“THE WHOLE SOCCER PACKAGE”:

WOMEN’S TRANSITIONS INTO DIVISION I COLLEGE SOCCER

by

BRYAN C. CLIFT

(Under the Direction of Diane M. Samdahl)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore how incoming freshmen on the women’s soccer team at a Division I university perceived and negotiated the transition from high school to college during their first semester. To date, athletes’ transitions to college have received little attention from the academic community. In-depth interviews were conducted in the spring of athletes’ first year and were informed by observation and participant journaling during their fall semester. Due to preseason training, which takes place before classes begin, and little coursework at the opening of the academic term, soccer developed as participants’ priority. School became important only after students realized dedication to coursework was necessary to achieve their desired performance in classes. Due to the required commitment to sport, participants viewed participation as both beneficial and detrimental to college experiences such as independence, self-development, maturation, and social engagement.

INDEX WORDS: College athletes, College athletics, Transition, Freshman, First year experiences, Women and sport.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the most wonderful people in my life.

Sarah and my parents

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I viewed this project as a personal challenge. Having never found myself in academia, this was my first step towards what may prove to be a life changing experience. Needless to say, I could not have completed this goal without the help of many people.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Does this skew your data, that I'm not playing anymore?" ~ Sofia

The last twenty-five years have seen dramatic increase in the number of women college athletes in America. Soccer in particular has had a substantial increase in participation. In 1977, only 2.8% of American colleges had women's soccer programs but by 2002, 87.9% of colleges supported varsity level women's soccer (Acosta & Carpenter, 2002, pp. 8-9). The research base around college sport, women, and soccer, has not kept pace with this recent rise in participation.

The freshmen year is a period of transition for new students as they move from high school to college. The first year of college is a time for independence, self-development, and maturation (Schilling & Schilling, 2005). Because they participate in sport, college athletes' transitions to college may be different than other students. The addition of college sport into the life of a transitioning student brings with it more time demands, more expectations, and less free time. The literature surrounding college athletes has not addressed their transition to college. The focus of this project is on the transitional experience of women college soccer players during their first semester of college.

College soccer is unique in that participants arrive on campus and begin soccer training before they begin classes. Arrival on campus before the official welcome week for freshman has been characterized as an "anti-intellectual" experience (Kuh, 2005). Different

colleges have different academic calendars and at some schools soccer players are training one or two weeks, or even one month, before courses even begin. Becoming accustomed and socialized into soccer before becoming accustomed to courses is potentially problematic for freshman athletes.

This research is focused on the athlete. According to Chelladurai (1997), athletes are considered the primary producer and beneficiaries of college athletics because they are involved in the production of college sport and they receive benefits, such as scholarships, as a result of participation. Therefore, college athletes deserve attention from researchers. Sport as a form of commercial entertainment recognizes athletes as entertainers (Sack, 1987) and yet the NCAA has insisted that college athletes are amateurs. Recently, Joe Godri, coach of the Villanova baseball team, revealed that he referred to and told recruits that "being a Division I student-athlete is a full-time job" (Pennington, 2008).

Major Division I colleges across the country have benefited from a capitalist model of operation while the athletes themselves have been subject to the demands of a profit driven environment (Miracle & Rees, 1998). As the major workforce of a million dollar business, but touted as amateur and expected to perform both athletically and academically, athletes are placed in a precarious position. They are subjected to the demands and expectations found in high capitalistic modes of operation but do not receive the benefits of achievement.

The debate about college athletes and academic performance has raged through public media and scholarly literature. Research has been used to support both positive and negative relationships between sport and academics (cf. Miracle & Rees, 1998; Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006). Men's basketball and football players, who play high profile sports, have been shown consistently to have lower average performance in the classroom in

comparison to the student body (Adler & Adler, 1985; Eitzen, 1987; Miracle & Rees, 1998). In comparison, women and men in non-revenue sports have consistently performed as well as or better than the student body (Pascarella, Bohr, Nora, & Terenzini's, 1995; Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison, & Hagedorn, 1999).

