 1.

Croatia enjoys having quite a number of its players playing in marquee clubs around the world (statistics on players hereafter are from Soccerway, 2017). Luka Modric plays for Real Madrid and is a key piece to the team's midfield, he shares the field with some of the best players in the world. Also suiting up for Real Madrid is Mateo Kovacic, usually seeing time as a substitute. Conversely, Ivan Rakitic plays for Barcelona, Real Madrid's La Liga rival team which also boasts some of the best players in the world. Mario Mandzukic has been somewhat of a journeyman playing on various marquee clubs. Currently, he plays for Italian

powerhouse Juventus. Ivan Perisic plays midfield for Inter Milan, another top flight Italian team. Lastly, Croatia's captain who recently retired from international play and has the most caps ever for the national team at 134 plays in Ukraine at Shakhtar Donetsk. He has turned down more attractive offers from bigger clubs around Europe due to his loyalty to the club. Perhaps Croatia's most famous player is Davor Suker. Suker was part of the squad that surprised many at the 1998 FIFA Cup and achieved a third place finish. Suker won the golden boot at this tournament, scoring the most goals (6). He also won the silver ball as the second most outstanding player next to Brazil's Ronaldo.

Croatian Domestic League

The Croatian domestic league, otherwise known as Prva Hrvatska Nogometna Liga (1.HNL), is the premier league in Croatia. It has a total of ten clubs participating for the 2016-2017 season, working on a relegation/promotion system with the league directly below it, 2.HNL. The Croatian Football Association (hereafter CFA), known as Hrvatski Nogometni Savez, oversees all top 3 tiers of football in the country (1.HNL, 2.HNL, 3.HNL). 2.HNL and 3.HNL both promote the winner of their respective leagues to the division directly above them. 1.HNL relegates the last place team while having the second last team play in a playoff relegation with the second place team in 2.HNL which is competing for promotion. In the 1.HNL, teams are listed as either not-for-profit organizations or a 'public limited company'. Below the top three national leagues are an interconnected set of county leagues that each implement their own system of relegation and promotion. As a whole, the Croatian football pyramid is as follows;

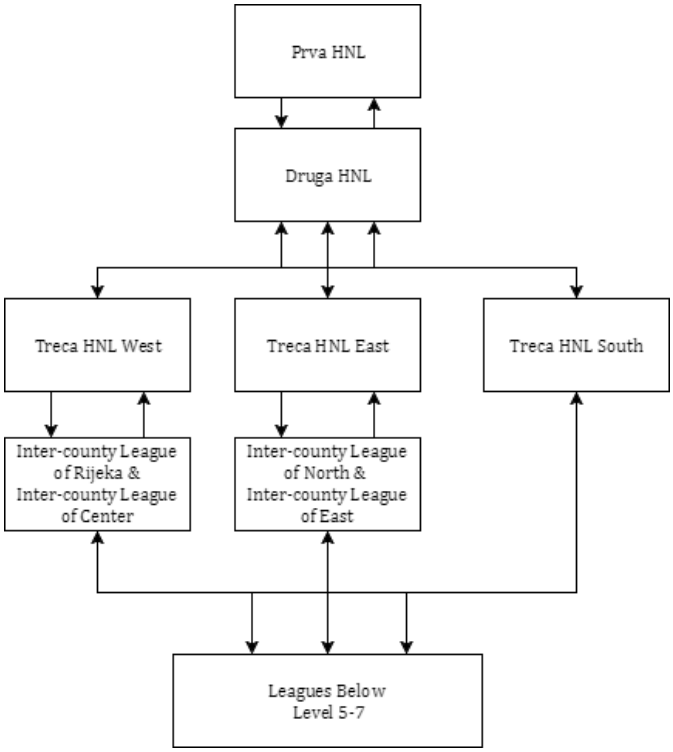

Figure 7. Croatian League System. Own illustration.

1.HNL is usually quite a top-heavy league, historically being dominated by two clubs, Dinamo Zagreb and Hajduk Split. Between these two clubs, they have accounted for every single league championship but one. More recently, Dinamo Zagreb has won the league every year since the 2005-2006 season. The following is an overview of the winners of the 1.HNL over the last 20 years.

Croatia				
1996–97	Dinamo Zagreb		2006–07	Dinamo Zagreb
1997–98	Dinamo Zagreb		2007–08	Dinamo Zagreb
1998–99	Dinamo Zagreb		2008–09	Dinamo Zagreb
1999–00	Dinamo Zagreb		2009–10	Dinamo Zagreb
2000–01	Hajduk Split		2010–11	Dinamo Zagreb
2001–02	NK Zagreb		2011–12	Dinamo Zagreb
2002–03	Dinamo Zagreb		2012–13	Dinamo Zagreb
2003–04	Hajduk Split		2013–14	Dinamo Zagreb
2004–05	Hajduk Split		2014–15	Dinamo Zagreb
2005–06	Dinamo Zagreb		2015–16	Dinamo Zagreb
Number of championships:				
Dinamo Zagreb	16			
Hajduk Split	3			
NK Zagreb	1			

Figure 8. Croatian League Winners Last 20 Championships. Own illustration.

When analyzing European domestic league rankings using UEFA's coefficient system (every UEFA coefficient hereafter is from UEFA, 2017b), Croatia does not fare too well, coming in at 16th overall in Europe alone as of April 1st 2017. Croatia's 1.HNL revenue make-up is quite different from that of the top leagues in Europe, as well as other leagues of its own quality. In 2015, the 1.HNL made a total of 43 million EUR. Croatia ranks first in all of European football when it comes to outgoing transfer fee proceeds as a share of total revenue. That is to say that transfer proceeds in Croatia accounted for 85% of total revenue when the two are compared (UEFA, 2017). Furthermore, Croatia sees almost half of its aggregate league revenue come from proceeds from UEFA, coming in at a total of 46% of all revenue for the league. This would include Champions League as well as Europa League contributions. Also, interestingly enough, Croatia has one of the lowest domestic broadcasting proceeds in all of Europe, coming in at only 3% of total revenue. To round out Croatia's revenue makeup, 10% comes from gate receipts, 20% from sponsorship commercial and 21% from 'other' (Ibid). Lastly, the aggregate amount spent on wages in the Croatian 1.HNL was 42 million EUR in 2015, an increase of 21% from the previous year. Interestingly enough, Croatia spends the second highest amount on players' salaries in comparison to league revenue when compared to other countries in Europe. Of the 43 million EUR made in 2015 in the 1.HNL, approximately 42 million (96%) was spent on wages. This also was the highest figure in all of Europe (Ibid).

Croatian Football Cup

Croatia hosts a cup tournament each year that encompasses teams spread out over almost all leagues in Croatia. The tournament starts with forty eight teams, each selected by the CFA. Each club from the top two tiers is selected. After this regional winners and finalists are awarded tournament berths by a selection committee. The top sixteen teams receive an automatic buy into the round of thirty two, while remaining teams have to compete to get there. The winner of the Croatian Cup receives a Europa League berth. In the case that the Croatian Cup winner is also winner of the 1.HNL league, the runner up receives the Europa League berth, since the 1.HNL winner is awarded a Champions League berth.

Controversy over Leadership

More recently, the domestic league has caused a bit of a stir over controversial management and leadership, particularly in regards to Zdravko Mamic, former chairman of Dinamo Zagreb and active figure

in the CFA. Mamic took over Dinamo in 2000 and rid the club of many of its debt and obligations, using much of his own money. His management of the club was deemed heavily controversially. Under his command the club had seen 13 coaching changes in 16 years. Even more alarming to the Croatian public was his influence in the CFA. He was seen as the main figure in appointing former star Davor Suker as president of the HNS. His authoritarian style and influence began to scare fans. What set off most Croatian fans in their opposition to Mamic was the fact that he was being heavily investigated by authorities for tax embezzlement and evasion. Furthermore, due to Dinamo's heavy exporting of footballers to clubs abroad, Mamic had allegedly set himself up to profit from these young talents. It was speculated that in order for Dinamo players to go play abroad, they would have to forgo 25% of their salaries until the end of their playing careers (Balkaninsight, 2015). This was highlighted when former Dinamo striker and Croatian international Eduardo Da Silva sued Mamic on the basis of their contract, and won the case. ESPN (2015) went as far as naming Mamic one of the '50 most influential figures in football'. All of these separate incidences caused the ever loyal Bad Blue Boys fan base to start boycotting Dinamo games. For years the team played without their loyal fan base. The unrest did not stop there. Fans began to act and lash out at international games and make disruptions, hoping for the CFA to be fined and sanctioned. The CFA had to begin to stop allowing the sale of tickets to some international away games. These events were most highlighted at the recent 2016 Euro Cup in France. Croatian fans threw flares onto the pitch, stopping gameplay and becoming headline news. The motives behind the flares were speculated to come from Mamic's reign and influence on the CFA, and also his affiliation and support to the Croatian center-right democratic union, the HDZ (Balkaninsight, 2015). Under Mamic, the CFA even showed support to the party, along with the entire Dinamo staff and squad through advertisements (Ibid). Eventually, Mamic along with his brother and at the time coach of Dinamo were arrested in late 2015. This effectively ended the boycott of the Bad Blue Boys and they returned to the Maksimir stadium to support their team. Mamic would go on to resign as chairman of the club in early 2016 and only take on a minor advisory role.

Dinamo Zagreb Youth Academy

With Dinamo Zagreb being Croatia's marquee club, it bares credence to investigate into how they operate their youth academies and teams preceding the senior squad. Dinamo Zagreb has carved itself out a niche competency by developing and producing talent. To begin with, the academy normally trains around 200 players per year, with 21 coaches attending to the youth (ECA, 2012, p.57). Prospective children who wish to be a part of the club are to submit an application form, and are then invited to 'summer camp' where the

elite are selected to come train with their respective age group. The club recruits youth from all parts of the country. The vast majority are recruited from in and around the Zagreb area (Ibid), however promising youth from other parts of the country are also invited to join the academy. Unlike other youth academies who are proponents of the 4-3-3 formation, Dinamo Zagreb has its youth teams employ a 4-4-2 or a 4-2-3-1. Training schedules for the youth academy are quite rigorous to begin with even at a young age (Ibid). Dinamo begins their youth teams at the U8 level with teams all the way up to the U19 level. Children below the U11 level practice 3-4 times per week. U13 practices 4-5 times per week, while U15 is 5-6 times per week. Teams over the age of 15 normally practice every day only having two days per month off from football. The academy houses most children in their 'NK Dinamo Academy Houses'. Due to the central training location of the academy being right in Zagreb, most players go to school in public or private schools in the neighborhoods nearby. Overall, Dinamo spends approximately 1.3 million EUR annually (8% of their overall budget) on the youth academy (Ibid).

The club places high value in the technical abilities of their youngsters and the focus from an early age is on these abilities. Everything under U11 is played with eight players and a goalkeeper. In U12 full 11vs.11 is introduced and dynamic technical abilities coupled with speed are greatly stressed. The attention to detail in these young stages is so great that in some drills the number of ball contact times in concrete drills is calculated during one year (Ibid). Teams here usually play more than 60 matches per year. The focus for youth, particularly in the U11 and under age categories is not centered around competition and winning games. Youth are encouraged to enjoy the activity of football and continue to foster their knowledge of the game through actively participating rather than competing at a young age. The well standing relationship with the senior squad allows select players from the older age categories to fully attend the senior team mid-week practices for more exposure. Professionalism is demanded of the players and they are exposed to pro football life from an early age (Ibid). Furthermore, another key competency of the academy lies within the senior team's 'B' squad, NK Lokomotiva Zagreb. Promising youth players, or players from the Dinamo senior team in need of more development are sent to Lokomotiva to hone skills and receive more exposure and experience to the game (Ibid). Unlike most other 'B' squads, Lokomotiva is in a lot of way a separate entity from Dinamo and operate according to their own means (Ibid). However because of this, they compete in the 1.HNL, Croatia's top league. Therefore youth players or senior players in need of more exposure are still able to gain experience in Croatia's top league against the best competition available to them.

It should also be of note, that these training methods and tactics are all quite similar and nationwide in Croatia, they are not exclusive to Dinamo (Bird, 2014; De Launey, 2013). The CFA has implemented the same developmental plan with cooperation from teams at the club level. Overall, the CFA normally spends an average of two million EUR a year on youth development (Jackson, 2007). Furthermore, the aim in Croatia from a young age is toward the development of the individual player, and not team play (Ibid) Children in the ages between six to twelve do not participate in full regulation football. Rather, they play in smaller sized pitches with fewer players in order to facilitate individual growth and creativity. Creativity and the ability to make decisions and carry them out on the spot are of utmost importance in the youth system. Vatroslav Mihacik, a Croatian academy coach commented on Croatia's approach to youth development relative to other countries:

> "Our nickname is the Brazil of Europe because of the style we play. Conditions in Croatia are far worse than in England where you have better facilities, better pitches, experts on nutrition and physiology and so on. But we are creative. Creativity is the deciding factor in growing a good player" (Ibid).

Colleague and head of the Croatia's youth football, Martin Novoselac, reinforced the claims and importance on creativity in Croatia:

> "You cannot make a player in a moment - it is about the long-term, The most important thing is taking care over technique and making steady progress. Our boys do not play in real competitions until they are 12 or 13, and even then the result is not everything. Creativity is what matters. We are always teaching them to be creative. They will know how to shoot, play one touch and dribble. But choices are left to them. You can practise for 100 years, but if you don't have the right feeling it's no good" (Jackson, 2007).

Croatian talent development revolves around individuality and skill at a young age. Winning is not valued and children are encouraged to have fun and hone their skills how they see fit. Furthermore, in order to facilitate these developments, youth are not exposed to real regulation matches and competitive play that demands winning until the ages of twelve and thirteen.

Fan Support and Hooliganism in Croatia

Football in Croatia has indeed bred some extreme cases of hooliganism amongst fans. The CFA has been fined and sanctioned over the behavior of Croatian fans at international games numerous times. These fans however normally stem from two different fan bases in Croatia; Dinamo Zagreb's Bad Blue Boys and Hajduk Split's Torcida. Dinamo Zagreb's Bad Blue Boys were established in 1986 by a group of fans who were inspired by the movie Bad Boys starring Sean Penn. For many, including Croatian journalist Andrej Krickovič (Avanti, 2017) the Bad Blue Boys were leaders in the nationalistic movement and call for Croatian independence in the early 1990s. The group frequently expressed their views and showed support to Franjo Tudman, leader of the early Croatian movement and eventual first President. The Bad Blue Boys identify themselves with the pro-Croatian movement and these traits are something that they carry with them today. The group has been branded as one of the most loyal but dangerous support groups in the world, with the Bleacher Report magazine citing them as one of the sixteen 'hardcore hooligan firms, ultras groups we wouldn't want to mess with' (Turner, 2013).

The start of Croatian Hooliganism can for the most part be traced back to an event that occurred directly preceding the civil war outbreak in Yugoslavia. In 1990, Red Star Belgrade was playing an away game in Zagreb against Dinamo. The timing of the game is an important factor, as it came just weeks after Croatia held its first multi-party elections in almost fifty years, something that had not been done in Yugoslavia. This act sparked tensions amongst Serbs and Croats, making the game something more of a nationalistic encounter than an act of sport. Even in the hours leading up to the game, fights and chaos could be seen in Zagreb. However it was during the game inside the stadium that the real fighting took place. Red Star arrived with 3000 of their fans called 'Delije'. About a half an hour into the game, the Dinamo 'Bad Blue Boys' were able to break police resistance and a full scale attack started between the fans resulting in 100s wounded and seriously injured (Milekic, 2016). The fighting lasted an hour until several police reinforcements came to stop the madness. The incident marked the beginning of the end of the Yugoslav first league as many teams began to withdraw the following season. Also, the Bad Blue Boys now had a nationalistic brand that they themselves endorsed and promoted leading into the civil war that was to come in less than a year. It can be speculated that this nationalistic identity still stands with the supporters today.

On the other end of the supporter spectrum stands the Torcida group of Hajduk Split. The Torcida group is speculated to be the oldest football support group in Europe (Croatia Week, 2015). The group got their start in 1950 after a group of students experienced the fanatic atmosphere at the FIFA World Cup Finals in Brazil against Uruguay and Brazil. This inspired them to come home and build a fanbase of their own (Ibid). Hajduk has enjoyed high levels of success in both the Yugoslav leagues of the past and in the Croatian 1.HNL that they compete in today. Torcida fans have, like the Bad Blue Boys from Dinamo, been involved in their own amount of troubles. There have been several occurrences of flare disruptions as games, as well as Torcida fans starting chaos by throwing bricks, bottles and stones at police and opposing fans. The patriotic demeanor of Torcida members is also prevalent just as it is with Dinamo's Bad Blue Boys. The behavior and allegiance of these two big support groups, as well as various other smaller groups across Croatia is of importance. Each of these groups exhibits high group identity and traits of nationalistic Croatian pride. What is interesting to note however is that when Croatia competes on an international scale, Torcida and Bad Blue Boys, as well as other smaller groups, all come together collectively as one. There are no reported signs of inter group tensions amongst supporters and the national team support is placed first. The coming together of these groups of fanatic supporters goes a long way in supporting the national team, as they are seen in large numbers at every major tournament and qualifying match around the world.

Croatia - Analysis

First analyzing Croatia on Hoffman's et al.'s (2002) characteristics of optimal conditions for a footballing nation produces some similarities. Due to Croatia's state as a developing nation, it's GNI of 22,380USD in 2015 does well to fit in accordance with Hoffmann et al.'s (2002) claims that a lower relative GNI per capita will steer youth towards football. This figure sits quite closely to the optimal level of 21,836USD where diminishing returns are expected. Furthermore, in relation to the cultural factors outlined by the authors, Croatia also bodes well in terms of football being the number one sport in the country along with its cultural affinity toward the game, as well as the country being heavily catholic which was also mentioned as a cultural factor. Furthermore, the geographic settings outlined by the authors align with Croatia, as the country has a moderate climate, especially along the coast.

Croatian Domestic League

As previously mentioned, the Croatian 1.HNL is a relatively lower quality league and seen as a stepping stone for most professionals. A quick glance at the championship frequency would reveal that there have been only three champions over the last 20 years of domestic play, with Dinamo winning every title since the 2005-06 season. Using Sandgren et al.'s (2013) insights that football nations with domestic leagues of lower quality need to develop players and have them play abroad in higher quality leagues, leads to a unique inference about the state of the Croatian league. A key aspect of the Croatian 1.HNL can be rooted in having youngster in youth academies as well as young players beginning their senior careers exposed to high levels of playing time. Poli et al.'s (2015) concept of capital experience and having young players play as many possible games is something that is taken seriously and applied country wide in Croatia. Leagues with a higher quality of football are not always able to give young players as much playing time when compared to other leagues of lesser quality (Maguire & Pearton, 2000). Croatia takes these weakness and uses them to their advantage, allowing young players an opportunity to play as many possible minutes as they can, further facilitating their growth and development. The culture instilled at their biggest clubs helps to further nurture talent by creating other avenues of high level competition other than the 1.HNL, such as Champion and Europa League competition. The table below shows that when taking into account the total amount of minutes played by players in the U22 category regardless if they were club trained or

not, Croatia fielded the most amount of minutes by any other European country:

Classification of leagues according to minutes played by footballers under 22 years of age (07/2009 - 12/2015)

League	Area	Nat	For	Total	Cat
Croatia	C	26.3%	2.4%	28.7%	++
Slovenia	C	23.3%	4.5%	27.8%	++
Netherlands	W	17.6%	6.5%	24.1%	++
Serbia	C	19.9%	2.6%	22.5%	++
Norway	N	15.8%	4.6%	20.4%	++
Finland	N	16.4%	3.7%	20.1%	++
Slovakia	C	16.5%	3.5%	20.0%	++
Austria	C	15.9%	2.8%	18.7%	+
Denmark	N	14.8%	3.6%	18.4%	+
Scotland	W	12.3%	5.9%	18.2%	+
Sweden	N	14.5%	2.8%	17.3%	+
Belgium	W	11.6%	5.6%	17.2%	+
Switzerland	W	12.6%	4.4%	17.0%	+
Czech Rep.	C	12.7%	2.8%	15.5%	+
Israel	S	13.6%	1.8%	15.4%	+
Hungary	C	12.2%	2.3%	14.5%	-
Germany	W	10.7%	3.8%	14.5%	-
France	W	10.7%	3.0%	13.7%	-
Ukraine	E	9.9%	2.9%	12.8%	-
Bulgaria	E	11.2%	1.5%	12.7%	-
Belarus	E	11.3%	1.1%	12.4%	-
Portugal	S	6.0%	5.5%	11.5%	-
Poland	C	9.9%	1.5%	11.4%	-
Romania	E	9.6%	1.5%	11.1%	-
Spain	S	6.9%	2.7%	9.6%	--
Greece	S	8.0%	1.6%	9.6%	--
Italy	S	3.3%	4.2%	7.5%	--
England	W	4.0%	3.5%	7.5%	--
Russia	E	5.6%	1.7%	7.3%	--
Turkey	S	5.6%	1.0%	6.6%	--
Cyprus	S	4.1%	2.1%	6.2%	--

Zone: Central Europe [C], Eastern Europe [E], Northern Europe [N], Southern Europe [S], Western Europe [W]
Nat: National players - For: Foreign players - Cat: Category

Figure 9. Classification of leagues according to minutes played by footballers under 22 years of age (07/2009 - 12/2015) (Poli et al., 2016a).

Tying these domestic league traits back to Sandgren et al.'s (2013) inferences of having players compete in higher quality leagues, these competencies have allowed Croatia to become one of the biggest exporters of football per capita in Europe, having approximately 600 players playing abroad in various leagues around the world, as well as Dinamo ranking as the fourth largest producer of talent in Europe and closely trailing them in 7th place is Hajduk (Poli et al. 2015a). Also, another interesting aspect of the football culture in Croatia stems from the fact that other clubs in the 1.HNL use the same approach in valuing the development of their club trained players, not just Dinamo and Hajduk. Clubs in Croatia tend to give their club trained youngsters, on average, more playing time and opportunity than other domestic leagues provide their young players (Ibid). In the Croatian 1.HNL, club trained players made up 23.4% of senior team rosters as of 2015 (Ibid). Conversely, these club trained players enjoyed playing 24.4% of the possible minutes available. This results in a ratio of 1.04, the highest of all European countries when taking into effect the percentage of minutes played (Ibid).

% of club-trained players in the squad (1st October 2015) and % of minutes played (July-October 2015), by league

	% squad	% minutes	ratio
AUT	19.3%	17.0%	0.89
BEL	11.8%	9.7%	0.82
BLR	34.0%	26.5%	0.78
BUL	25.0%	16.8%	0.67
CRO	23.4%	24.4%	1.04
CYP	11.5%	5.1%	0.44
CZE	30.7%	31.8%	1.03
DEN	29.1%	23.7%	0.82
ENG	11.7%	7.7%	0.66
ESP	23.7%	20.9%	0.88
FIN	23.7%	16.1%	0.68
FRA	19.4%	15.7%	0.81
GER	13.3%	12.3%	0.93
GRE	10.7%	5.8%	0.54
HUN	29.5%	27.0%	0.91
ISR	26.6%	21.4%	0.80
ITA	8.6%	9.0%	1.04
NED	22.8%	20.4%	0.90
NOR	26.2%	24.0%	0.91
POL	18.6%	12.9%	0.69
POR	11.1%	9.0%	0.81
ROM	14.5%	10.1%	0.69
RUS	15.7%	9.1%	0.58
SCO	20.9%	15.4%	0.74
SRB	23.0%	19.7%	0.86
SUI	23.6%	20.1%	0.85
SVK	28.5%	24.8%	0.87
SVN	26.0%	25.0%	0.96
SWE	24.4%	18.9%	0.77
TUR	8.3%	5.1%	0.62
UKR	25.0%	20.3%	0.81
Total	19.7%	16.3%	0.83

main training clubs in October 2015, 31 European leagues

		Total number	In the club	In other clubs	Average % of minutes
1.	Partizan (SRB)	78	13	65	43.3%
2.	Ajax (NED)	75	11	64	50.2%
3.	Barcelona (ESP)	62	10	52	43.0%
4.	Sporting CP (POR)	53	9	44	46.3%
.	Dinamo Zagreb (CRO)	53	5	48	43.5%
6.	Dynamo Kyiv (UKR)	52	11	41	46.8%
7.	Hajduk Split (CRO)	49	11	38	43.8%
.	Crvena Zvezda (SRB)	49	6	43	43.8%
9.	Feyenoord (NED)	46	7	39	43.5%
.	Porto (POR)	46	2	44	50.8%
11.	Sparta Praha (CZE)	45	5	40	56.7%
12.	Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR)	44	5	39	48.1%
13.	Real Madrid (ESP)	43	8	35	54.3%
14.	Levski Sofia (BUL)	41	13	28	41.3%
.	Manchester United (ENG)	41	6	35	41.6%
16.	Lyon (FRA)	39	13	26	54.0%
.	PSV (NED)	39	9	30	44.8%
18.	Dinamo Minsk (BLR)	38	7	31	57.7%
19.	OFK Beograd (SRB)	37	9	28	40.8%
.	Standard (BEL)	37	7	30	46.4%

Figure 10. On the left: % of club-trained players in the squad (1st October 2015) and % of minutes played (July-October 2015), by league. On the right: Main training clubs in October 2015, 31 European leagues. (Poli et al., 2015a)

Therefore the Croatian domestic league is one of opportunity and development, especially for players beginning their senior careers, which can likely be due to the poor shape of their domestic league. Poli et al's (2015) experience capital can be seen as a great asset in developing talent in Croatia. More recently however, young Croatian talent has been going abroad even before their senior careers begin. With Croatia recently joining the European Union in 2012, restrictions on recruiting youth have been lifted and recruiting is occurring straight from Croatian youth academies as young as the age of 16. For Romeo Jozak, head of the Croatian Football technical committee, this talent drain does not seem to be an issue at all. Jozak comments on the phenomena;

> "The major window for making technical implementation is from ages 12 to 16, and they're in Croatia at that time. So when they leave the country it's not a big issue. They already have the core implemented in their bodies" (De Launey, 2013).

From a CFA standpoint, the quality of the national team is ready to withstand the migration patterns of football that are seen today. Talent development of youngsters will continue to be a key competency of the

Croatian football association, and the revenue received from these developments will continue to churn the Croatian domestic league.

Youth and Talent Development

Analyzing the case of Dinamo Zagreb's youth academy produces some insights that can be tied back to the literature of youth development. When comparing the identification process to the model developed by Cobley and Cooke (2009), Dinamo takes an early approach in talent identification, selecting promising youth from an early age. As mentioned, children are selected from camps that are run during the summer, prospective youth are then asked to come for further trials and evaluations with the club. As mentioned by Mohamed et al. (2009), an early identification process does not necessarily translate to better players, some instances allow for youth to be identified later on. Dinamo mediates between an early and late identification process through its summer camps, where identification is done each year for promising prospects. This approach should do well to eliminate any identification problems in selecting promising youth players.

As showed in the case of Dinamo Zagreb's academy, the youth, particularly those in the U12 and under age groups are exposed to an environment with high levels of individuality and enjoyment, and full competition is not highly stressed. This ties in efficiently with Côté & Hay, (2002) talent developmental model of athletes. The authors explain that an athlete's early years could be described as the 'sampling years', where deliberate play is held to be of utmost importance. Deliberate play can be described as the process of learning specific skills through enjoyment and engagement that comes from an internal motivation to participate. Furthermore, Côté (1999) concept of deliberate play also mirrors the mastery climate that Ames and Archer (1998) describe to be important for physical education. A mastery climate mirrors a deliberate play approach in that learning through engagement and enjoyment is put first. The two concepts also do not stress competition and results to any great degree, but put fun and enjoyment as a requirement (Côté, 1999; Valentini et al. 1999). Dinamo creates an environment for children that fosters enjoyment and individuality. The strategies they employ foster children to enjoy themselves and learn through internally motivated principles which in turn creates a more positive experience (Ames & Acher 1988) and a chance of higher participation later in an athlete's life (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999; Parish & Treasure, 2003).

Moving along to the next stage of Côté & Hay's (2002) talent development model and Dinamo's youth development is the U13 to U17 age groups. According to the authors, it is during this 'specializing' stage that more of a focus on 'deliberate practice' should be stressed. Deliberate practice is the process of practicing with the intention of improving one's skills, and enjoyment is not considered as important anymore. Athletes go through various drills in order to hone and develop skills and not merely to enjoy themselves. This is seen evident at Dinamo, and even all around Croatia's youth clubs through the unified vision mentioned previously by Romeo Jozak. All Croatian youth between the ages of 12 and 16 go through heavily technical skills development through these years, however it is still done in a way that mediates between a deliberate play and deliberate practice approach. As mentioned in the Dinamo youth academy case, the coaches even go as far as counting the amount of ball contact times a player has per year. The goal in these years is to hone and develop specific skills that will be the foundation for the player in his senior years.

This leads into the final stage of Côté & Hay's (2002) model known as the 'investment' years. Athletes 17 years of age and up are classified to fit in this stage and deliberate practice is stressed to its highest degree. Athletes either develop into professional players or join the 'recreational' years. In Dinamo's youth academy, it is at this stage that promising youth are permitted to practice with the senior team on select days in order to be exposed to high levels of professionalism and competition. Furthermore, the age divisions here play up to 60 games a year, in order to further develop and gain capital experience. It is at this final stage where athletes are presented with the opportunity to keep playing professionally or eventually enter the recreational years.

Croatian National Pride

A possible explanation to Croatia's early surprise on the international football scene might be credited to the domestic conflict that arose during the early 1990s. As previously mentioned, the end of Titoism and the eventual collapse of many non-democratic economies in the early 1990s placed great pressure on Yugoslavia, the country Croatia was a member state of for 60 years. Nonetheless, Croatia was wholly seen as an independent country by most UN members by 1992 and from this point on its independent competition in football slowly began. With such an internal conflict as this, high degrees of patriotism were in turn produced. Croatians felt a large sense of unity and togetherness among one another. This sense of identity was at an all-time high during civil war. The small country finally felt a sense of

individuality not only from Yugoslavia but also from the rest of the world. It can therefore be speculated that this sense of patriotism and pride sparked Croatia's performance and success on an international stage. Igor Stimac, former player and coach of the national squad commented on the state of Croatian sports and the pride Croatians have in relation to its recent history:

> "It's a chance to show the world, through the different sports, that we exist...Sportsmen are the best ambassadors for us. It is a great inspiration to represent Croatia. There is a lot of pride. With the war and everything that went on, that increases the national energy...We don't have to teach the kids to sing the national anthem. I wouldn't say they're nationalists, but there's national pride, they know they've got to fight" (De Launey, 2013).

The Croatian national team was competing with a sense of pride and togetherness that might be something akin to the 'host country effect'. Hoffmann et al. (2002) discuss the effect that hosting has on a nation. An analysis done by the authors showed that hosting a World Cup event had a positive effect on subsequent tournament performance. Also of importance, is the fact that 13 out of the last 20 FIFA World Cups have had a host team finish in the top four of the entire tournament. The most radical example of a host-country effect can be seen during the 2002 FIFA World Cup in South Korea. Prior to the 2002 tournament, South Korea was ranked 42nd in the world after their 2001 international campaign, but finished at a miraculous fourth place when they hosted the tournament. Hoffmann et al. (2002) speculate that this hosting effect can be related to a cultural affinity of the general public towards the sports. Furthermore they add that:

> "The results indicate that world championship hosting activity has an impact on performance in international games both inside and outside the world cup.... This implies that some of the host effect is due to sympathetic audiences, and some to the underlying football culture which generates both good squads and viable hosting bids" (Ibid, p.267).

The notion that a collective affinity or sense of identity amongst a country can in turn help the national team produce better results on the field may seem farfetched. However the results of host nations in both the Euro and World Cups show that collective pride and unity can do wonders to the performance of the

team. Between 1992 and 1998 Croatians as a people were in the midst of a civil war. Feelings of great patriotism and pride were present amongst almost all Croats. Furthermore, the want of being recognized on a world stage was evident due to Croatia's newly gained independence (De Launey, 2013). Therefore the surprising results of both the 1996 Euro Cup quarterfinal appearance, and the third place finish at the 1998 FIFA World Cup can both be speculated to be seen as somewhat of a patriotic performance on behalf of the Croatians. This surprising performances set into place a cultural pride and association to football amongst Croatians. It can be speculated that these early successes on the international stage set the foundation for the future footballing generations of the country.

Uruguay

Population: 3,431,555

FIFA Rank: 9

Uruguay – Case Study

Uruguay is a small country located in the southeast portion of South America. It is situated between the countries of Argentina and Brazil. In total, Uruguay is 176,215 km^2, making them the second smallest country in South America measured on square kilometers. Most of the country is covered by pampas and is therefore flat. The climate is humid and subtropical, with the temperature in the capital almost always between 6°C and 27°C. However for the better part of the year the temperature is above 15°C (Weatherspark, 2017). Uruguay had a population of 3.4 million in 2015, of which 88% is Caucasian. Almost half of the population is Roman Catholic and close to 20% are atheist (CIA, 2017a). The official language in Uruguay is Spanish. The capital of the country is Montevideo which houses around 40% of their population. Uruguay's GNI in 2015 was 70 million USD or 20,400USD per capita. Uruguay also enjoys having the second highest GDP per capita in South America, as well as having the 43rd highest GDP per capita in the world. Uruguay as a country is leading in many civilized areas among its South American counterparts. Amongst these areas are democracy, size of middle class, lack of corruption, city with highest quality of living (Montevideo), security, press freedom and peace amongst others (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

Football Culture in Uruguay

If football fans were asked to mention the two biggest South American national football teams, most would probably mention Brazil and Argentina. Uruguay can be regarded as belonging to that same elite class of South American football, as they are in several ways the most successful South American football team ever. Uruguay is the only nation that has won the world cup while having less than 27 million inhabitants at the time of winning. Their earliest successes came in 1930 and then 1950 where they won the FIFA World Cup. Other accolades include being the most successful team of the Copa America tournament. Football settlements in Uruguay began in Montevideo, which were originally affected by Britain's influence on the country (Giulianotti, 1999). The first notable football club was founded in 1861 under the name of Albion FC. Thirty years later a group of Uruguayan and British workers from the British-owned Central Uruguayan Railway founded the Central Uruguayan Railway Cricket Club (CURCC). Although the name of the club indicates a cricket organization, football was played as well and they won their first championship in 1900 (Ibid). A decade after the club won their first championship the members decided to only focus on

football, renaming the organization Club Atletico Penarol or simply just Penarol. Penarol are now the most successful club in the history of domestic football in Uruguay. To challenge British football in Uruguay a group of Hispanic students at the University of Montevideo decided to create a club in 1899 called Club Nacional de Football or simply just Nacional, which today is the second most successful club in Uruguay and not far behind Penarol. The British influence on Uruguayan football can today be seen on the names of football clubs such as Wanderers, Liverpool, River Plate, Rampla Juniors etc. (Giulianotti, 1999). According to Giulianotti (1999), one of the main explanations for Uruguay's early football success, in particular their second World Cup victory, was due to their economic increases after World War II where they became the richest country in South America measured on GDP per capita. Although it was many years ago since Uruguay won their last World Cup, they are indeed still a big football country with a huge passion for the sport. So much so in fact, that studies have shown when the Uruguayan national team plays important matches, crime rates in the capital can fall up to 15% (Munyo, 2014). The stories depicting Uruguay's passion for football are numerous. In the 1980s Uruguayan attacker Fernando Morena was sold to Spain from Penarol. The fans of Penarol wanted him back due in large part for the club's 90th anniversary. Fans began to collect money for his transfer back to Penarol. Morena eventually came back due to the fundraising and he became the most scoring player in the Uruguayan domestic league with the record still currently standing (Rainbow, 2013).

Players such as Luis Suarez, Edinson Cavani and Diego Forlan are just a few of the marquee Uruguayans who have had success on an international level. In 2006 Uruguay had 241,300 active football players accounting for 7.03% of the whole population. Most of the active players were of the male gender (214,000), which shows the interest for football amongst males in the country. Uruguay currently has 1210 different football clubs making them the country with most clubs per capita in the world.

Uruguayan National Team

The association of Uruguayan football (AUF from hereafter) was founded in 1900 and played their first game one year later against Argentina. Their team colors are white and sky blue, giving them their nickname *La Celeste* (The Sky Blue). Uruguay are ranked as the 9th best team in the world (1st April 2017) and their average rank since the beginning of the FIFA rankings has been 23rd. Uruguay's home games are played at Estadio Centenario stadium, which has a capacity of 76,000. They are led by their captain Diego Godin who plays for the Spanish club Atletico Madrid. Alongside him is their all-time games played leader

Maxi Pereira who has played 114 games for Uruguay (February 2017). Uruguay's all-time leading scorer Luis Suarez leads the team with 47 international goals (April 2017). In appendix 2 a table shows their national team at the latest Copa America and the number of games players have had before the age of 23. Uruguay is by far the smallest country to ever win a World Cup. Their first time was in 1930 where they hosted the tournament themselves. The second time came when they defeated Brazil own their home soil. Uruguay makes frequent appearances both at the World Cup but also in the Copa America tournament.