Women are relatively new participants to the sporting world and as such have been incorporated into a model of sport designed for men (Birrell, 1987). The role of soccer in the lives of women college athletes speaks directly to the nature of sport in the American education system. As one of the rising sports in The United States, soccer is one of the most prominent sports in which women play and compete.

Research has focused on many aspects of the lives college students and college athletes but few studies have viewed the college athlete holistically and or identified athletes' views of their own transition into college life. This study is particularly interesting because soccer commences prior to the beginning of classes. By exploring the lives of college soccer participants, insight into how women negotiate the transition into college will be gained.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore how women soccer players perceived and negotiated the transition from high school to college during their first semester at a major Division I college in the Southeastern United States.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this project.

1. What are freshmen soccer players' experiences during their first semester at college?

2. How do freshmen soccer players balance sports, academics, and other aspects of their first freshmen semester?

Theoretical Perspective

A symbolic interactionist perspective guided and informed this project's methodology and research design. Symbolic interactionism (SI) asserts three premises: first, that people act on the basis of meaning; second, that meaning is derived from social interpretation; and third, that meaning is absorbed through an individual and interpretive process (Blumer, 1969). Simplified, SI proposes that experience is interpreted by individual perception and that perception guides meaning and action.

This framework positioned me to examine how participants "interpret events and objects and situations and respond to their interpretations" (Gusfield, 2003, p. 122). The experiences of college women athletes involve many events and interactions that have a "multiplicity of possible meetings" (p. 122). The methodologies and methods that are used within this framework respected individual participants as sources of data and used their own words to document their experiences.

Definition of Terms

To aid in understanding this study, several terms are defined. The first term is *NCAA.* The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the largest governing body of sport in the American education system. The core purpose of the NCAA is as follows:

> Our purpose is to govern competition in a fair, safe, equitable and sportsmanlike manner, and to integrate intercollegiate athletics into higher education so that the

> educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount. (The National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2008b)

The NCAA is comprised of Division I, II, and III membership statuses. The difference between the designations is based on the number of teams an individual school supports and how those teams are funded. Division I athletic programs are widely considered the highest level of play. Division I institutions typically have larger athletic budgets, more financial benefits for athletes, and an organizational structure that is separate from the institution they represent.

The second term is *Title IX*. In 1972 the United States Congress passed into law an amendment to the constitution that stated the following:

> No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. (The United States Department of Justice, 1972)

Since the ratification of this amendment, high school and college sport has seen rapid increase in women's participation in sports.

The third term is *college athlete*. The college athlete is a person who attends a college and participates in intercollegiate sport. The term *student-athlete* was strategically planted into mainstream society to suggest that athletes are amateurs (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). Use of the term *student-athlete* reifies the amateur status of athletes in college when in fact their relationship with a school is closer to that of employer-employee. In recognition of that relationship the term *college athlete* has been advocated by Staurowsky and Sack (2005) for use by researchers.

The fourth term is *high profile sport*. High profile sports are commercialized and frequently associated with “big time” (Miracle & Rees, 1998, p. 227) or big business practices. With operations resting “strictly on market principles” (Miracle & Rees, 1998, p. 227) and not on the personal and social needs of students, commercialized sport programs become industrial in nature. The high profile and most profitable sports are men’s basketball and football. Synonymous terms for high profile sport are *revenue sport* and *major sport*.

The fifth term is *low profile sport*. By contrast, low profile sports are the sports that are sponsored by athletic programs but do not incorporate commercialization at the level of high profile sports. These sports typically do not make money for athletic programs. Common low profile sports are men and women’s soccer, baseball, and track and field. Though not absolute, few sports are profitable beyond men’s basketball and football. Synonymous terms for low profile sport are *non-revenue sport* and *minor sport*.

The sixth term is *recruited athlete*. Individuals deemed recruited athletes have been targeted and pursued by coaches or administrators to participate in sport and receive some degree of benefit associated directly with sport participation, such as tuition compensation or living expenses. A synonym for recruited athlete is *scholarship athlete*.

The seventh term is *walk-on*. A walk-on athlete is a person who has tried out and has been accepted onto a team without being recruited by a coach. These players do not receive compensation of any kind for education.