Copa America and World Cup Finals Uruguay has participated in:

- 1916 Copa America – Winner
- 1917 Copa America – Winner
- 1919 Copa America – Runners-up
- 1920 Copa America – Winner
- 1921 Copa America – Third place
- 1922 Copa America – Third place
- 1935 Copa America – Winner
- 1937 Copa America – Third place
- 1939 Copa America – Runners-up
- 1941 Copa America – Runners-up
- 1942 Copa America – Winner
- 1945 Copa America – Fourth place
- 1946 Copa America – Fourth place
- 1947 Copa America – Third place
- 1949 Copa America – Sixth place
- 1950 World Cup – Winner
- 1953 Copa America – Third place
- 1954 World Cup – Fourth Place
- 1955 Copa America – Fourth place
- 1956 Copa America – Winner
- 1957 Copa America – Third place
- 1959 (Argentina) Copa America – Sixth place
- 1959 (Ecuador) Copa America – Winner
- 1962 World Cup – Group Stage
- 1966 World Cup – Quarterfinals
- 1967 Copa America – Winner
- 1970 World Cup – Fourth Place
- 1974 World Cup – Group Stage
- 1975 Copa America – Fourth place
- 1979 Copa America – Group stage
- 1983 Copa America – Winner
- 1986 World Cup – Round of 16
- 1987 Copa America – Winner
- 1989 Copa America – Runners-up
- 1990 World Cup – Round of 16
- 1991 Copa America – Group Stage
- 1993 Copa America – Quarterfinals
- 1995 Copa America – Winner
- 1997 Copa America – Group Stage
- 1999 Copa America – Runners-up

- 2001 Copa America – Fourth Place
- 2002 World Cup – Group Stage
- 2004 Copa America – Third Place
- 2007 Copa America – Fourth Place
- 2010 World Cup – Fourth Place
- 2011 Copa America – Champions
- 2014 World Cup – Round of 16
- 2015 Copa America – Quarterfinals
- 2016 Copa America – Group Stage

All of Uruguay's wins in the Copa America make them the most successful team in the history of the tournament. The current national coach Oscar Tabarez known as El Maestro (The Teacher), is coaching Uruguay for his second time. The first time came in 1988-1990 and more recently from 2006 to present. He has also been in charge of big clubs such as the Boca Juniors and AC Milan. He is known for his technical style of play and is seen as a teacher for his players (Giulianotti, 1999, p.144). During his second tenure as national coach of Uruguay, he has taken them from 29th place on the FIFA rankings to various places in top ten as well as an all-time high as the second best team in July 2011. Furthermore, Uruguay managed a fourth place finish at the 2010 World Cup and won the Copa America the year after. Most of the players on the Uruguayan national team play outside of Uruguay. During the 2016 Copa America, Uruguay only had two players out of the 23 in their squad playing in the Uruguayan domestic league. Only Haiti had fewer players from their own domestic league than Uruguay. During the 2010 World Cup where Uruguay finished fourth, they had two players from their domestic league. The squad assembled for 2014 World Cup only featured one player from their domestic league. Only three other teams during the 2014 World Cup had one player featured from their domestic league. Of the 23 players in their squad at the 2016 Copa America, 12 players played in one of the top five leagues in the world; England (three), Spain (four), Italy (three) and France (two). Of the 23 players assembled for the 2016 Copa America, all played their first senior match at a Uruguayan club. All of Uruguay's best players have been trained in Uruguay while almost all have transferred to various leagues abroad. Many Uruguayan players play abroad when taking into consideration the size of the country. As of April 2017 Uruguay had 403 players abroad, as compared to other nations; USA (283), Denmark (185), Czech Republic (160), Spain (534) Argentina (1044), England (678) and Belgium (239). The Spanish professional leagues have the highest amount of Uruguayan players.

Uruguayan Domestic Football

The Uruguayan Primera Division is structured differently from other big European leagues such as the domestic leagues in England, Spain and Germany etc. A restructuring of the league has been undergone for the 2017 season where the second tier league will consist of fewer teams for the purpose of increasing CB (Giovanelli, 2015). Uruguay uses three separate rounds during a season, unlike other leagues using only one. The three different rounds are known as the Apertura, Copa Intermedia and the Clausura. Each round has its own winner however teams collect aggregate points from all three. The winner of the Copa Intermedia (second round) gains a berth into the Copa Sudamericana (South America's equivalent of Europa League). The winners of the Apertura and Clausura play each other in a semifinal, with the winner going on to play the team who won the aggregate points title of all three competitions. In the instances that a team wins both the Apertura and Clausura, there will be no finals against the aggregate winner no matter who the team is. Copa Libertadores (South America's equivalent of Champion's League) berths are awarded to the winner of the Uruguayan Primera as well as the runners up, as well as the next best team with the most aggregate points.

Three teams will be relegated from the top tier league. These three teams are the teams with the average fewest points calculated from the last two seasons. Teams who are in their first year of top tier play use points collected in a single season. Teams are relegated to the league directly below called the Segunda Division. 2017 featured 15 teams in Segunda Division. Teams relegated from the Segunda Division are relegated down to the Segunda Division B. In Segunda Division B 15 teams plays for a spot in the Segunda Division. Teams cannot be relegated from the Segunda Division B since no leagues below exist in the Uruguayan football association. However teams are regularly denied participation due to financial problems. Some teams come back years later when their financial are in order again (El Pais, 2017). There is also an external league system in Uruguay still supported by AUF called Liga Universitaria. There are nine leagues with twelve teams each exhibiting non-professional play.

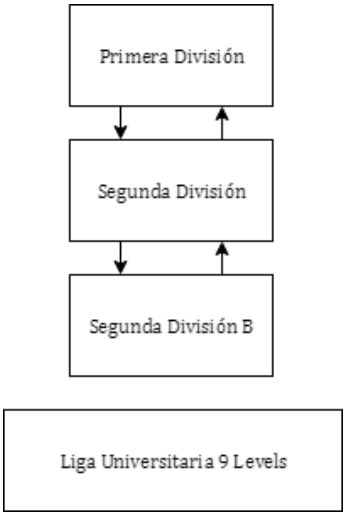

Figure 11. Uruguayan League System. Own illustration.

The Clubs

There are primarily two teams dominating the Uruguayan Primera Division. These include Penarol who before 2017 had a total of 48 league wins, and Nacional who has the second most wins with 46. Combined these two team have won the league 94 out of 113 seasons. The third most wins are shared by a total of four teams. The following table exhibits league title winners over the last 20 years, while also showing how unbalanced the league is in relation to championship frequency. Penarol and National have won 16 of the last 20 league titles.

Uruguay				
1998	Nacional		2007–08	Defensor Sporting
1999	Penarol		2008–09	Nacional
2000	Nacional		2009–10	Penarol
2001	Nacional		2010–11	Nacional
2002	Nacional		2011–12	Nacional
2003	Penarol		2012–13	Penarol
2004	Danubio		2013–14	Danubio
2005	Nacional		2014–15	Nacional
2005–06	Nacional		2015–16	Penarol
2006–07	Danubio		2016	Nacional
Number of championships:				
Nacional	11			
Penarol	5			
Danubio	3			
Defensor Sporting	1			

Figure 12. Uruguayan League Winners Last 20 Championships. Own illustration.

In the 2016 season 13 out of 16 teams in the Primera Division hailed from the city of Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. Penarol and Nacional are also the only teams from Uruguay to ever win the Copa Libertadores (South America's equivalent of Champion's League), Penarol with five wins and Nacional with three wins all of which came between 1960 and 1988. No Uruguayan team has ever won the Copa Sudamericana. All coaches in the Primera Division need to take a three year course at AUF which includes a written and practical exam they have to pass before they can coach at the best level in Uruguay (Bucciarelli, 2013).

UEFA recently released a report with focus on the footballing landscape in Europe from 2015 (UEFA, 2017). Amongst other things UEFA compared the number of players from foreign countries playing in the best domestic league of every footballing nation in the world. UEFA also compared the age of these players in each domestic league. Uruguay had the third lowest number of foreign players in the Primera Division at around 7.5%. Every European country had more foreign players in their best domestic league. The average age of the players in the Uruguayan Primera Division are just below 25 which is below the average of all the leagues in the world. The only team ranked higher than Uruguay on the recent FIFA ranking which had a lower average age was Belgium, however only by a couple of months.

Club Ownership

Ownership of clubs in Uruguay is different from clubs in Europe which can be seen as a structural weakness (Giulianotti, 1999, p.148). The clubs are not commercially organized like clubs in Europe. Clubs in Uruguay are all democratically run by members and not by companies, businessmen or institutions. Clubs are run as private associations where members called 'socios' pay a fee to become a member of the club. In return, members get to use the facilities of that club which could include swimming pools, fitness gym etc. Socios can also buy tickets to club matches at a reduced price together with gaining voting rights. A problem with this concept is that big teams attract a higher amount of members and can charge a higher premium since they also have better facilities. This vicious/virtuous cycle allows bigger clubs to stay in front of smaller ones (Ibid). The members can not cover the cost of the clubs alone, therefore clubs are heavily dependent on player sales. As mentioned clubs are heavily dependent on player sales to Europe if they wish to survive which puts them in weak bargaining positions against European clubs (Ibid). The development of young and talented players is therefore crucial for survival. Selling the best players to survive affects the attendance of games in a negative way since spectators wish to see the best players

compete (Ibid). Low attendance does not help the debt that many of the teams have. The accumulated debt of the Uruguayan teams in their professional leagues has in total increased by over 50% since 2005 (El Observador, 2015). Reports of players not receiving their salary and players denying to start the tournament due to lack of good stadium facilities are just few of the problems that have recently plagued Uruguayan football (Inzaurralde, 2014). Several of the stadiums that marquee teams play in do not have a capacity of more than 6000, where seats are often made of concrete. Stadium lights, clocks and scoreboards are not a part of every stadium either (Rider, 2016). Spectator numbers are also low. No official statistics on attendance to matches are available, however several football sites agrees that the average number of spectators are under 5000 per game for most teams (World Football, 2017; Transfermarkt, 2017).The ticket price to watch a game in the Uruguayan Primera Division sits between 200-300 Uruguayan Peso or around 7-10.5USD (February 2017). This prize is for non socio spectators (Tickantel, 2017).

Paco Casal, a sports agent (written about below) who owns the company Tenfield currently owns the broadcasting rights to the Primera Division and Segunda Division for 11.8 million USD (10.7 million USD annually before 2017) (Gómez, 2016). The revenue is not equally distributed between all the teams. Penarol and Nacional receive 9% each. The rest of the clubs in the Uruguayan Primera Division receive 73% of the amount equally which works out to be around 5.2% each. The clubs in the Segunda Division receive around 0.6% each. It should be of note the TV deal before 2017 was even more unequally distributed towards Penarol and Nacional. Hooliganism at stadiums in Uruguay is also known to be a problem. People have recently been shot dead and matches have been postponed due to riots (MercoPress, 2016). However compared to other countries in the South American region (Young, 2014; Barshad, 2016) Uruguay is far from the worst in regards to hooliganism.

Youth System - Baby Futbol

FIFA (2014) has studied Baby Futbol (Baby Football from hereafter) in Uruguay. Baby Football is an organized football league for kids which has been in operation since 1960. There are two competing organizations in charge of Baby Football, both of them trying to maximize player registration. Association Uruguay de Futbol Infantil (AUFI from hereafter) and Organizacion Nacional de Futbol Infantil (ONFI from hereafter) (Bucciarelli, 2013). AUFI is an organization under the control of the AUF. AUFI is organizing Baby Football exclusively in Montevideo. ONFI on the other hand has many more registered players but

organizes Baby Football outside of Montevideo. Although the name indicates 'Baby' Football, it is for youth in the age groups from five to 13 years divided into nine different age groups (FIFA, 2014). The president of the federation of Baby Football in the region of Montevideo Roberto Pastoriza explains that in Uruguay 85% (or 62,000) (Ibid) of all the boys in the ages from six to 13 years old plays Baby Football. A number that high is unseen in any other country on the planet (Ibid). Several places in Uruguay offer Baby Football at no charge, however some children are charged a monthly price of around 100 Uruguayan Pesos (Around 3,5USD). This is compared to an average price of 30EUR per month in Spain (Around 31,8USD) (Urwicz, 2014). The football under the guidance of the AUFI is played in an 11vs.11 format whereas ONFI plays on smaller pitches and smaller teams sizes which range from 7vs.7 from age five to nine and 9vs.9 from age 10 to 13. The majority of the best players in Uruguayan football have participated in both AUFI and ONFI, meaning that they have played under both formats while also playing twice the amount of games (Bucciarelli, 2013). Even though these leagues are well organized, there is no league table, relegation or promotion however games are still highly competitive (Ibid). The activities that kids do during their football training are differentiated based on their age. Players between the ages of five to seven are trained with a focus to be familiar with the ball and the basic principles of football. Ages eight to 10 are introduced to different rolls on the fields together with more focus on controlling the ball. From 10 to 13 tactics are introduced and the players should now be in control of their body.

Every trainer in Baby Football must take a one year course at the AUF where a written and practical exam is required to complete the program (Bucciarelli, 2013). Paolo Montero a former professional football player and the former youth coach at Penarol explains how Baby Football is played everywhere in every city in every town and even on street corners. According to Montero this is the reason for the success of Uruguayan football and the many talents they produce. The best players in Uruguay have played Baby Football and many more are already in the pipeline (FIFA, 2014). The Uruguayan national coach Oscar Tabarez adds that the Uruguayan national team is only good because of Baby Football, explaining that every player on the national team since the 1990s has been involved in Baby Football (Ibid). Many of the Baby Football leagues are financially linked to the best teams on a senior level in the country. Roberto Pastoriza adds that professional teams in Uruguay scout all their talent from Baby Football (Ibid).

Ages 14-18

The next stage after Baby Football is for the players in the age groups of 14 to 18, which have both an A and B division. The best clubs in the country start here by scouting for the best players from Baby Football that are turning 14 to develop in their youth academies and hopefully later on sell. This age group is divided into five groups, each of them having their own name representing their own age group. Every team plays 11vs.11 and they compete with full rules and regulations. League tables are introduced along with promotion and relegation. However the promotion and relegation system is different compared to other countries. It is not the teams that get relegated or promoted but the clubs themselves and each of their age groups. The clubs have five teams, one in each of the age categories. These teams collect points together and the points are accounted for in a 'group' table. At the end of the season the clubs with most points will be promoted and the ones with fewest will be relegated. This method is used so clubs do not only focus on becoming good in one age group but rather in all five. Every player will therefore receive the best possible training (Bucciarelli, 2013). Every trainer in this age group must take a two year course at AUF where they in the end have to pass a written and practical exam (Ibid).

Third-Party Ownership

Third-Party Ownership (TPO) is when the future transfer fees of a player are partly owned by a private company or another person than the player himself. Having a TPO over a player often allows the company to decide which club the player should play for, as well as accepting any transfer fees regardless of the player's personal preference. With profit in mind companies take their own interest into consideration when they sell a player they 'own'. Most players are therefore sold to Europe (The Telegraph, 2016). FIFA have studied the consequences of TPOs (FIFA, 2015) and decided to ban effective May 1st 2015. Agreements made before the ban can remain in place until they expire. The English Football Association decided to ban TPOs from the start of the 2008-2009 season. Although TPOs are soon going to be outdated completely, Uruguayan football has still been affected for many years and this might have had an influence both on the distribution of their best players but also on the shape of their best domestic league.

Paco Casal who was mentioned above was at one time the most powerful person in Uruguayan football and still might be (Giulianotti, 1999, p.149). He has represented many of the best players from Uruguay for their contract negotiation domestically but he has also been lobbying for them to be sold to Europe. His TPO work however has improved the lives of many players in Uruguay, including their salaries and the status as players (Arbena, 1995, p.104). TPO played a big role in the selling of players to Europe by

increasing the supply and demand of Uruguayan footballers. However at the same time it also decreased the number of spectators to the games in the Primera Division (Arbena, 1995, p.104). Uruguay's success in Copa Libertadores might have been affected by their best players moving abroad since no team from Uruguay has won the Copa Libertadores since the late 1980's. Paco Casal still represents several players and is lobbying for them to move abroad to Europe but is not operating under TPO terms anymore (Burford, 2014, p.37).

Uruguayan Mentality - The Dream

The migration of Uruguayan players to Europe has affected the grassroots in Uruguayan football (Giulianotti, 1999, p.150). Many young kids and their families now see the possibility and benefits of becoming a football player in Europe. This gives them a chance to get out of their relatively economic and social poverty. Playing at one of the best clubs in Uruguay does not necessarily make a player rich, but when the chance of playing abroad become a possibility many young players pursue this goal relentlessly (Giulianotti, 1999, p.151). Luis Suarez is one of the Uruguayan players that has been affected by the financial rewards by moving abroad to Europe. As he tells Ana Laura Lissardy, a Uruguayan-Italian journalist and author the book 'Vamos que vamos' asked Suarez on his motivations in football and how his girlfriend moving to Europe affect him (Lissardy, 2013):

> "That was when I really realized that if I wanted to be close to her I'd have to work hard. I'd have to wake up. So I set to work much harder than I needed to. I wasn't free to go there nor her to come here because of the money situation. So I had to train to the max to be able to succeed in Europe" (Ibid).

A Man's Game

Uruguay is known for playing an aggressive brand of football and winning at all costs. A popular Uruguayan coach Julio Ribas once said that football should not be beautiful, and that if you want beauty go watch ballet (Aguirre, 2014). It is not acceptable to break the leg of an opponent, but 'dirty' play is fine. Martín Aguirre editorial director of El País in Montevideo calls the football played on the fields in Montevideo the toughest football in the world (Ibid). Even professional coaches have commented on the toughness of the game in Uruguay compared to Europe. Dennis Bergkamp says that the football played in

European football academies is too focused on rules as well as youth having a spoiled mentality. For him this is the reason why European football academies do not produce fighters like Luis Suarez (Ibid). Even though Baby Football does not has a table recording wins and losses, Suarez released a biography talking about his experiences with Baby Football:

> "At first this model looks similar to that used around the world, but in Europe they encourage an almost no-contact sport at that age. Baby Football in Uruguay is physical and it's aggressive (…) some mothers and fathers keep their children away from it because they believe some of the fun is lost due to the intensity. Some even consider it dangerous (…) it reinforced the message I had already learned from the street – that you play to win at any cost" (Ibid).

Uruguay - Analysis

Uruguay's consistent success over their long period of football makes for an interesting analysis. To begin, a country so small that enjoys the relative success sustained over such a long period of time is unseen. Most of Uruguay's socioeconomic factors are not far from what Hoffmann et al. (2002) found to be the most optimal conditions for national football success. Factors in accordance include their GNI per capita, geographic, region, language and religion. The average annual temperature is a bit higher than the suggested average of 14 degree Celsius. Uruguay's success does not seem to be a coincidence or the product of one golden generation that has made them successful in recent years, suggesting that they have found a way to consistently develop talented football players. Their greatest success came several decades ago with their win in the 1930, and 1950 FIFA World Cup. These earlier tournaments however had fewer teams participating in comparison to the game today. Their World Cup wins are surprisingly not the best argument for their status as the most successful team relative to population in football's history. Analyzing their wins in the Copa America (South America's continental nation tournament) clearly shows their consistent success over a longer time. Copa America wins per decade:

- 1910-1919: 2 out of 3
- 1920-1929: 4 out of 9
- 1930-1939: 1 out of 3
- 1940-1949: 1 out of 6
- 1950-1959: 2 out of 6
- 1960-1969: 1 out of 2
- 1970-1979: 0 out of 2
- 1980-1989: 2 out of 3
- 1990-1999: 1 out of 5
- 2000-2009: 0 out of 3
- 2010-2019: 1 out of 3

– (Copa America 2019 is not yet played)

In the two decades where Uruguay did not win any Copa America trophies, they still managed a top four finish in both. The 1970s saw them finish fourth place in 1975, with the tournament only being held twice in that decade. The 2000s saw them make semifinal appearances in all three Copa Americas, finishing in third once. These solid recent performances led them to their most recent Copa America championship in 2011. No other national team in the world has won their continental tournament that many times and enjoyed success spread out over such a long period. The Euro Cup in comparison might be harder to win in relation to the number of good football nations participating, however the Copa America still boasts

talented teams in relation to world class football, including prominent powerhouses Brazil and Argentina. Uruguay has won all the Copa Americas hosted on its home soil, which results in seven out of 15 thier championships. The host nation effect (Hoffmann et al., 2002) can be speculated to have aided the Uruguayans in these home soil victories, however their success also extends to out-of-country play. Teams do not win major tournaments strictly do to home field advantage as other factors are heavily at play.

Uruguayan Domestic League

Another factor making Uruguay an interesting case is how their international competition level is compared to the shape of their domestic league, the Uruguayan Primera Division. As written in the case, it is not uncommon for Uruguayan clubs to be relegated due to financial problems and their huge debt level. The Uruguayan Primera Division is so unbalanced that a coin flip could historically speaking decide the winner of the league between Penarol and Nacional. Unbalanced leagues can cause total income decreases, fewer spectators and less media coverage causing a fall in total league revenue (Quirk & Fort, 1992). No data has been able to be found on the overall income of the Uruguayan Primera Division. However, an average of approximately 5000 people attended the games in the 2011-2012 season. Around 45% of the total attendance came from Nacional and Penarol home games. The attendance of the Uruguayan Primera has the same number of spectators as the fourth best league in England (Ibid). The comparison is made based on the same numbers used in UEFA's financial landscape report over the year of 2015. The leagues in Europe with an average attendance similar to Uruguay (between 3000-7000) are shown in the table below. Both Argentina and Brazil have much higher attendance numbers than Uruguay and are therefore not worth comparing:

FIFA Rank	Country	Average Attendances	Association club coefficients (1st April 2017)
31	Ukraine	4295	8
34	Austria	6794	15
42	Czech Republic	4662	13
46	Greece	4345	14
48	Denmark	5618	18
56	Israel	6333	22
81	Norway	6970	25
94	Kazakhstan	3899	29
Other small countries in FIFA's top 15 rank March 2017 (Wales is also in top 15 however their best teams play in the English Premier League)			
5	Belgium	11103	9
8	Portugal	11325	7
11	Switzerland	10032	12

Figure 13. Average Attendances of domestic games in the best domestic league of small football nations. Own illustration. Attendance numbers are from 2015-2016 season (EFS, 2017) Uruguayan numbers are from 2011-2012 Apertura.

Comparing the attendance numbers between the Uruguayan Primera Division and other European leagues with the same figures, each of these European counterparts are much lower on FIFA's ranking. Higher attendance to matches raises broadcasting revenues, merchandising and sponsorship deals which in turn results in better players (Késenne, 2007). This can be seen to improve talent development and thereby national team performance (Hypercube, 2015, p.20). Uruguay is currently successful on a national level and a raise in league quality might not necessarily increase their national team performance, however this point will be touched upon later in the analysis. For a country so interested in football, the low attendance in the domestic league comes at a surprise. Their recent broadcasting deal confirms this. Comparing Uruguay's broadcasting deal with deals of the best domestic European leagues in 2015, Uruguay would have been placed just outside the top twenty. This equates to a deal approximately in proportion to Cyprus (UEFA, 2017, p.74) which had a population of 1,165,300 in 2015, three times smaller than Uruguay.

The distribution of the broadcasting deal between Uruguayan clubs also does not help to improve CB. The current distribution gives advantages to National and Penarol, who already lead the league in terms of championship success. An unbalanced league situated towards National and Penarol has however not aided in their player development when observing the makeup of the 2016 Copa America squad. The reasons for this can be numerous, but it does not seems to have major effect on current players on the national team developed in the two clubs opposite to research suggested by Hypercube, (2015, p.20). This however is made on a small sample size indicating that it may have been a coincidence.

Total Youth	Total Players	Total Senior	Total Players
Defensor Sporting	4	Defensor Sporting	6
Nacional	3	Montevideo Wanderers	4
Montevideo Wanderers	3	Nacional	3
Penarol*	(2)	Danubio	3
Danubio	2	Central Espanol	2
Cerro Porteno	1	Penarol	1
Paysandú Bella Vista	1	Miramar Misiones	1
Deportivo Maldonado	1	Paysandu Bella Vista	1
Central Espanol*	(1)	Cerro	1
		Atenas	1
* Abel Hernandez played on two different teams and is therefore included in both the count of Central Espanol and Penarol			
Stats from: www.transfermarkt.com			

Figure 14. Uruguayan Club Team Distribution. Own illustration. See individual player distribution in appendix 4.

The last obvious factor that does not improve the shape of the Uruguayan Primera Division is the placement of the clubs. Most of the clubs in the Uruguayan Primera Division are based in Montevideo. Football clubs attract most of their supporters from their local area (Hypercube, 2015, p.31). This results in clubs competing for fans in the same geographic area. A study by Walker (1986) showed that in England city size correlates with match attendance. If 13 teams in the Uruguayan Primera Division are competing for the support of one city's population, then each of the clubs will attract fewer supporters. The recent restructuring of the Uruguayan Primera Division and TV deal distribution from 2017 might help to change the CB of the Primera Division for the better. However no radical changes have been made to the league design apart from extra games being added through the Copa Intermedia. A small change however includes smaller teams now being able to compete in the Copa Sudamericana if they can manage to win the Copa Intermedia. Winning Copa Intermedia adds more money and prestige to the winning club. A side advantages of these extra games on senior level may benefit young Uruguayan players.

Uruguayan Youth System

The Uruguayan Primera Division is in bad shape, yet they still enjoy international success consistently relative to their size. In regards to other factors leading to success, Hoffmann et al. (2002, p.258) add the following:

> ”Youth development is dependent on the existence of football physical and organizational infrastructure, as well as the availability and standard of equipment. Private access to equipment and available leisure time for participating in sporting activities are also important in this context”.

That fact that every Uruguayan player has been playing Baby football at a youth level before being recruited in their teen years to academies might be a key to their success. As found in the case, every national Uruguayan player since 1990 has played Baby Football. Another remarkable finding was that 85% of every boy from six to 13 years old plays Baby Football and one reason for this could be the low capital requirements of football. Hoffmann et al. (2002, p.259) also adds:

> “It can be played with a modicum of equipment and organization, in contrast to sports such as equestrianism, yachting, car racing etc. In many societies, football therefore presents relatively attractive financial opportunities for children from under-privileged backgrounds”.

Most young boys in Uruguay play football during their sampling years, suggesting that they are motivated in some way because young children choose the activities that they enjoy participating in the most (Côté & Hay, 2002). This motivation is important to sustain the athletes in the sport and developing them as they grow older. Also of note, is the fact that it is almost free to play football for youth in Uruguay, making it easier for kids to participate regardless of their parents’ financial status. The more people playing football in a country, results in a bigger pool of potential world-class players the national team can choose from. However mass participation does not necessarily increase the success in sport as found by Van Bottenburg (2002, p.63):

> “if we look at the entire range of sport-for-all, it appears that the correlation between the degree of sport participation and top sport success primarily depends on the intensity, competitiveness and the degree of organisation in sporting practice. If we adopt a very broad definition of sport, we find no significant correlation between participation in sport and elite sport success”.

China, USA and India all had more active players in 2006 than Uruguay had inhabitants (FIFA, 2006). However they are all ranked worse relative to Uruguay on the FIFA rankings. Population though can be an advantages if the right circumstances accrues in the country (Hoffmann et al. 2002, p.267). The combination of mass participation and the interest in football that exist in Uruguay is impressive and worth analyzing. Hoffmann et al. (2002, p.267) finds that;

> "Increasing population is of benefit to a nation's footballing success only to the extent that these additional youngsters engage in football rather than in competing activities".

Analyzing Uruguay's performance at the summer Olympic indicates that the success Uruguay has enjoyed in football has not reflected their performance in other sports. That is to say, no research on the popularity of different sports in Uruguay has been found, but the interest and participation in football might be so overwhelming that it overshadows their performance in other sports. Several studies have shown that GDP is a predictor of success at the Olympics (Bernard & Busse, 2004; Rathke & Woitek, 2007) as well as population to some extent. The rationale behind choosing the summer Olympics to show the relative interest in football compared to other sports in Uruguay, is due to the summer Olympics having competition in almost all recognized sports (Uruguay has never medaled at the winter Olympic games therefore it was excluded). An analysis of the medals won at the Olympics starting Barcelona 1992 to Rio de Janeiro was done, due to 1992 being the year professional athletes were allowed to compete (Guttmann, 2002, p.178). Uruguay's latest medal before the 1992 games was in Tokyo 1964. Also, the top 25 teams of the FIFA rankings as of April 1st, 2017 will be included in order to contrast between the best football nations at the moment of study.

FIFA rank top 25 vs Olympic Medals (1992-2016)				
FIFA rank (1st April 2017)	Country	Total medals (Color = under 10 medals)	Population 2015 (Color = under 6 million)	GDP 2015 in millions (Color = under 100,000.00)
1	Argentina	28	43,416,750	583,168.57
2	Brazil	93	207,847,530	1,774,724.82
3	Germany	379	81,413,150	3,363,446.82
4	Chile	5	17,948,140	240,796.39
5	Belgium	28	11,285,720	455,085.73
6	France	101	66,808,380	2,418,835.53
7	Colombia	22	48,228,700	292,080.16
8	Portugal	11	10,348,650	198,923.26
9	Uruguay	1	3,431,550	53,442.70
10	Spain	123	46,418,270	1,199,057.34
11	Switzerland	40	8,286,980	670,789.93
12	Wales* - UK	272	65,138,230	2,858,003.09
12	Poland	93	37,999,490	477,066.45
14	England* - UK	272	65,138,230	2,858,003.09
15	Italy	203	60,802,080	1,821,496.96
16	Croatia	33	4,224,400	48,732.00
17	Mexico	27	127,017,220	1,143,793.18
18	Peru	1	31,376,670	189,111.14
19	Costa Rica	3	4,807,850	54,136.83
20	Egypt	11	91,508,080	330,778.55
21	Netherlands	136	16,936,520	750,283.91
22	Ecuador	2	16,144,360	100,176.81
23	Iceland	2	330,820	16,598.49
24	Ireland	18	4,640,700	283,703.22
25	Slovakia**	28	5,424,050	87,263.62
* England and Wales compete as Great Britain at the Olympic however both nations have athletes which won a medal at the last games in Rio de Janeiro where Wales had 9 winning athletes and England had 103 (counted by athletes and not by discipline) (BBC Sport, 2016) **Did not participate as Slovakia in 1992				

Figure 15. FIFA's top 25 ranked teams April 1st 2017 and their Olympic success from 1992 to 2016. Own illustration.

The results show that Uruguay under performs at the Olympic relative to other small countries and GDP indications as seen above. This is of note due to Uruguay's major results in football in the same period as mentioned previously. It is clear that Uruguay performs better in football relative to other sports, this is particularly interesting since football is the most popular sport in the world which theoretically increases competitiveness (FIFA, 2010). Uruguay's performance at the Copa Americas during the same time frame of Olympic analysis;

- 1995 Copa America – Winner
- 1997 Copa America – Group Stage
- 1999 Copa America – Runners-up
- 2001 Copa America – Fourth Place
- 2004 Copa America – Third Place
- 2007 Copa America – Fourth Place
- 2010 World Cup – Fourth Place
- 2011 Copa America – Winner

This again suggests that Uruguay has an enormous cultural affinity and passion for football, which has been found important by both Hoffmann et al. (2002) and Holt (2002) which eventually leads to the development of footballers in Uruguay.

The football 'education' that Uruguayan football players get from a youth age under Baby Football and up until they play their first senior match are mostly the same. It is here that mass participation is combined with talent development. As explained in the case every football player the last couple of decades has been playing Baby Football. Of particular note, every coach in Uruguay was required to fulfill the same standards set by the AUF. Depending upon the age group, all coaches needed to have a minimum one year course at the AUF which helps in every player getting the same minimum level of quality training according to their age group. This could arguably be a reason for some of Uruguay's success. As found in literature, Feltz et al. (1999) conclude that coaches with better educations and or experience improve athlete performance, but also athlete satisfaction, which may give an indication for Uruguayan success. Furthermore the high number of young footballers suggest a system that motivates youth to play the sport, where coaches can then use their education and guidance to produce more satisfied and motivated players as mentioned by Feltz et al. (1999) and Malete & Feltz (2000).

The Uruguayan youth system follows the talent development model proposed by Côté & Hay (2002). In Baby Football the goal is not to collect points and win games in search of promotion, but rather let every player participate and have fun without winning being the goal. This can be seen even in the last year of Baby Football when athletes are 13 years old and the focus on winning still is not stressed to any great degree. This suggests a high focus on deliberate play where youth participate due to enjoyment, which also helps keep youth motivated and around the game longer. These findings are in align to the sampling years in Côté & Hay's (2002) framework which ends when an athlete is around 12. Furthermore, these characteristics of Baby Football also align with the mastery climate proposed by Ames (1992). The focus on fun and non-competitive play, where athletes are encouraged to learn from an internal motivation are in accordance with the environment of a mastery climate.

From the ages of 14-18, winning and promotion are introduced, also lining up with Côté & Hay's (2002) suggested framework. According to the authors, footballers during these specializing years of 13-16 should be introduced to the concept of deliberate practice which puts a higher focus on the development of football related skills and not on having fun all the time. Furthermore the most talented players in this

age group will be selected to train with the best academies, which is similar to Cobley & Cooke's (2009) identification model introduced in the literature however in the case of Uruguay it comes at a later stage relative to other countries. However even at this stage the focus is still very much on player development and coaching, due to the collective relegation/promotion system in place mentioned previously within the youth system. Due to this collective system, every team in every age group should then theoretically receive the same amount of quality training. This is in contrast to the normative system where teams are judged individually on their performance, which may lead to clubs allocating the most resources to whatever team they see fit. The method of the Uruguayan system suggests that the relative age effect would be reduced since players will receive the same minimum level of training. After the age of 18 the best Uruguayan footballers enter the senior level which has a high focus on deliberate practice and professionalism. These traits are also in accordance with Côté & Hay's (2002) investment years.

Unlike other European and even South American countries, all of Uruguay's players began their senior careers playing in their own domestic league. Therefore when players reach a senior age group, they are able to play on a high level since the percentage of foreign players in the Primera Division is one of the lowest in the world. National teams like England are damaged by the number of foreign players in the Premier League due to their young talents missing the opportunity to play at high level (Maguire & Pearton, 2000; Binder & Findlay, 2011). England has the highest number of foreign players in their league compared to every other country in the world (UEFA, 2017), which hurts the development of English talent (Maguire & Pearton, 2000). This is due to the Bosman ruling (Maguire & Pearton, 2000; Binder & Findlay, 2011) which came into effect for European players in 1995 and non-European players in 1997. The Bosman rule allows players the freedom to move between European football clubs when they have registered their first match with a club inside Europe, as well as clubs not being required to pay a transfer fee when a player's contract has ended. Maguire & Pearton (2000) show in their research that less powerful leagues, such as the Scandinavian leagues, lose their most talented players to leagues of higher quality. The quality of a small nation's domestic league falls as its best players move abroad, however this results in young players being exposed to higher competition and further development. Without concluding that the Bosman rule has improved the quality of the modern Uruguayan national football, it does however give a good indication of why most players have started in Uruguay and were then sold to foreign clubs after playing their first senior matches in Uruguay. The Bosman ruling has exposed Uruguay to a senior level of a higher domestic football that is represented in the European leagues. Whether or not

the national team of Uruguay would improve following a raise in quality of their domestic league as Hypercube suggests (Hypercube, 2015, p.20) is not easy to say. The low number of foreign players gives an opportunity to young Uruguayan players to shine and further develop, an increase in the amount of foreigners in the league may hinder these competencies. The bad shape of the Uruguayan Primera Division may be benefiting player production.

Social Empowerment

The last thing found to be relevant in the case of Uruguay was the social empowerment that football offers. The chance of becoming rich or gaining social and economic improvement might cause players to play football and work extra hard in the hopes of improving their current situation. D. Stanley Eitzen (2012, p.141) points out that few of the kids playing sports in America reach a professional level and actually improve their financial situations. Even when presented with the overwhelming evidence on the odds of becoming professional, youth still persist and believe their individual circumstance are not what the statistics suggest. Many African-American youth only see sport as their only way out of poverty, crime and despair (Ibid). This may stem from the fewer opportunities presented to unprivileged youth and time spent on developing their athletic skills (Ibid). Although Eitzen's research was not based on footballers in Uruguay, it may indicate one of the factors that has made Uruguay a successful football nation. In an old book by Franklin Morales (1969) about football in Uruguay, Morales suggests the same patterns of young players and their families seeking football as a savior of their relatively poor social and economic status (Morales, 1969). As previously mentioned, Luis Suarez describes how the wealth from football made him able to move freely around the world. The fact that underprivileged youth may see sports as their only chance to change their social and financial status gets them to work even harder compared to kids from more affluently relative backgrounds. In the case of Uruguay's football success these factors bear relevance to their success.

Belgium

Population: 11,249,420

FIFA Rank: 5

Belgium – Case Study

The Kingdom of Belgium became independent in 1830. In 2015 Belgium had 11.2 million inhabitants, 58% of which were Flemish, 31% Walloon and the rest mixed or others (CIA, 2017b). Their GNI per capita is 45,770 USD with a total of 514 billion USD. Belgium is 30,528 km^2 with Brussels being the capital city. The three official languages are Dutch, French and German, but less than 1% speak German as their native tongue (CIA, 2017b). 75% of the people in the country are Roman Catholic (Ibid). The temperature in Brussels is between 1°C and 20°C depending on the time of the year.

Football Culture in Belgium

The Belgian Football Association (BFA from hereafter) was founded in 1895 by the French elite in the country (Kassimeris, 2009, p.1331). During its existence it has been affected and divided on numerous occasions by the two predominant cultural groups that exist in Belgium, Fleming and Walloon. French Belgians dominated the BFA for many years even after the BFA began to include Flemish translations of the association and their activities in 1913 (Ibid). The French speaking elite did many things to segregate the Flemish working class away, including the name change of the BFA to Union Royale Belge des Societes de Football Association using 'Royale' in the name to exclude the Flemish (Ibid). The Flemish response was to make their own association and league in 1930 which made the number of Flemish clubs explode with over 300 clubs in under 7 years. However this new league was not recognized by the BFA or FIFA and was dissolved shortly after World War II. In more recent times there is still a separation between the clubs with a Flemish and French background (Duke & Crolley, 1996, p.54). Most of the teams indicate which side they belong to by including 'Koninklijke' in their official name if the club has Flemish ties, like Club Brugge Koninklijke Voetbalvereniging or Koninklijke Racing Club Genk. The French clubs add 'Royal' to their official names, as in Royal Sporting Club Anderlecht or Royal Standard de Liège (Ibid, p.52). Today, Flemish players are the most represented group on the Belgium national team (Kassimeris, 2009, p.1333). The Belgium national team is today one of the only symbols that is accepted and supported by all communities in Belgium (Duke & Crolley, 1996). In 2006 a total of 7.87% of the whole Belgian population, or 816,583 players, were playing football. Of the active players, 745,269 were male. A total of 1869 clubs, or 17,960 teams was also counted. These numbers clearly shows the high interest for football that takes place in Belgium.