The last term is *recruited walk-on.* A recruited walk-on is an individual who has been recruited to participate in college sport but receives no benefits other than those associated directly with the participation of the sport.

Organization of the Study

Chapter Two reviews literature that is relevant for this study. Areas of consideration include literature from student affairs, higher education, sport psychology, and sport sociology. Chapter Three provides an overview of the methodology and research design. It includes the selection of participants, the sample population profile, data collection procedures, data analysis techniques, researcher subjectivity, a discussion of trustworthiness, and concludes with a personal statement. Chapter Four presents the data including a description of each participant and experiences of these freshmen college athletes in relation to sport, academics, and free time. Chapter Five presents data in relation to how these freshmen college athletes balanced sport, academics, and free time. Chapter Six summarizes findings and discusses them in relation to literature, and offers recommendations and concerns of relevance to college athletic administrators and coaches.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

"It is hard having both the student and athlete name instead of just the student. You give up a lot but you gain a lot too." ~ Lisa

The purpose of this study was to explore how freshmen women soccer players perceived and negotiated the transition from high school to college during their first semester of college. The research questions that guided this study are as follows: (a) What are freshmen soccer players' experiences during their first semester at college? (b) How do freshmen soccer players balance sports, academics, and other aspects of their first freshmen semester? This chapter will review the literature that helped shape the study and is divided into three topical sections. The first section speaks to the nature of college sport within the American education system. The second section explores the development of women in collegiate sport. And the third section discusses transitions to college.

American Collegiate Sport

Intercollegiate athletics is unique to the United States (Markovitz & Hellerman, 2001a; Bowen & Levin, 2003). There are currently over 1200 institutional members of the NCAA with over 380,000 athletes in competition within those institutions (The National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2006). With such a variety of institution types, locations, and cultures across the nation "it is difficult to get a clear, definitive grasp of the nature and quality of the undergraduate experiences of intercollegiate athletes" (Umbach, Palmer, Kuh,

& Hannah, 2006, p. 711). The literature addressing athletics within the college education system is expectantly large, controversial, and ambiguous (Miracle & Rees, 1998). Studies of the people involved in college sports have ranged largely in the following areas according to Chelladurai and Reimer (1997): management such as athletic directors, commissioners, and a limited number of constituents such as employees, coaches, sport information directors, fans, and sponsors. Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah (1997) identified graduation rates, student engagement, self understanding, and higher level cognitive development as topics common throughout the literature. Importantly, Chelladurai and Reimer (1997) point to athletes as the primary producer and consumer of college athletics and propose that athletes be a primary focus of research. Studies that focus on athletes were identified and used for this project.

The College Athlete

College sport, which the NCAA has deemed amateur in nature, was initially characterized by amateur ideals aimed at achieving the "personal, social and emotional gratification of the participants" (Miracle & Rees, p. 233, 1998). However, Miracle and Rees also described Division I athletic programs at present as "big time" (p. 226) because of the commercial ambitions institutions frequently practice. Schools with highly competitive men's basketball and/or football programs bring in millions of dollars to an athletic department. Capital accumulation, development of million dollar television contracts, and distribution of merchandise are common practices in athletic departments today. Schools have become infused with commercial values and modes of operation and have lost the original intentions of amateur athletics that used to be central to college sport. The commercialization of collegiate sport has transformed the athletes into professional

entertainers (Miracle & Rees, 1987) and has driven much of the criticism of college sport (Chelladurai, 1997).

One of the first studies to focus on college athletes themselves revealed that the athletic experiences of male college basketball players at a major institution were different than high school including size of the institution and athletic program, academic involvement, and emphasis on winning (Adler & Adler, 1987). The size of the athletic atmosphere dominated "all facets of [basketball players'] existence, including academic involvement and performance" (Adler & Adler, 1985, p. 244). The number of athletes, the size and quality of the facilities, amount of preparation, the demands and expectations, and so forth were a vast change for athletes as they moved from high school to college. Their involvement steadily became more professionalized and enjoyment was often lost. Within the big business of college sport, athletes were subjected to an emphasis on winning and were placed under more pressure to perform (Adler & Adler, 1985; Eitzen, 1987). The sentiments expressed by the participants in the Adler and Adler (1985) study resonated with what Miracle and Rees (1998) called "big time" college sports. Sport in college, particularly at major Division I institutions, is more like big business than the ideals originally found in amateur sport.

The lives of athletes and non-athletes are markedly different in many ways. Perhaps the greatest difference lies in the "time demands and rigid scheduling" (Jolly, 2008, p. 146) to which athletes must adhere. Athletes are subject to two to fours hours of training per day, attend a minimum of a full class schedule, and are frequently required to attend mandatory academic monitoring appointments. Athletes are required to take on additional responsibilities in the classroom in order to compete athletically. For example, at the

beginning of a semester, athletes identify themselves to an instructor in classrooms in order to clarify which days, if any, they will miss for competition. Should they miss an exam because of a scheduled athletic event, athletes are required to make up that exam. Often school is scheduled around their athletic involvement, which can compound difficulties in the learning environment.

Using in-depth interviews from Canadian men's and women's basketball, swimming, and track, and women's volleyball players during their final years at school, Miller and Kerr (2002) developed a model for the life of a college athlete by framing three spheres of life: athletic, academic, and social. These three spheres of life were found to compete for the participants' time, rendering individuals unable to completely fulfill any sphere. The athlete sphere revealed several experiences of athletes. Athletes in this study were found to have high levels of enthusiasm for their sport upon arrival. Compared to previous sport experiences, these athletes discovered higher levels of intrateam competition, more demanding coaches, and an expectation of athletic excellence. The lifestyle cost of competing at the collegiate level was found to be extremely high. Athletes trained longer and more frequently than before, which began to cut into their academic and social lives. The athletes in this study suggested that "role conflict" (p. 354) and "role overload" were experienced during their college years.

Over time, the athletes adjusted and were better able to manage their roles as students and athletes. However, athletes often found their athletic selves and academic selves in competition with one another. Additionally, athletes were not highly engaged with the rest of the student body and spent their social time with their athletic peers (Miller & Kerr, 2002). They suggested that college athletes created their own culture and were relatively isolated

from the rest of the study body. Across the literature, college athlete isolation from the student body has been supported (Adler & Adler, 1985; Meyer, 1990).

In an examination of the transformation of college sport into a form of commercial entertainment, Sack (1987) described athletes within corporate college sport, as a departmental disposition non-specific to a sport, as "hard-pressed" (p. 32) to reconcile their athlete and academic roles because of the demands placed on them in those roles. Athletes within corporate models of athletics were likely to be academically under-prepared for college, earned lower grade point averages, were less likely to graduate, and more likely to feel pressure to be athletes before being students. Under the pretense that athletic programs become more and more profitable while athletes themselves do not see those increased benefits, Sack predicted that the governing body of college sport would have its values and intentions questioned.

College sport has also been found to limit athletes' abilities to engage in autonomous behaviors (Kimball, 2007). Through open-ended interviews of football, men's golf, women's basketball, and women track athletes at a Division I institution, Kimball (2007) explored how and why men and women college athletes chose to participate in an activity that greatly limits autonomy. The structure of Division I athletics was deemed to impose pressure, obligation, and compliance at levels that deterred individuals from being autonomous. Despite this, the majority of participants reflected positively about their experiences as college athletes. Relationships became increasingly important for athletes in this study as friends impacted decision-making processes and sport enjoyment. Interestingly, in most situations teammates were "more influential in altering individual's behaviors" (p. 833) than were coaches or instructors. Kimball implied that in terms of work ethic, both on

and off the field, the culture of the team and teammates was greatly influential on individual behavior.

Athletes typically have regularly scheduled activity; frequent travel; access to a variety of resources such as immediate medical attention with trainers, academic counselors, and tutors; and some have funding for school and living expenses. More important than the experiences and differences of athletes and non-athletes are meanings assigned to those experiences and the impact they have on experiences of college life (Birrell, 1987).