Belgian National Team

Belgium has a long footballing tradition, playing its first recognized FIFA match in 1904 against France. Belgium was also one of the first countries to join the early FIFA initiative. Home games are played at King Baudouin Stadium which has a capacity of 50,000. They share their nickname with the marquee English club Manchester United as both teams are called The Red Devils. Belgium was ranked as the fifth best team in the world in April 2017. However, the last ten years have been turbulent for the Belgians. In June 2007 they reached their all-time low, they were ranked as the 71st team in the world. Around eight years later in November 2015 Belgium was ranked as the best team in the world. Their average rank sits at an overall 31st since the beginning of FIFA's ranking system. Belgium are normally captained by one of the best defenders in the world Vincent Kompany from Manchester City, however due to an injury he was not able attend the 2016 Euro Cup. Eden Hazard from English powerhouse Chelsea captained Belgium during the 2016 Euro Cup. The current coach of Belgium, Roberto Martinez, decided to keep Eden Hazard as the captain after the Euro Cup even when Vincent Kompany was fit to play again (Holyman, 2016). These two are just few of the many football stars that Belgium has produced in the last decade. Amongst others are Romelu Lukaku, Kevin De Bruyne and Thibaut Courtois which is just the tip of the iceberg. Belgium's all-time top scorers are Bernard Voorhoof and Paul Van Himst, with Jan Ceulemans having played the most international games.

Belgium enjoyed moderate success in international competition up until the 1980s. During this time, their first 'golden generation' enjoyed success on an international stage. Euro Cup and World Cup Finals Belgium has participated in;

- 1930 World Cup – Group Stage
- 1934 World Cup – Group Stage
- 1938 World Cup – Group Stage
- 1954 World Cup – Group Stage
- 1970 World Cup – Group Stage
- 1972 Euro Cup – Third Place
- 1980 Euro Cup – Runners-up
- 1982 World Cup – Group Stage
- 1984 Euro Cup – Group Stage
- 1986 World Cup – Fourth Place
- 1990 World Cup – Round of 16
- 1994 World Cup – Round of 16
- 1998 World Cup – Group Stage
- 2000 Euro Cup – Group Stage

- 2002 World Cup – Round of 16
- 2014 World Cup – Quarterfinals
- 2016 Euro Cup – Quarterfinals

A quick glance of the performance history of Belgium at international competitions reveals some key details. As previously mentioned, they experienced their first 'golden generation' between the 1980s and early 1990s. Subsequent to this was disappointments at any competition they managed to qualify for excluding recent competitions. What is interesting however is what occurred after the disappointment of the 2002 FIFA World Cup. Belgium missed out on three Euro Cups and two World Cups in the following years. Their turnaround will be explained later in this case study. Current coach of Belgium Roberto Martinez took over after Marc Wilmots because of the disappointing result in the 2016 Euro Cup, losing in the quarterfinals to a surprising defeat by Wales (Duivels, 2016). Roberto Martinez himself has played football on a professional level with 425 senior games and coached several professional English football teams. He was sacked from Everton a few months before becoming the coach of the Belgian national team. Currently for the 2018 World Cup qualifications, Martinez and the Belgian national team have won four of their qualification games as well as having one draw, putting them in a favorable position to qualify for the next World Cup. In appendix 3 can a table of the Belgium national squad for the European Cup 2016 be found together with matches played before the age of 23.

An interesting thing when researching the Belgium national team is how it developed over time. Analyzing their team from their best World Cup performance in 1986, against their team which failed in the FIFA World Cup 2002, along with their latest team from the latest Euro Cup in 2016 brings forth interesting differences in the development of Belgian football. In 1986 Belgium only had two out of 22 players playing abroad, one in Germany and one in the Netherlands, the rest playing their club football in Belgium. Seven of their players played in RSC Anderlecht, four in Club Brugge KV, three in Standard Liège and the rest were spread out over other Belgian teams. Their team for the 2002 World Cup had 15 players playing in Belgium professionally; four players played in Club Brugge KV, no other Belgian club had more than two players on the national team at that time. Four of their players played in Germany, three of them on Schalke 04, two in France, one in the Netherlands and one in the English team Derby County who was relegated that year to the second best league. The squad in the 2016 Euro Cup was nothing alike the two teams previously in regards to player distribution. Only four players played in Belgium at the time of the

Euro Cup 2016, one in Canada, one in France, two in Italy, one in Russia, one in Turkey, two in Spain. The two in Spain played on two of the best teams in the world FC Barcelona and Atletico Madrid. The rest of their players played in England on a high level; Liverpool (3), Tottenham Hotspurs (3), Chealsea (2) and one in Manchester United, Manchester City and Everton. Another remarkable factor is the difference between the average age and average international caps of the 2002 World Cup team and the 2016 Euro Cup team. The average age of the 2002 team was 28.91 years old compared to 25.96 years for the 2016 team. A difference of 2.96 years. The average number of caps for the 2002 team was 23.87 compared to 32.17 for the 2016 team. A difference of 8.3 international games on average or 34.79%. From 2002 to 2016 more of the players on the Belgian national team had moved abroad to better leagues. In addition to the 2016 squad, it should also be of note that seven Belgian players were the product of one or two immigrant parents (Smith, 2014). The first public UEFA rankings of European domestic leagues were made in 2002-2003. The top five leagues have remained the same since the ranking's inception, implying that the world's top talent was distributed in these leagues. In 2002 Belgium had seven players in the top five leagues compared to 16 in 2016. Not only did Belgian players become several years younger on average, but have also played many more international games at a younger age. The total amount of Belgium players abroad in as of April 2017 was 239, where the majority was playing in The Netherlands or England.

Belgian Domestic Football

The best football league in Belgium, the Belgian First Division A also known as the Jupiler Pro League, has had two main restructurings during this decade. The first came in the 2009-2010 season. Here a playoff was introduced and the number of teams in the Jupiler Pro League was reduced from 18 to 16 along with other changes. The changes were made to increase CB, sporting quality, average attendances per match and financials amongst others (Hypercube, 2017). The new league structure was developed by stakeholders in Belgian football and the Dutch company Hypercube, who also helped Denmark restructure their league for the 2016-2017 season (Ibid). The first changes made to the league structure in Belgium had great success. They improved from 15th place on UEFA association club coefficient rank to a 9th place. Their TV revenues have increased by over 60% due to stronger teams playing more matches at a higher level due to teams being able to retain talent more effectively (Ibid). The most recent radical changes were made for the 2016-2017 season. For the beginning of the season, football in Belgium was divided into professional football and amateur football. 24 teams were to play on a professional level to secure better

foundation and more money for the best clubs in the country (Lesoir, 2016). From the 2016-2017 season, 16 teams were to play in the Jupiler Pro League, the same as before. However the second best league in Belgium, Belgian First Division B, also known as the Proximus League, was reduced from 17 teams to eight where the last nine teams from the 2015-2016 season were relegated. The Belgian league pyramid is as follows;

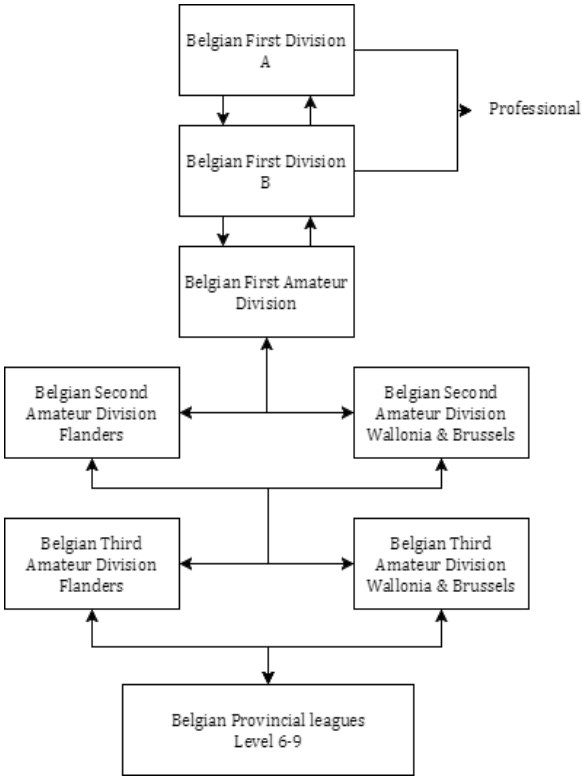

Figure 16. Belgian League System. Own illustration

Jupiler Pro League

The Jupiler Pro League begins with a regular season played from July to March. Every team plays against each other two times both home and away. The six best teams after 30 games qualify for the Jupiler Pro League Playoff I (Championship Playoff), while the rest of the teams are going to play in the Jupiler Pro League Playoff II (Europa League Playoff), except the team finishing in 16th place team as they are relegated before the playoff begins.

Jupiler Pro League Playoff I (Championship Playoff)

The six best teams take points with them according to their finish in the regular season. The best team takes 31 point with them, second takes 30, third takes 27 and the rest take 25. Each of the teams then play against one another again both home and away. The champions of the Jupiler Pro League are the ones with most points after the 10 matches in the playoff. The champions do not only win the Jupiler Pro League but also qualify to next year's group stage in the UEFA Champions League. The runner-up secures a Champions League berth but they enter the qualification round instead. The team ending third is going to enter the UEFA Europa League in the third qualification round the year after.

Jupiler Pro League Playoff II (Europa League Playoff)

The nine teams entering the Europa League Playoff are divided into two groups together with three teams from the Proximus League. The three teams from the Proximus League that are entering the Europa League Playoff are the losers of the promotion playoff in the Proximus League, while the promoted teams from the Proximus League do not compete for Europa League qualification but are merely promoted to the Jupiler Pro League.

The winner of the two groups in the Jupiler Pro League Playoff II play a semifinal. Only one game is played on the home field of that team in the semifinal that was the best ranked as the better team in the regular season. The winner of the semifinal plays a final against the fourth or fifth place from the Jupiler Pro League Playoff I depending on the Cup winner. The winner of the Europa League Playoff final qualifies for the third qualifying round in next year's UEFA Europa League. The distribution of Champions and Europa League spots in future seasons also depends on Belgium's UEFA association club coefficient. The explanation of their league systems is depended on them keeping their current spot on the UEFA association club coefficients ranking. Following table shows the championships of the best Belgian football league of the last 20 years;

Belgium				
1996–97	Lierse		2006–07	Anderlecht
1997–98	Club Brugge		2007–08	Standard Liège
1998–99	Genk		2008–09	Standard Liège
1999–2000	Anderlecht		2009–10	Anderlecht
2000–01	Anderlecht		2010–11	Genk
2001–02	Genk		2011–12	Anderlecht
2002–03	Club Brugge		2012–13	Anderlecht
2003–04	Anderlecht		2013–14	Anderlecht
2004–05	Club Brugge		2014–15	Gent
2005–06	Anderlecht		2015–16	Club Brugge
Number of championships:				
Anderlecht	9			
Club Brugge	4			
Genk	3			
Standard Liège	2			
Gent	1			
Lierse	1			

Figure 17. Belgian League Winners Last 20 Championships. Own illustration.

The league system of the Proximus League is even more complicated than the league system for the Jupiler Pro League. We find no reason for explaining the structure more than a few things. At the end of the season one team from the Proximus League is promoted to the Jupiler Pro League and one team from the Proximus League is relegated after a playoff round to the third best league in Belgium called Belgian First Amateur Division. Belgian First Amateur Division is as explained above an amateur league and teams relegated will therefore not receive the same benefits as the teams in the two best leagues (Lesoir, 2016).

Belgian Cup

The Belgian Cup Beker van Belgie is the last way to win a spot in Europa League. By winning the Belgian Cup that team secures a spot in next year's Euro League. The winner enters the group stage of Euro League. Teams from all nine levels of the Belgian League structure pyramid enter the Belgian Cup, which employs a 10 round system. The higher ranked teams enter the tournament in later rounds. A team from the lowest league in Belgium enters in round one and has to win 10 rounds to win the Cup. Teams from Jupiler Pro League enter in round six and have to win five rounds to win the Cup.

Belgian Clubs

RSC Anderlecht are the most winning team in the history of Belgian domestic football. They have been champions 33 times out of a possible 113 times. Four teams in total have won more than 10 championships. 16 teams in total have won the best league in Belgium and a total of five different teams have won a championship since 2009. None of the teams in the Jupiler Pro League 2017 are placed in the same city.

On an international club level in the Champions League and Euro Leagues Belgium's success lay quite a while back. RSC Anderlecht won the Euro League in 1983 and ended as runner-ups the following year. During the last 10 years the most success a Belgian team has seen in Euro League action was the quarterfinals, once in 2009-2010 and 2014-2015, and twice in 2016-2017. A Belgian team has never won the Champions League, however Club Brugge finished as runner-ups in 1978. Only one Belgian team has reached the Round of 16 in the last 10 years which was in the 2015-2016 season.

UEFA (2017) conducted a football landscape report and found that players in the Jupiler Pro League in 2015 had a below average age relative to other domestic leagues around the world, with an average age around 24.5 years old. However most of the players in Jupiler Pro League are foreigners. Around 55% have another nationality other than Belgian which makes the Jupiler Pro League the league with the third most foreigners in the world, only Cyprus and England have more foreign players than Belgium.

Belgian Restructuring

As previously mentioned, the disappointing performances in the late 1990s and early 2000s really hit home hard in the country of Belgium. Fans were utterly disappointed in their national team and something needed to be changed in the way the BFA operated (Mcgowan, 2013). Enter Michel Sablon, a former average Belgian player who played for Brussells based club Merchtem in the 1970s. Sablon had been active in the BFA since the 1986 FIFA World Cup in Mexico as an assistant, which saw Belgium exit in the round of 16. He had first hand experienced the trials and tribulations of the squad. In 1998, Belgium saw themselves exit the FIFA World Cup tournament in the group stage. This early exit was enough for Sablon to start asking questions (Ibid). By 2001, Sablon had been appointed as Belgium's technical director,

overseeing youth development and strategy. This in turn ended up being the first step toward a complete overhaul of the BFA and the way the association organized itself as well as its relations to the club system. Sablon's first step in changing the course of the development of players came in regards to creating a unified vision for the entire country (Ibid). Prior to 2001, each club academy deployed their own development strategies and tactics, as well as their own playing formation. This in turn created a lot of disparity and lack of cohesion when players came together to compete in the national squad. In a Guardian article, Bob Browaeys, a Belgian youth coach and close confident to Sablon was quoted as saying "there was no unified vision on youth" (James, 2014). In particular, one of the main differences in the way youth academies ran their programs had to do with the playing formation they employed. Different playing formations encouraged different aspects of the game and exemplified certain skills more than others (Ibid). Sablon then took to the field and started analyzing how different neighboring countries and academies fared in youth development. Sablon took trips to The Netherlands, France and Germany. He visited the youth academies of Ajax and Barcelona and soaked up all he could. For Sablon, one of the first major discoveries he came to was the playing formation France, The Netherlands and Germany used in many of their youth programs both at the club and national level, which was the 4-3-3 (Mcgowan, 2013). The 4-3-3 was seen as the best formation available that aided individual development but also encouraged effective team play (James, 2014). Bob Browaeys comments on the shift to the 4-3-3 system:

> "It was a massive shift but we believed that 4-3-3, at that moment, was the strongest learning environment for our players," [Browaeys adds] "We felt that we had to develop dribbling skills, we said at the heart of our vision was 1v1, the duel. We said when a boy or girl wants to start playing football, you must offer first the dribble, let them play freely" (James, 2014).

This unified vision, or 'blueprint' as it is now being called was one of the main determinants of the resurgence of Belgium football (Mcgowan, 2013). For Sablon however, he is now faced with the new challenge of heading the Singaporean Football Association and will be attempting to change the direction of the squad using many of the same tactics.

The Belgian Blueprint

One of the first initiatives Sablon undertook was creating change at the youngest ages possible for every club on the BFA. From his observations in Belgium, he saw that youth coaches prioritized winning and not development (Ibid). This perspective was the first change Sablon implemented. Sablon's view on prioritizing fun and not winning at youth ages was apparent during his talks to the different clubs (Ibid). Sablon would go as far as demanding youth trophy plaques and results removed of walls before giving his presentations (James, 2014). Youth teams and academies were required to put winning aside and make sure that having fun and enjoyment of the game came first (Mcgowan, 2013) These traits are integrated very early on beginning with youth at six years of age. What is even more important in the changes made into the youth playing systems were the amount of players competing in games. Sablon required that players aged eight to nine years old play games in 5vs.5 formats. Players aged nine, 10 and 11 were to play in 8vs.8 games (Browaeys, 2012). Finally when players reached the age of 12 would they start playing full 11vs.11 games with full rules. Also, in addition to the number of players on the pitch, came other rules and adaptations that would aid in the development of the players (Ibid). It should be of note, that more recently, the BFA has introduced an initiative that will see a new U6 division. This division will play exclusively 2vs.2 in attempt to even further exemplify the ball control strategies mentioned. The BFA outlined these initiatives into five to seven year olds as being in the 'exploration' stage, which meant getting use to the ball and accustomed to contact time. Seven to 17 year olds were seen as a collective group each with more pronounced focus on different aspects. 'Individual development' was the key goal of the BFA at this stage (Browaeys, 2010). Younger players of this age group would focus on basic skills and tactics, while older players would focus on using this skills in a more team environment. Lastly, players from 17 years and upwards were seen as the 'integration' group. This phase focused mainly on integrating players into full adult football and the professionalism required for it. It is at this stage that winning was heavily taken into consideration.

These rules changes and adaptations in Sablons eyes heavily facilitated talent development (James, 2014). By taking advantage of using less players on the pitch, players now had more contact time with the ball (Ibid). This allowed them to hone their technical skills to a much greater degree and become more comfortable within different aspects of the game. When Sablon first undertook the process of changing the way football was played at a youth level in Belgium, he put to work a team of university researchers to go

out and investigate how football was played at a youth level (Ibid). The research team analyzed over 1500 matched for Sablon and found that contact times for youth was highly lacking in a lot of cases. Sablon explains the process and his reasoning behind using the research team:

> "That's why we started with scientific analysis. If we showed the clubs the figures of young boys and girls playing at under-eight and under-nine, and they touched the ball twice in half an hour, no one can say that it's good. We had the proof. We had the figures. And this was people who were known in football. The guy who made the analysis, Werner Helsen, was a player and a coach in the second division, so he's a professor in university but also a real football man" (Ibid).

On top of creating an environment for youth that catered to more ball contact time, the new approach was also more fun for children (Browaeys, 2010). Kids were now more exposed to the game and the impact each child had on the outcome was more pronounced due to the smaller amount of players on the pitch. Players continually hone their individually skills while gradually making their way up to environments that closer resemble real adult play. Furthermore, these changes all facilitated and were in accordance with the BFA's new requested format of employing a 4-3-3 playing formation. Lastly, in order to best facilitate youth and have them exposed to the best possible training methods, Sablon needed to make sure that coaches and educators would held up to specific standards as well. To ensure this, Sablon set up free coaching clinics at certain times of the year for prospective coaches. These clinics would outline Sablon's plan as well as give other important tools to aid player development (James, 2014). Not every youth team has an experienced former player acting as coach. These clinics ensured young players were getting quality coaching and attention all on a unified basis.