Athletes and Academic Performance

One of the most substantial areas of literature concerning college athletes is the relationship between academic achievement and athletic participation. Positive and negative relationships have been found between college athletic participation and academic performance (Miracle & Rees, 1998; Umbach et al., 2006). Stereotypes of athletes as "unintelligent and unqualified" (Jolly, 2008, p. 148) are often perpetuated by instructors and students. Variations among institutions across the country blur the ability to judge the quality of athletes' undergraduate academic experiences (Umbach et al., 2006). Understandably, "not enough is known about the extent to which intercollegiate athletes devote time and energy to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college" (Umbach et al., 2006, p. 711). A college's most essential task is providing the best possible education to its students (Bowen & Levin, 2003). For this reason, individual student's academic performance is important above all else, regardless of the supplemental activities in which he or she engages.

Athletes tend to come into college optimistic about their academic and athletic endeavors and remain so throughout their freshman year. However, after the first year of

college, athletes became disillusioned with coursework as they “realized how difficult it was to keep up” academically (Adler & Adler, 1985, pp. 243-244). Eventually, many athletes became disenchanted with going to and participating in class as the athletic demands overwhelmed athletes’ concentration and commitment.

Division I athletes have also been shown to be more likely to feel pressure to prioritize sport over school. As athletes progressed through school their attitudes, effort, and goals changed and negatively impacted their academic performance: “Some began to do only the minimum to get by” (Adler & Adler, 1985, p. 35). Ultimately, athletic failure became frequent and the athletes began to blame others for their failures. Participation in college athletics was pinned as the “vortex of… celebrity and fantasies” (Adler & Adler, 1985, p. 248) into which athletes willingly enter.

In a study that incorporated men and women across all university sports, only male basketball and football players were found to have statistically lower cognitive abilities through the second and third years of college (Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison, & Hagedorn, 1999). Evidence has also shown that men in non-revenue, or low profile, sports and women in all sports did not display a significant difference in academic performance from non-athletes (Pascarella, et al., 1999). These findings were consistent with an examination of first year students as well (Pascarella, Bohr, Nora, & Terenzini’s, 1995). Big time sport athletes performed consistently lower academically than other groups of athletes and non-athletes, as was the case in previous literature (Adler & Adler, 1985; Eitzen, 1987; Miracle & Rees, 1998).

Grades, coursework, major, and graduation rates have been used as indicators of college athlete academic success (Eitzen, 1987). Athletes across Division I institutions have

been shown to achieve lower scores on entrance exams than non-athletes, receive statistically lower grades than non-athletes, and typically enroll in less rigorous courses and majors. High profile sport participants also have lower graduation rates than the student body (Eitzen, 1987). However, athletes in non-high profile sports have had higher graduation rates and grades similar to the student body (Eitzen, 1987). The impediments of academic achievement were attributed to the pressure, demands, and expectations placed on athletes (Adler & Adler, 1985; Eitzen, 1987). Interestingly, women athletes were found to have grades, coursework, and graduation rates on par or better than that of the regular student body (Eitzen, 1987; Sack, 1987). However, Eitzen (1987) said that it has become important to look at women's sport as it progresses because women athletes may take on characteristics of men's programs as women's sport grows and becomes more professional and commercialized.

The academic sphere in Miller and Kerr's (2002) study, which framed athletes lives into three academic, athletic, and social spheres, was described as a "difficult transition" (p. 354) by incoming freshmen athletes. Athletes were found to struggle to adjust to the quantity and complexity of work at college, and the required amount of independence to be successful. Despite a commitment to academics, athletics impaired students' academic success. Interestingly, after their first year athletes became more enthused academically. Among the reasons for this was a willingness to select classes that sparked intellectual interest and a realization that grades were important for post athletic competition endeavors. The idea that athletes become more interested in coursework as they progress through college is one of many ongoing ambiguities in the literature (Miller & Kerr, 2002).

In another study, the academic experiences of women volleyball and basketball scholarship players at a Midwestern Division I institution were overwhelmingly positive

(Meyer, 1990). Participants did well academically in high school and perceived college to be an extension of that success. Only 30% of those women athletes considered ineligibility resulting from poor academic performance as a possibility for themselves. In fact, many became more motivated to engage in academics than previously. A majority of participants said they enjoyed their coursework and that the team culture supported and positively influenced individuals scholastically. Meyer's study of women athletes contradicts Eitzen's (1987) notion that the development of women's sports will make women athletes more professionalized and lose academic equality with the student body.