These changes and requests of the BFA did not come lightly. In the beginning most clubs were not quite proactive in implementing these changes within their youth academies (Mcgowan, 2013). Even within the association and the national team, Sablon and his colleagues were subject to scrutiny as results were not at first coming using the new tactics outlined. Clubs did not see the value in using these changes and few switched over. Where Sablon had a bit of luck however was in the timing of his new acquaintance to being director of the technical committee. In 2000, Belgium had co-hosted the Euro Cup with The Netherlands. Using some of the funds profited from hosting the tournament, and in addition with help from the government, Belgium opened up eight elite football school academies by 2002 called 'Topsport' (James,

2014). These academies allowed players to receive even additional training on top of their regular club practices. Players who were between the ages of 14 and 18 were in consideration to be admitted into the program. If a player was a part of one of the national youth team programs, he or she would gain automatic admittance into the school. Students who were not would undergo a selection criteria through their club or provincial level. The BFA wanted all players, regardless of their stage in high school to be able to attend the school if they were to pass the selection criteria (Ibid). Most importantly, players could finish their full high school diploma at the school. Depending on the school, players would attend morning practices before school 3-4 times per week. Also, due to the small size of Belgium, players were able to live at home and attend the schools for free. This unique aspect allowed them to attend practices in the morning at their schools, while also being able to participate in club activities in the evening four to five times per week (Ibid). The exposure to football effectively doubled for a lot of youth and the results were staggering. Seven players off the most recent FIFA World Cup squad were a product of the football school academies (Ibid). Furthermore, the school academies now allowed the associations to implement their own training techniques and talent development strategies. Overall, the BFA was able to put players through an annual amount of 250 hours of training (Ibid). More importantly, this training was given under their principles. As of 2013 the Topsport schools had a total of 337 students, 243 in Flanders and 97in Walloon (Browaeys, 2012). It was not long before improvements were made and clubs started to take notice that the federation's approach to developing talent was effective. Slowly but surely more clubs started using the federation's approach on youth and this in turn bred Belgium's current generation of footballers. Sablon made some comments about the introduction period into the new development system in 2013:

> "We had a whole group of people around a table in the technical department and we decided to make a plan for three target groups...First of all was the clubs, secondly the national team and third the coaches of the schools...So we adopted the same vision for all three groups...It took more than five or six years before everyone could bring themselves to accept it. Because for most of the coaches and the clubs, all they cared about was winning the game. Nothing else. But that was absolutely wrong for the development of all the players. Totally wrong... In the beginning it was terrible. But eventually they began to see it. They went with us because they saw that what we told them worked. It made players better" (Mcgowan, 2013).

For the clubs, their first major sign of the results of the BFA's initiatives came when the Belgium U17 squad, which featured today's stars Eden Hazard and Christian Benteke, finished in the top four at the European Championship, a first in the history of Belgian football. A year later, a squad featuring Marouane Fellaini and Vincent Kompany had a surprisingly good Olympic campaign. For clubs around Belgium, this was the final straw. After this impressive performance every club was on board and saw the power of the BFA's plan and developing players under a unified vision (Ibid). Sablon's turnaround of the crisis in Belgian football has been well documented and heard of in the football community. Sablon admits that he may have had a bit of luck in the timing of so many great talents of Belgium's new golden generation and the fact that they are all quite young; "It's excellent...But when those guys come together in one group, I think it's a little bit lucky also" (James, 2014). Sablon may think that the timing of each of the players was lucky, but regardless he stands confident that the changes made to player development were the cause of it all: "But I have no doubt. What we did with our development system made them better. It made them the players they are now" (James, 2014).

Belgium - Analysis

Analyzing Belgium according to the footballing criteria set by Hoffmann et al. (2002) does not produce any similarities in what the research suggests. The authors describe general characteristics of good footballing countries that include climate, religion, language, culture and GNI. Belgium is in alignment with the author's characteristics on the grounds of culture and religion, however their GNI is twice the size of the suggested ideal figure. Also, Hoffmann et al. (2002, p.261) observed that nations who host major tournaments have better performance on the international stage following the event which also holds true for Belgium after they co-hosted the 2000 Euro Cup.

Restructuring of Belgian League System

As mentioned in the Belgium case, the BFA worked closely with the Dutch consulting company Hypercube to restructure their football league system with the purpose of increasing CB. The Jupiler Pro League has had six different champions over the last 20 years with RSC Anderlecht as the winner nine times. It is possible to compare the number of different champions after the restructuring of the Jupiler Pro League and the number of different champions during the same time length before the restructuring. However this small sample size does not describe CB to any great accuracy. Other indications will then be used to see how CB has changed. As found in the literature a decreasing of the CB will attract fewer spectators and revenue will fall (Quirk & Fort, 1992). In other words if league revenue and attendance numbers are increased after a restructuring it is likely due to a CB improvement. Furthermore, an increase in CB will also indirectly improve talent development due to more money earned by clubs which can be reinvested (Hypercube, 2015, p.20). This restructure however has not been found to affect the current national team. This is due to the fact that most of the players on the Belgian national team for the 2016 Euro Cup had already started their senior career before the time of the restructuring. However a potential increase in revenue after the restructuring can be seen to affect the upcoming talents developed in Belgium in some way or another. To measure a potential increase in the CB of the Belgian league, other external factors can be investigated that give credence to the state of the league. Factors such as the UEFA association club coefficient rank, league attendance level and total league revenue. Belgium has advanced from 15th place during the 2009-2010 season on UEFA's association club coefficient rank to 9th place as of April 1st 2017. According to findings in literature an increase in CB should increase league revenue and thereby attract

better players due to players often choosing the most lucrative contract available. If everything else stays equal and the Jupiler Pro League teams continue to attract better players, the league should keep seeing improvements year to year. If CB has increased in regards to revenue, league attendance levels are speculated to also improve, which can be seen in Belgium. The average attendance for the Jupiler Pro League in the last season before the restructuring was 11,039, with the 2015-2016 season having an average of 11,905 or an improvement of 7.8% (EFS, 2017).

Year	Average Attendance	Year	Average Attendance
2016	11905	2001	9757
2015	11873	2000	9721
2014	11836	1999	7808
2013	11153	1998	7912
2012	11726	1997	7927
2011	11574	1996	7294
2010 (New Structure)	11743	1995	7611
2009	11039	1994	7558
2008	11369	1993	7509
2007	10533	1992	7542
2006	10293	1991	7570
2005	9715	1990	8003
2004	9861	1989	8039
2003	10105	1988	8663
2002	9176	1987	7323
2001	9757	1986	7973
2000	9721	1985	7426

Figure 18. Average Attendances of the Jupiler Pro League since 1985 (EFS, 2017). Own illustration.

The improvement of league attendance in Belgium is clear and steady, especially when taking into consideration attendance figures from the last 30 years. The average attendance between the 2010-2016 seasons is 11,687 spectators per game, while the attendance before the restructuring (2003-2009) sat at an average of 10,416 per game, an overall improvement of 12.1%. Even more remarkable is the increase in overall league revenue after the restructuring for the 2009-2010 season. The revenue of the clubs increased by an average of 49.9% from the financial year of 2009 to the financial year of 2015 (UEFA, 2017, p.67). UEFA explains that the Jupiler Pro League has been doing relatively good compared to other small countries;

> "Growth has been more patchy lower down the rankings, where clubs from countries with smaller populations have not benefitted from similar levels of TV growth. Belgian, Kazakh and Swiss clubs have enjoyed the most relative success in increasing their revenues but the average revenue in

> Austria, Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Scotland has either decreased or increased only marginally" (Ibid, p.67).

The recent success of the Belgian national team and their rise on the FIFA rankings started around the same time as the restructure of 2009-2010. As explained earlier, the national team players currently on the squad have not been affected by the increased revenue in relation to talent development due to them not experiencing any of these changes. The improvements of the Belgian domestic league can be speculated to help the next generation of talent.

Senior Matches

Coincidentally enough, and as Hoffman et al. (2002) eluded to in regards to performance subsequent to hosting a major tournament, Belgium's turn around in football came right after their disappointing performance where they hosted the 2000 Euro Cup. When observing the makeup of Belgium's current national squad and golden generation, the amount of games played before the age of 23 is of importance as found in the literature. The Jupiler Pro League comes in at ninth overall in Europe but closely trails other very respectable domestic leagues ahead of it. The youngsters exposed to these early games receive a high level of capital experience. As mentioned most Belgian players currently representing the national squad did not get their senior career start in the Jupiler Pro League. Several were transferred early in their youth careers to academies abroad and played their first senior games outside of Belgium. Furthermore, another interesting aspect of Belgium's player production comes into relation of their domestic league. Belgium has the third highest amount of import players active in their league. The Belgian domestic league is currently made up of approximately 55% foreign born players, closely trailing only Cyprus and England. The phenomena of having a high percentage of foreign players has not boded well for English player development (Maguire & Pearton, 2000). This influx of foreign players creates problems for fielding youth, and English youth have consequently been unable to receive an adequate amount of playing time (Ibid). Belgium however seems to combat this problem since many of its promising youth decide to attend academies abroad, and using the quality of its league as more of a stepping stone for Belgium youth who stay to play in the domestic league. Nonetheless, Poli et al. (2015) stress the importance of leagues other than the big 5 in developing talent. Therefore the quality of the Jupiler Pro League goes a long way in developing the youth who do not go abroad to academies from a young age. Belgian players who are able to compete at this level are well prepared to make the jump to a big five league:

“This analysis illustrates the crucial role of leagues outside the big-5 in the development of players’ careers. This holds true also for the most talented footballers” (Ibid). Furthermore, the authors go over the implications this should have for clubs who cannot give their youngsters a big playing opportunity:

> ”This finding suggests that the optimisation of the environment within which to promote talents goes hand in hand with partnerships and strategic alliances between teams of different levels (...) the wealthiest teams would do better to cooperate in a healthy and united manner with those of lesser means. This would permit the more regular fielding of talents since the very beginning of their adult career, which would give them the opportunity to fully develop their skills” (Ibid).

When analyzing the amount of games played at the U23 level for players of the national squad for the Euro Cup 2016, the numbers are quite high (see appendix 3).

On average, a player on the Belgian national team in the 2016 Euro squad had played an average of 164 games before their 23rd birthday, not including players under the age of 23. Poli, et al., (2015) found that, footballers in the ‘big five’ leagues, had on average played a total of 114 matches prior to their 23rd birthday. This puts the Belgian national team average of 164 games played, 43.8% higher than the average of players in Europe’s top leagues. As the authors explain, not every player plays the same amount of games when it comes to their position. Forwards and midfielders are typically fielded earlier in their careers and accumulate more experience, while defensive players play fewer games in comparison. Goalkeepers on the other hand enjoy the least amount of experience as they are typically fielded much later in their careers. On average, forwards play in a total of 130 games prior to their 23rd birthday. Belgium’s forwards come in at a staggering average of 198 games played before their 23rd birthday, not including Divock Origi. Midfielders are fielded for an average of 125 games prior to their 23rd birthday. The Belgian midfielder's register an average of 176 games played, considerably higher than the norm. Defensive players are fielded for an average of 106 games prior to their 23rd birthday. The Belgian team defenders played on average 121 games before their 23rd birthday. This figure also excludes Jason Denayer and Jordan Lukaku who have not yet turned 23. Lastly, Goalkeepers rank quite lowly in comparison to the other positions fielded, typically playing an average of 73 games. However Belgium ranks quite favorably

here when compared to the average as their three goalkeepers make up an average of approximately 152 games played, more than double than that of an average keeper in a big five league.

Focus on Fun and the Individual

The restructure of the Belgian youth system and their approach to development starts very early even at the youngest of age divisions. Promising youth are selected for elite teams in a manner that corresponds to Cobley and Cooke's (2009) identification model. The best youth are taken out of a normative population, where some youth may miss out on important coaching. This early identification process does not seemed to have harmed Belgium's current success. Therefore it is imperative to understand the way in which youth approach learning and development. After the restructure of the development strategies within the BFA, a key focus Sablon undertook was making the game 'fun' for children. The BFA wanted to take away the focus on winning and being competitive, and accentuate the individual and their own experience of the game. This initiative fits quite well with Côté & Hay's (2002) research on the development stages and in particular the 'sampling years' early on in a player's career. Côté & Hay (2002) comment that it is critical in this early stage from seven to 12 years old that players enjoy themselves and have fun. Competition is not stressed and players are not expected to perform in search of results. The BFA's guidelines to ensure each player received the same uplifting experience of football included the following guidelines (Browaeys, 2012);

- During practice sessions and games, each player is playing the game and engaged the whole time, as opposed to sitting out or watching from the sidelines
- Due to the smaller amount of players, each player will touch the ball frequently and become comfortable with ball dribbling
- Again, due to the smaller amount of players, each player will get more scoring opportunities and experience scoring goals
- Each player is not restricted to a position and can choose to play the style of play they prefer
- Coaches are encouraging and not focused on winning games
- Parents are supportive and realize that the children are not in professional ranks and are only there to have fun.

Furthermore, these factors outlined are all in accordance with the concept of deliberate play vs. deliberate practice. Deliberate play is defined as a sense of enjoyment that is internalized and integrated into the child. The child participates purely out of the enjoyment involved and this has been speculated to even create opportunities for learning specific skills. This is contrasted with deliberate practice where players are expected to exert cognitive or physical effort purely for the sole purpose of improving, and not for any immediate personal gains.

The latter characteristics and environment instilled by the BFA can be characterized as a 'mastery climate' (Ames, 1992). A mastery environment does well to tailor to the needs of the BFA. The association wanted to take focus off of winning and competing (performance involving climate), and shift the attention back to having fun and individual development of players (mastery climate). By honing in on player enjoyment and the development of the individual, the BFA has effectively created an environment that produces players more ready to compete when they reach a higher level. Furthermore, as the research from Ntoumanis & Biddle (1999) and Parish & Treasure (2003) has shown, a mastery climate tends to produce more active players in the future. For the BFA, this means more registered players playing the game later on in life. The effects of this reach beyond the higher pool of talent this may produce. By adopting the aforementioned strategies, the BFA can hope to produce more engaged, invested and competent youth in terms of football. This will create more players in the Belgian community and increase levels of competition for youth. Having said that, the use of a mastery climate cannot be directly attributed to creating better football players. It can be speculated while analyzing the positives that it will in turn produce more talent, however a direct cause and effect relationship is yet to be determined or investigated.

Small Sided Games Means More Development

From the data compiled on the restructure of the Belgian talent development program, a key factor found and stressed throughout was the implementation of small sided games, particularly in youth age divisions. This change was seen as a key component of the overhaul that Sablon implemented, as he himself stressed its importance. Players in the U12 categories were required to play games in smaller groups in order to stress individual development and more ball contact time. The current literature available on the development of young athletes did not shed much light onto the phenomena of using small sided games therefore it was not expected to be a major factor. However due to the importance placed on it by Sablon,

an investigation into other literature would help to illuminate the topic. A concept known as 'skilled perception' in sports has been found to be critical pertaining to sport expertise (Abernethy et al., 1993; Starkes & Allard, 1993; Williams et al., 1999). Put simply, athletes of many different sports are constantly put into positions where they are to evaluate options available based on the situation that is presented to them. This concept holds very true for football. Players are repeatedly put into situations of high stress where time and space are limiting the amount of decisions possible, and a reliance on anticipating future events is key. Williams (2000) speculates that it is this ability that separates skilled from less skilled players in the game of football. Williams (2000) discusses 'skilled perception' as an underlying trait in football that is a need for any player. When comparing the concept of skilled perception with Sablon's implementation of games with fewer players played, the effectiveness of the method may be in question since the game is perceived differently with fewer players playing. However, in a lot of instances, football can be broken down into odd-man situations where players are put into 2vs.3, 3vs.2, 3vs.4 or 4vs.3 situations etc. Full 11vs.11 play does not give each player enough ball contact time and exposure in order to be tasked with these challenging situations and decisions. Therefore with fewer players on the pitch, players are put into positions much more frequently that they might experience in full 11vs.11 games. Chase & Simon (1973) conclude that the difference in skilled versus unskilled players is their ability to recognize and recall structured patterns and formations due to a knowledge level that allows them to group perceptual information into larger and more meaningful units. Williams (2000) takes this concept a step further and applies it to football:

> "This ability to chunk items (e.g. players' positions) into larger and more meaningful units (e.g. patterns of play) enables them to recognize the emergent features of a pattern of play early in its initiation, thereby facilitating anticipation" (Williams, 2000).

A recall test performed by Williams & Davids (1995) found that experienced football players, when compared to inexperienced players, were more effective at recalling player positions in an action-sequenced video test. It was concluded that the better recall of the experienced players was due to task-specific knowledge along with more rapid and effective retrieval of the action-sequences from their memory. Furthermore, Ericsson & Staszewski (1989) noted that experienced players process football specific information to a more deeper and conceptual level, as well as recognizing defensive and offensive patterns earlier resulting in better anticipation of plays. Therefore, if the game is broken down and

segmented for young players into situations that they might see in future 11vs.11 games, it would enhance their ability to develop skills. By increasing ball contact time, young players are effectively exposed to many more situations that each exhibit a certain pattern and style of play. High exposure to these types of situation will as Williams (2000) explains, lead to more effective pattern recognition and players will be able to anticipate and react accordingly. By the time a youth player has reached the age of 13 where they are introduced to full regulation 11vs.11 games, they will have already been exposed to a high amount of situations each with their own segmented version of what an 11vs.11 game might entail. The problem then with youth in U13 and below age categories playing in full 11vs.11 games at a young age is that they are not nearly exposed to enough ball contact time and situations that will later on down the road aid in pattern recognition recall.

Immigration and Multiculturalism

Lastly, the consensus around Belgium over their emergence into international dominance has also been attributed to waves of immigration into the country (Smith, 2014; James, 2014). Of the 23 players assembled for the Euro Cup 2016, seven had foreign roots outside of Belgium. This international flavor has been speculated to have sparked a rise in Belgian football dominance (Ibid). D. Stanley Eitzen (2012) comments on the phenomena of economically oppressed and racialized youth and their outlook on sports as a path out of poverty. Eitzen (2012) goes on to explain that many African-American youth in the United States see becoming a professional athlete as a legitimate avenue out of their economic situation. Furthermore, and more alarming, is the fact that many persist with these beliefs even when presented with the overwhelming statistics that show their odds are extremely low. The phenomena is also found quite prevalent in Africa. Youth pursuing careers in football, through media and other channels, are often only shown successful stories of national heroes achieving greatness in Europe playing for big football clubs (Poli, 2006). This can be the case also for youth in Belgium's impoverished areas, specifically in the town of Liege. James (2014) comments on the situation in Liege's slum-like area of Droixhe. As he explains, it is an area high in crime and heavily lacking in infrastructure. However the area is rich with footballers. Benteke, Witsel and Bakkali, who all hail from the area have been featured on the national squad as regular performers (Ibid). They serve as inspirational figures for the youth in the area and give a sense of identity to them, letting them feel connected to the Belgian national team. Kismet Eris, a former youth worker in the area commented on the matter:

> “It’s not easy for the kids here... They don’t have the same chances as the other ones, and that’s why they’re so proud of the national team, because now they are also accepted as Belgian people, because they see some of their own playing for the national team. A few years ago it was not like that. Now it is more open. With the national youth teams, you can see that you’ve got a lot of children of immigrants, or former refugees, representing Belgium. It’s also the country – the country is people like Christian, [Marouane] Fellaini, Axel Witsel, [Jan] Vertonghen, who is Flemish, Courtois, a Walloon. That’s the typical image of Belgium” (James, 2014).

The immigrant and impoverished youth in Belgium now have an identity and an avenue to pursue ambitions. Although as previously mentioned, the majority will not meet these goals as very few make it to the professional ranks. Nonetheless, this influx of players with a more passionate identity can only be seen as an upside to the BFA. Furthermore, the active participation in football can also be speculated to help youth through education and their development as individuals. Jean Kindermans, a coach and youth educator that works for the Belgian team RSC Anderlecht comments on the reality of youth pursuing football as a career and his responsibilities as a coach;

> ”In Anderlecht, every day 220 young guys, from under-six to under-21, are dreaming about a future professional career. Explain to me how many from the 220 are going to reach professional level? Maximum 10%. (...) if you stay in Anderlecht as long as possible, you will have a degree at school that will give you the opportunity to find a job, to be a human being with intellectual skills” (James, 2014).