Despite popular belief, athletes across many universities have been shown to be similar from the student body with regards to academic achievement. In a study with over 7,500 men and women athletes and close to 50,000 men and women non-athletes, athletes actually achieved slightly higher graduation rates than non-athletes (Umbach et al., 2006). Participants in this study ranged across the three divisions of NCAA athletics. Those in big business athletic departments were not distinguished. The findings for women were supported by previous studies (Meyer, 1990; Eitzen, 1987) in that women athletes and non-athletes achieved similarly academically.

The literature on athletes in college is contradictory. Athletes are subject to intense demands on their time by participating in sport. High profile male athletes tend to be less prepared academically and are unable to cope with the rigor of academic at the collegiate level. Men athletes in high profile sports also have career outlets in their sport. Women and participants in non-revenue generating sports, tend to have similar academic achievement levels to that of the student body. Since women sports are non-revenue and lack ongoing career possibilities, questions remain about the experience of women college athletes.

Women's Collegiate Sport

The last twenty-five years have seen dramatic increase in the number of women college athletes. In 1970, prior to the development of Title IX, the number of women's college athletic teams averaged only 2.5 teams per school. In 1978 that number grew to 5.61 and in 2002 reached 8.35 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2002). In the 2002-2003 academic year 375,851 students competed as intercollegiate athletes. Of those 375,851 participants, 160,997, approximately 43%, were women (The National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2005).

Women physical educators and faculty members originally founded and sponsored women's collegiate sport (Birrell, 1987; Miracle & Rees, 1998). The intial model for women's sport focused on educational values and social interaction rather than competition (Birrell, 1987). Beginning in the 1920s this remained the focus for approximately fifty years. In the 1970s the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) was founded in order to develop "high-level competition, records, championships, and public recognition" (Miracle & Rees, 1998, p. 232). It is at this point that women's college athletics began to take shape in a similar fashion to men's programs. Title IX was instituted 1972 and resulted in the increased demand for and subsequent participation in sports by women. Interestingly though, it wasn't until 1981 that women's sport was incorporated into NCAA (Birrell, 1987; Miracle & Rees, 1998). After NCAA championships for women were implemented, the AIAW folded and women's athletics "came under the jurisdiction of the NCAA…. Since then, women's sports have come to mirror the men's system in almost every detail" (Miracle & Rees, 1998, p. 232).

Men have long been under a system that stresses success, competition, and economic productivity. Women, however, have rapidly transitioned into the male athletic world only within the last 25 to 30 years, thus making women's experiences within a male model of college sport unique to women (Birrell, 1987). As women's sport came under the direction of a male model of sport, the structural and philosophical changes resulted in increased emphasis on traditionally male values (Blinde, 1989). Birrel (1987) warned that "exposure to the highly competitive male model [of sport] may alter women's experiences of sport" (p. 92).

The Development of Women's College Soccer

Women's soccer has seen a substantial increase in participation during the last thirty years. In 1977, 2.8% of colleges supported women's soccer programs but by 2002, 87.9% of colleges supported women's soccer (Acosta & Carpenter, 2002). In 2007, Division I women's soccer consisted of 314 teams across 37 national conferences (The National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2008a).

Prior to the adoption of women's sport into the NCAA, the AIAW supported women's college soccer. In 1975 Brown University was the first school to officially support a women's soccer program (Markovitz & Hellerman, 2001b). The AIAW sponsored the first women's national championship in 1981. The first NCAA women's college soccer championship was held in 1982. Since the incorporation of women's sport into the NCAA, women's soccer has rapidly developed.