If combined with ethical coaching and morality, the BFA can effectively keep using their diverse ethnic make up to their advantage. The ethnic youth in Belgium identify heavily with the national team and pursue football quite passionately. Youth can therefore use football as a ’magic carpet’ to get an education and eventually improve their economic well being.

Cross Case Analysis

After analyzing the cases of Croatia, Uruguay and Belgium, several interesting factors stood out in each of the cases in regards to the success that each nation currently enjoys. Each country had similarities amongst one another, some applying to all three cases while some were only prevalent amongst two. The factors that were present amongst more than one country were of interest for future research and further analysis, therefore primary data on the similarities was collected through three expert interviews. For the purpose of cross analyzing the data found, De Bosscher et al.'s (2007) macro and meso-level framework will be the driving force on how the data is analyzed. The framework will help to provide a basis to compare and contrast similarities amongst the three cases. Furthermore the interviews are done with experts in the domain of football. Their insights come through their knowledge and experience of football firsthand. Due to this, the experts often refer to their own experiences which they have gained both in Uruguay, Canada, USA and Denmark, as they often makes comparisons to these countries and draw insights from their own observations. However our findings are mostly discussed as concepts and open ended questions, so that the expert may come to a conclusion that applies to any footballing nation in general.

Macro-Level Factors

All three case countries have their own socioeconomic problems and competencies of different variations. Each case was analyzed in relation to Hoffmann et al.'s (2002) findings on the perfect socioeconomic conditions for football nations. Croatia and Uruguay were found to be in accordance with most of the traits mentioned by Hoffmann et al. (2002), suggesting that their current performance may be positively affected by the country's macro-level factors. Belgium on the other hand was not in alignment with Hoffmann et al.'s (2002) findings besides the traits of religion and host country effects. Most notable about Belgium, was the fact they had almost twice as high of a GNI as the optimal conditions suggested. According to the authors, a higher relative GNI gives youth more alternatives in their leisure time, thereby potentially eliminating talented football players. However a benefit from a country with a high GNI, may be that parents will have more disposable income for youth to participate, if the football system in place requires fees. Christian Nielsen (Interview 3), a former elite player in the Danish youth system, now coaches youth at a high level in the 13-14 year old age category. Due to Denmark's pay to play system,

when asked into economic makeup of the players on his team, he found that most came from seemingly affluent backgrounds. He commented that these children sometimes have a spoiled attitude and are often egocentric because of their background:

> "Yeah I guess they can seem a bit spoiled and they just think that everything should revolve around them. (...). They just feel some kind of entitlement to them being preferred instead of others" (Nielsen, 2017, 19:29-19:48).

This comes into accordance with findings in the Uruguayan case, where former Ajax coach Dennis Bergkamp commented that the youth system in Europe place a heavy focus on rules and that youth are spoiled compared to footballers in Uruguay. Nielsen also told us that even though some parents may not have problems paying for football fees, other children in the poorer parts of Denmark most likely have that problem when asked about the issue:

> "I guess that you can find poor neighborhoods especially in Copenhagen, not only Copenhagen but also just like the poor parts of Denmark where parents may not have that much money and they maybe do not want to spend it on their kids playing football at a club. Maybe they will just say if their kids really want to play football then just go play with your friends at school or go play at the local green area or the local park" (Nielsen, 2017, 18:08-18:33).

Football in Denmark is not free to play, therefore potentially talented kids from lesser economic means miss out. Conversely in Croatia and Uruguay, football was found to be free, or close to free in the case of Uruguay. Belgium's elite high school structure 'Topsport' was also free for youth. Athletes were able to get a quality high school education with an environment focused on football for free. This means that football can be played by anybody no matter their financial background, which most likely increases the number of potentially talented children that participate. Furthermore, youth that come from economically oppressed backgrounds were found to play with more motivation due to their situations, regardless of the overwhelming statistics on their chance of actually turning professional. In Belgium much of their national team makeup contained players who were the product of one or two immigrant parents. Immigrants are often less wealthy than naturally born citizens (Van Rie & Marx, 2013, p.44). Ignoring the ethical issues of

encouraging marginalized youth to pursue a career in football, a relatively poorer economic dynamic may bode well in developing talented players.

Furthermore in regards to mass participation, it was found only beneficial if the country has a large cultural affinity towards football and is taken seriously by athletes, opposite of what Holt (2002) found to be the case in Canada. With little to no cultural affinity for football, it was not taken seriously due to the overall view on the sport being solely for kids. A really strong football culture was found in all three case countries. Uruguay has a long and rich football history, where an extraordinary 85% of youth between the ages of six to 13 plays football, which makes Uruguay the country with the highest percentage of children playing football in that age group. Football was found to be the number one sport in Belgium, with the national team serving as a unifying pastime for the people of Walloon and Fleming. Croatia's football performance and fans were found to have a big role in the country's independence and identity.

Croatia's early success in the 1990s soon after their independence was seen as a motivational performance due to the pride and patriotism that arose in the country at the time. Derk Droze (Interview 2), former professional player and current coach on a professional level who has coached elite players in Denmark, was asked whether patriotism could lead to better performances as found in the case of Croatia:

> "Absolutely, for sure, all suddenly people start playing hard. (...) in the US several years ago it happened and then people begin chanting and coming together when they were having a run in the World Cup" (Droze, 2017, 29:40-29:51).

Furthermore, Richard Bucciarelli (Interview 1), who has worked with Uruguayan and Canadian football players and is currently working with his own company to improve the level of football coaching in Canada also noted the importance of culture in football. His comments on the football culture in Uruguay and whether or not this could be replicated in Canada was of note:

> "Uruguay and many other places have a real like culture and history in the game (...). I do not think that those kids are learning or developing as players from the coaching they are getting in Baby Football. I think they are learning and developing because they are watching soccer on TV all the

> time. They are playing with their friends, they are playing in their backyard and they have this thing like if you were to go and talk with a young Uruguayan child they could tell you every player that plays on the national team - they know. When the national team plays they know the result of the game, they are supporting the local clubs. (…). That is where they get their development and keep in mind out of that Baby Football is where Suarez and Cavani and all these top level players came from. So obviously something there is working, but in Canada we do not have that culture" (Bucciarelli, 2017, 9:10-10:32).

As found in the individual analysis of the cases, football culture in a country is of utmost importance, with Bucciarelli sharing the same views on the topic. Furthermore when asked about culture in relation to the success of a football nation, and if every nation could become successful at football, he commented that culture again plays a huge role. He also had his doubts whether a country like Canada without any rich footballing history could ever become successful:

> "So they have so much history [Uruguay]. As I said everybody that grows up there is knowledgeable about the sport, is passionate, they have professional clubs that have been around for 100 of years and all that. So can Canada be like that? It would take that much time for us to develop that kind of history" (Bucciarelli, 2017, 18:29-18:46).

This may likely be one of the best explanations as to why some countries have more active football players than Uruguay has in overall population, however Uruguay enjoys more footballing success. The same goes for the number of active football players in Belgium and Croatia relative to the number of active players in other countries. However population was still found to be a factor in football. Uruguay is by far the smallest country in terms of population to win a World Cup, however a lot has changed since their last World Cup victory. Bucciarelli also shared his experiences on the matter after talking with coaches during his time in Uruguayan football:

> "I remember talking with some of the coaches there and they were saying; You know the Europeans have won the last few World Cup, but we have all the history here. If we had a

population like Germany, Italy, Spain or whatever then we would be winning the World Cups" (Bucciarelli, 2017, 15:01-15:18).

Meso-Level Factors

Domestic leagues and Games Before U23

We found several factors that could influence a country's performance on a national level based on meso-level policies. However a surprising finding based on the literature reviewed was that the domestic league of the respective countries would be in better shape in terms of CB, revenue and average match attendance than they actually were. The only league found not to be in bad shape was the Belgian Jupiler Pro League. Both the Uruguayan and Croatian league suffered from low CB, with one or two clubs winning most of the league championships. However all three of the countries are still able to produce top level talent and get them exported to some of the best leagues in the world. Hypercube has found that domestic league strength and national team strength correlate and affect one another. This finding was only evident for Belgium. Furthermore based on Quirk & Fort's (1992) findings, an increase in CB will raise the revenue of a sports league. An increase in revenue will therefore mean more revenue for the clubs, which can be further invested into better players and more talent development. The low CB and poor economic states in Uruguay and Croatia does not seem to affect the ability for either of them to produce talent. It could be speculated that a low CB was actually helpful in aiding talent development in these countries (this will be touched upon later). Bucciarelli comments on the Canadian football league in contrast to the Uruguayan league. The Uruguayan league is in a bad financial state with low CB, he still found the leagues in Uruguay crucial for the development of the talented players and again compared it to the situation in Canada:

> "And the third problem [about the success in Canadian football] and we can not deny this as well we need our own national professional soccer league. At some point that league needs to look the way other leagues look which is it has to have a first division, a second and a third with promotion and relegation. (...). Youth clubs need to be incentivised to develop (...) Any club needs to know if they develop a player and that players goes on to become a professional they are going to get money. (...). Those clubs at the adult level they need to be incentivised to win. Meaning you win to get promoted you lose you get relegated. We have neither of those right now. Our "professional"

> teams like TFC has no incentive to win, it does not matter if they win or loss [in contrast to other open leagues around the world]" (Bucciarelli, 2017, 19.21-20.33).

As mentioned, the low CB in the respective leagues may very well benefit the youth players in Uruguay and Croatia. A league with a high CB will be able to attract better but more expensive players, due to more revenue generated. Croatia and Uruguay saw most of the talent in their top leagues as being domestic players, meaning that young and talented players are exposed to a professional level of football at an early age. Conversely, Belgium had the third most relative foreigners in their Jupiler Pro League compared to all other leagues in the world. Belgium was fortunate enough to have a talented crop of players spend time abroad in elite youth academies where they did not have to face this problem. This is in comparison with the English national team, where their young talented players are not exposed to top level football nor sent abroad, which was damaging the English national squad as found by Maguire & Pearton (2000). During the interview with Droze, the phenomena of players going to bigger clubs and not getting high quality playing time was brought up, similar to the situation in England, he explained the importance for young footballers to get playing time on a high level:

> "Let's say if I was going to go to Manchester United and I was training with the first team every day and I was getting reserve games at all the time and I was not getting regular first team minutes, eventually there's gonna be discussion about getting loaned out (...). I would be okay for a year or two being at a top club training at that high level and playing reserve matches because the most important thing is that you are getting matches to continue evolving. So if you are not playing any reserve matches and you are just on the pine every time and not getting any minutes or maybe any cup games then I would say it is important to move on" (Droze, 2017, 13.13-13.53).

When confronted with the problem on whether young players should seek a career in a big club or a club where they would receive more playing time such as in Denmark or Belgium, Droze used firsthand knowledge to comment on the issue:

> "For sure. This is the challenge I have had to deal with a lot of players who have to make these decisions. (...) so players would come to me and ask me for my opinion. (...). I have seen a lot of players being misguided and they go down the wrong path, and it is about the money. (...). But I see

> too many people getting payed to many big bucks to sit on the pine and they get content they loss their ambition or their motivation" (Droze, 2017, 14:03-15:39)

This adds to our findings that football players needs to play games not only to develop but also to keep their motivation and ambition and not get comfortable with their current situation. For both Uruguay and Croatia, players began their senior career in their home country before they began to play abroad and receive higher salaries. This means that they have to prove themselves on the highest professional level in their native league before being sold to clubs abroad.

Youth Vision

Another interesting similarity among the three nations, but which were stressed particularly in the cases of Croatia and Belgium, was a unified vision on youth development. In fact, both technical directors of Croatia and Belgium used the keywords 'unified youth vision' verbatim. In the case of Uruguay, a unity and collective goal amongst developing talent was also present. The AUF has very strict requirements for coaches once players reach the club level at around the age of 14, ensuring that all players get the same training. The first trait that arose in all three countries amongst developing youth was the importance stressed on non-competitive play in the athlete's early years. This dynamic was enforced through a number of different channels; coaches were required not to coach to win, parents were to be supportive, games did not count towards league standings among others. These changes aided in the overall construction of the learning environment for youth. The literature on a mastery climate names numerous benefits of adopting a mastery climate in physical education, which stresses environments with little to no competition. Therefore, the fact that all three cases exhibited some form of execution of non-competitive play can be seen as a factor in their youth development. Another key characteristics of the unified youth visions of both Croatia and Belgium was the relationship between clubs and the association. In both cases the importance of cooperation and willingness of clubs to be in accordance with the goals of the association were crucial. Clubs in Croatia and Belgium implemented the visions in some form or another of the association into their development of players. The eventual support of clubs in the case of Belgium was stressed by Sablon to be of great importance. The relationship between clubs and the association is also stressed by Jozak. Furthermore, Droze comments on the use of a unified vision within a club system:

> "I have coached at clubs where there hasn't been this kind of universal mark or way, this was back in the states (...), where directors are not enforcing a vision or way, I think that's changing(...) I always tell people pick a direction (...) what is your philosophy (...) what kind of culture are you trying to develop?" (Droze, 2017, 9:34-10:30).

Each country brings forth different qualities and brands that are unique to them. These may come in regards to player development and what aspects a football association (FA from hereafter) values, but countries are also differentiated by their meso and macro influences. Therefore each country will have a unique approach in regards to their player production and team philosophies. Droze stresses that different brands are common in football and comments on the importance of a unified vision in helping aid a specific brand: "(...)there's consistency (...) sticking at it (...) its repetition. Its incorporation of exercises that are nurturing of that style and identity" (Droze, 9:12-9:30). According to Droze, the execution of a unified vision aids in the implementation of a certain brand of football. Different brands of football can indeed be seen between Croatia and Belgium. Sablon regarded the 4-3-3 system and its advantages as suiting the FA's vision on the national team most adequately. Conversely Jozak is a proponent of the 4-3-2-1 system in Croatia. Both countries are in pursuit of a different vision or style of play, however the implementation of this vision is unified among clubs and the FA, being implemented country wide. These visions can be executed on a number of levels. On a youth development level these could include; adaptations to rules and regulations according to age divisions, implementation of technical skills, introduction of competitive play and training frequency to name a few. Other unified factors may include; strategies on development between clubs, talent identification, coaching education and licenses, accessibility to resources etc. It should also be of note, that small sided games in Croatia and Belgium were found to be a big factor amongst the visions the FA's had on youth. Both the youth systems in their respective countries incorporated small sided games, reduced pitch sizes, and other modifications to rules and regulations. These changes were done in order to ensure the most possible development and engagement of youth. The gradual increase to full regulation games was also seen evident in both cases, where full play normally started around the ages of 13-14. Consequently, this was the same age players in Uruguay were introduced to elite level club play and training.

Uruguay's approach to a unified vision is also interesting to analyze, in that they are different to Croatia and Belgium. Uruguay adopts a late talent identification stage in selecting elite youth. As mentioned

players are scouted by clubs at the age of 14. It is at this stage that players in Uruguay are introduced to the unified vision of their club. Uruguayan elite youth club play works on a system that promotes entire clubs and their age divisions and not individual teams as touched upon previously. This dynamic presents a situation where clubs are then required to place importance on every age division they compete in. Therefore clubs have to prepare and organize themselves in a unified approach that ensures each age division is put in the best possible situation that benefits club success. By evaluating club success on a more collective level, clubs are forced to act in ways that correspond more effectively at benefiting an entire organization rather than just an individual age division. This mirrors the initiatives in Croatia and Belgium however on a smaller scale. Croatia and Belgium work with clubs in a way that benefits clubs and the national team, as opposed to each individual club only pursuing its individual goals.

Youth Identification

Identification of elite youth was analyzed to follow the same structure in Belgium and Croatia, but differ in Uruguay. As mentioned, Croatia and Belgium adopt a talent identification process that identifies youth at the earliest possible stage they present themselves. This can result in the relative age effect influencing the direction on some level or another the talent development of a country. Droze comments on the use of an early identification process in football:

> "I've seen great players at seven, eight, nine (...) someone needs to continue this development, they need to be nurtured (...) most of the time they don't get identified, parents don't know how to handle it or put them in them wrong place (…). I believe you can identify early but it's not make or break it" (Droze, 2017, 12:03-12:50).

Therefore Droze sees the phenomenon of identifying early as having both positives and negatives that come along with the approach. The early youth who do show great signs of potential, are able to be given the proper coaching and guidance crucial to their development. However Bucciarelli stressed the benefits of the relative late identification in the case of Uruguay. Players in Uruguay are identified at the ages of 13 and 14, where they then join an environment that is highly professional.

> "The decision to identify a player into a competitive or professional program happens much later, but once that happens it's a huge difference. So as I said the coaching is much better, the environment is such that basically the clubs are held accountable for who they develop (...) they're incentivized to develop players" (Bucciarelli, 2017, 8:04-8:32).

The problems in identification are also stressed by Jozak. Jozak makes the distinction of biological age not always being in line with chronological age (Bird, 2014). That is to say some 14 year olds may already be close to being full adults, while other instances can see an 18 year old athlete in a body akin to that of a 15 year old. Therefore, when you put coaches under pressure to win matches from a young age, biologically more developed youth are typically favored, as opposed to an athlete who may show promise in technical aspects of the game. All three countries tackle this problem by attempting to create environments where children are not put into competitive situations and coaches are not required to make decisions based on results but rather on the development of the athlete. However in the cases of Croatia and Belgium this does not offset the initial identification stage that occurs. That is to say if a coach using an early identification approach chooses an athlete based on non-physical qualities (technical skill), they are nonetheless still separating athletes from a normative population at a young age. Jozak stresses that potential youth who appear to have sound technical abilities but lack physical qualities require expert coaching and training too, since their bodies will come to fruition at a later stage (Ibid). Thus the identification approaches adopted by each national team differ especially in the case of Uruguay. Bucciarelli stresses that once a player is identified in Uruguay it makes for a big change in the player's career. Bucciarelli also notes that at this stage the athlete can realistically get a better idea if football is something they can pursue professionally or not:

> "I mean the reality is that beyond the age of 14 if you are not serious about soccer it is not likely that you are going to improve to become a professional player later" (Bucciarelli, 2017, 7:15-7:26).

Again however, this view is rebutted by Droze who insists that some players can be identified at an early stage, but he believes that if an athlete has not made significant advancements at 16, that their future as a footballer is still not done yet (Droze, 2017, 11:38-11:49). Therefore the conclusions on talent identification provide different insights and approaches through data collection and analysis. A clear cut

similarity or theme amongst the case countries did not existed in regards to the most effective elite youth selection.

Coaching

Each country had its own approach in regards to their stance on coaching and the requirements needed. Uruguay was found to be the most stringent and demanding of their coaching requirements. In order to be able to coach youth on a competitive level in Uruguay, a two year education program was a requirement. Bucciarelli commented on the coaching education in Uruguay, stating that it was very much like obtaining a bachelor's degree in football:

> "It is the equivalent of a university degree and they actually take the equivalent of university courses. So they have things like periodization, sport psychology, physiology in addition to all the coaching (...)" (Bucciarelli, 2017, 16:53-17:08); "like a typical coaching license that you would do here [Canada] like the Canadian National B license which is one of the highest standards for coaching in the higher levels here (...) might be a 10 day course, so even if it is let us say like 8 hours a day so 80 hours plus an exam (...) in Uruguay the lowest standard for a professional coach is a two year - 1400 hours" (Bucciarelli, 2017, 16:20-16:52).