One possible explanation for the explosion of women's soccer is that men's soccer was not and has not been a dominant sport in the United States (Markovitz & Hellerman,

2001b). The lack of a dominant men's soccer system left room for women's soccer to develop without intense competition for resources in the college game. Perhaps the profitability of college football and basketball provided many of the resources and funding required to launch women's soccer programs. Additionally, women's soccer was a convenient way for colleges and universities to meet the Title IX demands for women's programs. Women's soccer developed primarily in colleges and universities in the United States, which is unlike much of the rest of the world where men's club soccer has been a major domestic and international sport and women's soccer is being modeled off of the men's programs (Markovitz & Hellerman, 2001b).

The Transition to College

Transitioning to college is a unique experience for students and athletes. Most incoming freshmen enter an atmosphere without parental guidance for the first time in their lives. Freshmen develop expectations before coming to college but the development, maturation, exploration, responsibility, and commitment that is gained within college and is made possible because of student independence from parental figures. Athletes, however, experience a different transition than non-athletes.

Incoming Freshmen Expectations

One recommendation for freshmen arriving to campus at the start of a term was that colleges should "limit who is allowed to come to campus before welcome week begins" (Kuh, 2005, p. 104) because students who arrive on campus before the official welcome week "can acquire anti-intellectual habits during this period" (p. 104). This has profound implications for soccer players who arrive on campus before the student body. Does this

mean that involvement in sport is an anti-intellectual experience that counters the intentions of the college academic experience?

In terms of expectations, students in the general student body have been shown to have high expectations of their academic, personal, and social selves before arriving on campus (Schilling et al., 2005). In classes, students have "fears of hard, intimidating, and aloof professors and large classes with intense competition" (p. 113). Students also emphasize "independence, freedom, and identify the need to work harder than when they were in high school" (p. 113). Personal time has a number of avenues of engagement, such as family, sleep, and extracurricular activities. Non-athletes have been found to reduce their extracurricular activity in order to adjust to their new environment. Students have also cited casual socializing and new relationships as critical to their educational experiences (Keup, 2007).

First Year Experiences

The first year of college is a time for independence, self-development, and maturation (Schilling & Schilling, 2005). The freshmen year is a period of transition for new students as they move from high school to college. Between 18 and 25 years of age, life is marked by instability and a lack of adult responsibilities and commitments, which allows individuals the opportunity and time to explore identity, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000, 2006; Keup, 2007). However, intensely involved activities, athletic or not, might facilitate the development of intimate friendships (Bonhert, Aikins, & Edidin, 2007).

Students' attitudes reflect a wide variety of experiences during their first year of college including academic involvement, importance of money, university life, conflicting

emotions, and preparedness and support (Franklin, Cranston, Perry, Purtle, & Robertson, 2002). First year students at a metropolitan university identified balancing these elements at school as a “necessity” (Franklin et al., 2002, p. 70) for success and for a brighter future.

In the Franklin et al. (2002) study, a wide range of concerns about money were revealed with some students considering long term financial wealth and stability and others thinking about financial survival in the present. A few students who were paying for school out of pocket or through federal programs voiced concern over living without “expected money” (Franklin et al., 2002, p. 76). Students who worked while enrolled in college encountered an additional set of responsibilities to consider when balancing schoolwork and other activities.

Adapting to college level courses has been cited as an important factor in adjusting to college life (Franklin et al., 2002). Large lecture halls and impersonal professors can hinder academic development (Franklin et al., 2002). However, college courses were helpful in developing students’ time management skills. Residence halls, which have been perceived as “uncomfortable, unsafe, and nervous” (p. 77), were difficult environments in which to accomplish coursework, but sharing living spaces and resources became important to social development.

Residence halls have also been characterized as a space in which to meet new people. Campus life events such as social events and various activities were important to feelings of involvement for most of the participants (Franklin et al., 2002). Formal organizational membership has not been viewed as one of the best ways to engage first-year students (Keup, 2007). However, students who did not get involved in campus activities have expressed a need to belong. Some expressed feelings of loneliness and were overwhelmed when not

involved in social activities (Franklin et al., 2002). Emotions around academic issues were described with feelings of frustration, nervousness and being overwhelmed (McIlroy & Jones, 1993; Franklin et al., 2002).