Furthermore Bucciarelli comments: "Uruguay is very proud of the fact that they have been one of the world's biggest exporters of coaches per capita" (Bucciarelli, 2017, 15:46-15:52).

When compared to the coaching demands in Croatia and Belgium, the requirements in Uruguay seemed to be much higher. Sablon however did stress the importance in coaching by making entry-level coaching courses free in Belgium, which effectively increased enrollment tenfold (James, 2014). Therefore youth coaches were now better equipped to handle athletes and more importantly could do it under the BFA's strategies. This can be seen as a similarity in both Uruguay and Belgium, in that the FAs of both countries influenced and dictated what kind of education coaches were receiving. This allowed them to furthermore implement the unified visions they had on youth by ensuring that coaches were educated according to the FA's goals.

Furthermore, aligning with literature and insights from Droze, the ability of a coach to motivate players, both at a youth level and professional level was of importance. Gould (1987) notes that coaches need to

take on roles as motivators, while Brown & Potrac (2009) state that motivational coaching is crucial at a grassroots level. Therefore, as suggested by Feltz et al. (1999), a coaching education can aid in the motivational competencies of coaches. The coaching licenses, and especially educations provided in Uruguay, further facilitate and develop a coach's motivational skills. These motivation skills are crucial according to Droze:

> "I have seen players that have been motivated and exceeded expectations because of coaching, and other players that have lost confidence and motivation (...) due to a style of coaching" (Droze, 2017, 27:50-28:40).

Droze furthermore stressed the importance of young players keeping their motivation: "Young players need to keep their motivation, long after they sign their first contract - just because they've signed a contract does not mean they made it" (Droze, 2017, 17:05-17:15). The coaching received by young athletes who have just entered the professional ranks is of importance too according to Droze in regards to motivation. Thus the impacts a coach can have on an athlete stretch beyond the domains of coaching purely team strategy and technical skills. The roles of a coach are multifold, and the impacts coaches have on young men in other areas more internal to the athlete were found to be of importance in the investigation of all three countries. Clubs in Belgium found themselves responsible for the well being and development of young athletes into responsible competent citizens (James, 2014) Dinamo was found to share the same outlooks on youth development, stressing that responsibility of the club to nurture well rounded young adults (Kepčija, 2014). The social responsibility taken on by coaches and clubs were seen to be present in both Croatia and Belgium. The implications of whether these virtues had any bearing on the development of talent remains to be seen however.

Discussion and Conclusion

The first portion of the research question at hand was interested in the way small successful footballing nations produced talent. After collecting and analyzing research, it has become evident that the methods on developing talent are numerous, and countries can approach this challenge in a multitude of ways. The multiple case study approach used in researching the topic highlighted the methods taken by three countries currently enjoying success today. It would appear that modifying and adapting the game of football into environments more suitable for youth seems to be an effective strategy in player development. This can be seen as an important finding in all three case countries, due to the fact that these changes occur at a meso-level and are all able to be influenced by policies. The modifications and adaptations analyzed not only include the way in which youth participate in football, but also into the methods and environments through which they experience the game. Therefore coaching and the ability to keep youth motivated is paramount in the success of a footballing nation. Furthermore the education of coaches was found strongly relevant in Uruguay and to some extent in Belgium. Research has shown that coaches with an education or high levels of experience perform better in relation to coaches without. Yet again, the environment through which youth perceive the game can also be directly influenced by policy makers. The fact that many of the findings that occur at a meso-level can be influenced was seen as a positive in regards to the future and direction of the game. As mentioned in the literature, sport policy makers are starting to focus on these meso-level factors more heavily, mainly due to the fact that they are able to be manipulated and influenced. One of the most surprising findings came in regard to the strength of the domestic leagues. Literature suggests that a strength of a domestic league can be seen as an indicator of national team success, for a host of reasons. Croatia and Uruguay were found to have low quality domestic leagues with a poor CB. Interestingly enough, when investigated further these weaknesses were actually seen as strengths to some extent in the respective countries. Due to a low level of CB, clubs were able to develop talent more effectively by exposing them to high amounts of playing time at a young age, while selling them later on for profits. The reliance on transfer fees in both countries seemed to incentivize talent development to an even greater extent.

The nation's investigated each had their own policies on how they approached the development of players. Croatia and Belgium were similar in many respects. The FA's and clubs in each country worked together to create a curriculum and environment that would benefit each party. This started at the earliest of age

groups and had an influence on any age of athletes participating in the game. Uruguay was unique in their approach to developing talent. They did not have such a structured plan entailing youth below the ages of 14. Uruguay seemed to have a mass participation environment which did not focus too heavily on competition at an early age, with talent identification coming later. However, it should be of note that the reasons behind each of the case country's approach to developing talent can be seen to stem from factors outside of the meso-level.

The macro-level factors within each nation could be seen as the foundation promoting each nation's success. In fact, it could be speculated that macro-level factors were required to be present in one form or another in order for a country to experience success. The current literature stated that real GDP was an effective predictor of international sporting success, particularly in the context of the Olympic Games. Football is interesting in this regard, as relatively high GNP per capita was seen to have diminishing returns in the success of nations. This claim was found to hold true for the cases of Croatia and Uruguay, who both seemed to have GNI per capita that was close to the optimal level. More importantly however, was the fact that all three countries had a cultural affinity towards the game of football. Through data collection, this was seen to be more evident in the case of Croatia and Uruguay, however Belgium's footballing culture was also relatively high in comparison to other footballing nations excluded from the study. It therefore seems that culture was one of the most underlying forces driving each country's success. As mentioned previously, macro-level factors cannot be influenced by policy makers and therefore cannot be manipulated. The process of building a footballing culture is not something a country can set out to improve in the short term.

The underlying objective of the research conducted was to investigate how *small* footballing nations produced favorable results. In particular, this meant investigating successful countries with relatively small populations. The impact a population had on a country's success can most certainly be seen as a success indicator, however only if a country possesses the correct macro-level factors. Again, the impact of a footballing culture was seen as paramount in this regard. If population was an accurate predictor in football success, then China, India, USA and Indonesia would all be dominating on a global scale. The lack of culture affinity towards the game of football renders a massive population useless in regards to producing talent. Conversely however, small countries with a large cultural affinity towards football seemed to offset their limitations in this regard to some extent. Furthermore, it could be speculated that

due to a country's smaller size, coordinating and implementing initiatives and visions may not be such as grand a task. It may be easier to control and implement policies in regards to football with a smaller population. Communication and relationships amongst the FA and clubs in a small country may run more effectively and smoothly. This competency can be crucial, due to the fact that implementing a unified vision, especially in regards to youth development, was seen as a major factor in the success of each country, particularly in the cases of Croatia and Belgium. Although there are no objective parameters on measuring the cultural affinity a nation has to football, a consideration to take into affect might be that smaller countries feel an even greater link to football due to the identity it brings. This was found to be the case especially in Croatia, as well as in Uruguay. Citizens of each country are proud and find identity through the performance of their national team. This may bode quite well in even further increasing the love a country has towards the game of football. The most recent example of this was at the 2016 Euro Cup, where Iceland's amazing run brought out 8% of its entire population to the event (UEFA, 2016). However, these positive effects cannot be seen by any means as completely mitigating a smaller population. Countries with large populations, who also have large cultural ties to football can almost always be seen to have an advantage. Large countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Spain, England, Germany, France and Italy, who happen to have strong cultural ties to football, all enjoy an average FIFA rank in the top 10. Brazil, Argentina, Spain and Germany each have an average rank in the top five. It would appear then that possessing the macro-level factor of a footballing culture seems to be the driving force propelling countries to footballing success. Without the proper culture, it would seem impossibly difficult for a country to produce any success over an extended period of time. However these macro-level factors are only useful when channeled effectively at a meso-level. Without the proper policies in place, the cultural affinity a country possesses will not aid in reaching a country's full footballing potential.

Limitations

Several of the academic papers used in studying the topic for this thesis are based upon the research of sports other than football. The literature that was seen as being best fit with our research question provided resources that would still be very applicable to the sport of football. However research was used that did not always corroborate with the domain of football, so its applicability may be diminished. Academic research that could be deemed as optimal for the study did not exist. Football is in many respects different from other sports, however an effort to find papers from sports with similarities to football was conducted.

The ‘FIFA Big Count’ used, which stresses important statistics in the study, could be viewed as rather outdated however it is the most recent data source provided by FIFA on the topic. Furthermore, the FIFA Big Count also states that many of the figures included in the study have not been confirmed by FIFA, and some are merely estimations. However, the statistics on the matter are published by FIFA who are the world’s football federation.

The research insights gained from the three footballing nations may only affect our possibility to say something general about the three small successful football nations which were studied. A study comprising of more countries may help in getting a more in depth and rounded perspective on the subject, however the three countries selected are due to them representing several aspect of different small footballing nations. They were chosen due to characteristics that covered a wide range of topics which would attempt to cover the phenomenon to a greater degree.

A lot of the research and foundation of the study was driven by research done by Hoffmann et al. (2002), which may be outdated. It is not unlikely that the optimal macro-level factors for a footballing country have changed since 2002. Some socioeconomic factors may have stayed the same, however financial characteristics are likely to have changed due to inflation or other various economic occurrences. Another issue that arose from the Hoffmann et al. (2002) research was the authors’ use of GNP, whereas this thesis incorporated GNI. The WorldBank explains that GNI was formerly known as GNP but is nonetheless still calculated in different ways producing similar results.

Championship frequency has been used for the measurement of CB, which requires subjective measures to operate. Therefore by only using three case countries our subjective measures of CB may need a larger sample size to infer if the respective leagues are indeed unbalanced compared to others around the world. The use of championship frequency was decided as the best option for the calculation of CB, due to the case country’s domestic leagues changing several times over the years. These factors resulted in other models being inconvenient to use.

Future Research

The implications of the study raise questions for future areas of research in the domain of small footballing countries, as well as any footballing country in general. The role of football culture that a nation possesses would be an excellent starting block for someone beginning to investigate the phenomena further. The inner workings and mechanisms behind a country's footballing culture, or parameters that can identify its measurability would be of great value in this domain of research. The current research conducted pointed towards culture as being a key driver regardless of how unique a country could be, meaning that a proper footballing culture needed to be present for success. Therefore the questions of whether culture is something that can at all be manipulated in a long term frame are of great interest. Although the possibility that a nation with no footballing culture may one day win the FIFA World Cup are almost non-existent, the very nature of an event like that occurring would do wonders. It is not impossible to think that a FIFA World Cup victory would instantaneously change a nation's footballing culture and future.

Furthermore, the very nature of the research question may pose inquiries about similar behavior in other sports or events. The unique competencies of a small nations in a particular sport are quite common to see. Countries with fewer resources are able to compete and figure out ways to master their games. It is not impossible to think that sports may have overlapping themes in general that serve to counterbalance or eradicate their weaknesses. This research could be taken even further, and conducted to see if there are any differences in the study of small successful sports nations when comparing team vs. individual sports.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Croatia – Euro Cup 2016 squad – Stats from: www.transfermarkt.com		
Name	Games Before 23 – League Games – (Total)	Where
Ivan Vargic (GK)	37	(37 Croatia)
Sime Vrsaljko	149 (159)	(113 Croatia) (36 Italy) (10 National Team)
Ivan Strinic	65 (68)	(65 Croatia) (3 National Team)
Ivan Perisic	134 (141)	(109 Belgium) (25 Germany) (7 National Team)
Vedran Corluka	122 (149)	(88 Croatia) (34 England) (27 National Team)
Tin Jedvaj*	78 (5)	(13 Croatia) (2 Italy) (63 Germany) (5 National Team)
Ivan Rakitic	194 (220)	(50 Switzerland) (135 Germany) (9 Spain) (31 National Team)
Mateo Kovacic**	222 (254)	(63 Croatia) (97 Italy) (62 Spain) (32 National Team)
Andrej Kramaric	143	(143 Croatia)
Luka Modric	150 (177)	(125 Croatia) (22 Bosnia and Herzegovina) (3 England) (27 National Team)
Darijo Srna	123 (141)	(68 Croatia) (55 Ukrainian) (18 National Team)
Lovre Kalinic (GK)	41	(41 Croatia)
Gordon Schildenfeld	124	(120 Croatia) (4 Turkey)
Marcelo Brozović	174 (187)	(151 Croatia) (23 Italy) (13 National Team)
Marko Rog***	118 (125)	(107 Croatia) (11 Italy) (7 National Team)
Nikola Kalinic	125 (128)	(79 Croatia) (46 England) (3 National Team)
Mario Mandzukic	149 (153)	(149 Croatia) (4 National Team)
Ante Corić****	112 (115)	(112 Croatia) (3 National Team)
Milan Badelj	176 (179)	(176 Croatia) (3 National Team)
Marko Pjaca	161 (173)	(142 Croatia) (19 Italy) (12 National Team)
Domagoj Vida	134 (142)	(125 Croatia) (9 Germany) (8 National Team)
Duje Cop	110	(105 Croatia) (5 Portugal)
Danijel Subasic (GK)	65	(65 Croatia)
Total without national games: 2836 – Average: 123,30 – by (19/03/17)		
*620 days before turning 23 **49 days before turning 23 ***488 days before turning 23 ****1123 days before turning 23		

Appendix 2

Uruguay - Copa America 2016 squad – Stats from: www.transfermarkt.com		
Name	Games Before 23 – League Games – (Total)	Where
Martin Campana (GK)	68	(68 Uruguay)
Fernando Muslera (GK)	83	(49 Uruguay) (34 Italy)
Martin Silva (GK)	130	(130 Uruguay)
Matias Corujo	82	(82 Uruguay)
Jorge Fucile	67 (77)	(30 Uruguay) (37 Portugal) (10 National Team)
Jose Gimenez*	103 (133)	(32 Uruguay) (87 Spain) (30 National Team)
Diego Godin	148 (168)	(82 Uruguay) (60 Spain) (20 National Team)
Maxi Pereira	99 (107)	(99 Uruguay) (8 National Team)
Gaston Silva	67 (78)	(30 Uruguay) (22 Italy) (15 Spain) (11 National Team)
Mauricio Victorino	67	(67 Uruguay)
Egidio Arevalo	116	(116 Uruguay)
Alvaro Gonzalez	114 (117)	(106 Uruguay) (8 Argentina) (3 National Team)
Diego Laxalt	65	(15 Uruguay) (50 Italy)
Nicolas Lodeiro	71 (83)	(43 Uruguay) (28 Netherlands) (12 National Team)
Alvaro Pereira	75 (76)	(28 Uruguay) (28 Argentina) (19 Romania) (1 National Team)
Gaston Ramirez	136 (162)	(42 Uruguay) (60 Italy) (England 34) (26 National Team)
Carlos Sanchez	61	(61 Uruguay)
Matias Vecino	72	(55 Uruguay) (17 Italy)
Edinson Cavani	130 (142)	(25 Uruguay) (105 Italy) (12 National Team)
Abel Hernandez	130 (140)	(38 Uruguay) (92 Italy) (10 National Team)
Diego Rolan	150 (167)	(41 Uruguay) (109 France) (17 National Team)
Cristhian Stuani	60	(40 Uruguay) (20 Italy) (8 Spain)
Luis Suarez	180 (208)	(27 Uruguay) (153 Netherlands) (28 National Team)
Total without national games: 2282 – Average: 99,22 – by (19/03/17)		
*308 days before turning 23		

Appendix 3

Belgium – Euro Cup 2016 squad – Stats from: www.transfermarkt.com		
Name	Games Before 23 – League Games – (Total)	Where
Thibaut Courtois (GK)	237 (266)	(45 Belgium) (154 Spain) (38 England) (29 National Team)
Toby Alderweireld	166 (182)	(166 Netherlands) (16 National Team)
Thomas Vermaelen	131 (146)	(131 Netherlands) (15 National Team)
Radja Nainggolan	116 (117)	(116 Italy) (1 National Team)
Jan Vertonghen	139 (159)	(139 Netherlands) (20 National Team)
Axel Witsel	221 (247)	(194 Belgium) (27 Portugal) (26 National Team)
Kevin De Bruyne	174 (200)	(113 Belgium) (9 England) (52 Germany) (26 National Team)
Marouane Fellaini	163 (189)	(84 Belgium) (79 England) (26 National Team)
Romelu Lukaku	269 (312)	(98 Belgium) (171 England) (43 National Team)
Yannick Ferreira Carrasco	148 (158)	(103 France) (45 Spain) (10 National Team)
Simon Mignolet (GK)	121	(104 Belgium) (17 England)
Jean-François Gillet (GK)	98	(6 Belgium) (92 Italy)
Dries Mertens	128	(128 Belgium)
Jason Denayer*	91 (99)	(44 Scotland) (28 Turkey) (19 England) (8 National Team)
Thomas Meunier	124 (126)	(124 Belgium) (2 National Team)
Divock Origi**	155 (178)	(89 France) (66 England) (23 National Team)
Christian Kabasele	77	(66 Belgium) (11 Bulgaria)
Mousa Dembélé	206 (234)	(23 Belgium) (183 Netherlands) (28 National Team)
Christian Benteke	184 (201)	(133 Belgium) (51 England) (17 National Team)
Jordan Lukaku***	104 (111)	(92 Belgium) (12 Italy) (7 National Team)
Michy Batshuayi	205 (213)	(120 Belgium) (78 France) (7 England) (8 National Team)
Laurent Ciman	93	(93 Belgium)
Eden Hazard	283 (325)	(194 France) (89 England) (42 National Team)
Total without national games: 3633 – Average: 157,96 – by (19/03/17)		
*467 days before turning 23 **396 days before turning 23 ***129 days before turning 23		

Appendix 4

Player	Youth Team	First Senior Team
Martin Campana (GK)	Deportivo Maldonado	Atenas
Fernando Muslera (GK)	Montevideo Wanderers	Montevideo Wanderers
Martin Silva (GK)	-	Defensor Sporting
Matias Corujo	Montevideo Wanderers	Montevideo Wanderers
Jorge Fucile	Montevideo Wanderers	Montevideo Wanderers
Jose Gimenez*	-	Danubio
Diego Godin	Danubio	Cerro
Maxi Pereira	Defensor Sporting	Defensor Sporting
Gaston Silva	Defensor Sporting	Defensor Sporting
Mauricio Victorino	Nacional	Nacional
Egidio Arevalo	Paysandu Bella Vista	Paysandu Bella Vista
Alvaro Gonzalez	-	Defensor Sporting
Diego Laxalt	Defensor Sporting	Defensor Sporting
Nicolas Lodeiro	Nacional	Nacional
Alvaro Pereira	Cerro Porteno	Miramar Misiones
Gaston Ramirez	Penarol	Penarol
Carlos Sanchez	-	Montevideo Wanderers
Matias Vecino	-	Central Espanol
Edinson Cavani	Danubio	Danubio
Abel Hernandez	Penarol and Central Espanol	Central Espanol
Diego Rolan	Defensor Sporting	Defensor Sporting
Cristhian Stuani	-	Danubio
Luis Suarez	Nacional	Nacional
Stats from: www.transfermarkt.com		