College Athletes' Transition from High School to College

For college athletes the transition from high school to college is difficult because athletes must transition to college life and to college athletics (Miller & Kerr, 2002), which is different from the non-athlete who transitions only to college life. Athletes must fulfill roles as both student and athlete. In their study of former college athletes, Kleiber and Malik (1989) raised the question, "Is five years enough time to execute both roles faithfully and effectively?" (p. 208) Students are subject to the pressures associated with higher education, such as increased expectations in coursework and independence (Tracey & Corlett, 1995; Arnett, 2000) and student athletes are subject to the pressures of commercial entertainment (Sack, 1987), higher competition levels and higher expectations (Miller & Kerr, 2002), and the extensive time demands of participation (Adler & Adler, 1985; Kimball, 2007; Jolly, 2008) that are commonly found in Division I college athletics.

Involvement in a collegiate sport at the Division I level may inhibit the independent nature of early adulthood because of the immense time demands and commitment level associated with *big time* collegiate sport (Miller & Kerr, 2002). For example, the time commitment associated with participation can limit an individual's ability to explore other opportunities for engagement as frequently or as thoroughly as a non-athlete. For athletes, the first year has been described as "a mixture of fun, stress, and challenge mixed with a very busy schedule" (Tracey & Corlett, 1995, p. 96).

Athletes' involvement in sport exacerbates the difficulties of balancing commitments in college, which is similar to the balancing involved in working a job. For non-athletes the new academic freedom and independence found in college can be a difficult adjustment that requires a responsible balance of social and academic endeavors (Keup, 2007). For athletes then, balancing social, academic, and sport pursuits is perhaps more difficult because of the additional responsibility that sport participation requires. Additionally, students on scholarship may experience increased pressure to perform to maintain grades (Franklin et al., 2002). Athletes on scholarship must achieve grades in order to maintain their scholarship must also perform in the sporting arena to keep their scholarship suggesting that they are under additional pressure and possible stress for achievement.

Athletes have been found to spend time with their teammates on and off the field as well as in and out of the classroom (Adler & Adler, 1985; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Kimball, 2007). Heavy time investments in Division I collegiate sport may provide the base in which intimate friendships can form while at the same time limiting the ability of athletes to explore other opportunities. Athletes and non-athletes come together from across of the country and sometimes from across the globe. The difference lies in that athletes are given a new group with which to associate while non-athletes can choose the activities and people with which they frequently engage.

In one of the few qualitative studies to explore the transitional experience of Division I college athletes, Tracey and Corlett (1995) reported six major themes of men and women track athletes' first semester of college: how experiences compared to expectations of college life, independence, change in emotional maturity, motivation to succeed, developing a sense of affiliation with others, and the importance of time management and organization as a

survival strategy. Their study reviewed the entire freshmen year with interviews occurring early in the first semester, second semester, and after the completion of the freshmen year. Given the relative singularity of this study, it serves as a primary source on college athletes' transitions to college.

Tracy and Corlett (1995) found that discussion of college life by men and women track athletes was often centered on academics rather than athletics or social experiences, and athletes' initial feelings of being overwhelmed evolved into feelings of being "survivors" (Tracey & Corlett, 1995, p. 92) with surprise at the volume rather than the difficulty of work for school. Expectations of a more difficult sporting experience, in terms of demands and requirements, evolved into surprise at the volume and intensity of involvement in sport. It is not surprising then to learn that college athletes viewed their first semesters as a survival period with both school and track demanding more time and commitment than expected.

The independence found in the first semester of college for the participants in the Tracey and Corlett (1995) study was viewed as a vehicle for a "better sense of self" (p. 93). These athletes acknowledged the privileges and responsibilities that came that come with greater freedom. Independence was expressed as a "vehicle for obtaining a better sense of self" (p. 93) and in which participants began to understand that discipline was required to be successful in college. Motivation to succeed was discussed primarily in academic terms. Motivation for athletic performance was often discussed only when researchers prompted questions. This suggests that the college athletes in this study were concerned first about school and second about sport.

Time management was one of the most prominent themes in the Tracey and Corlett (1995) study. Some athletes reduced course loads and others altered their social expectations

to meet the demands of being a college athlete. Interestingly, five of the twenty-one students involved in this study decided not to continue their sport during the course of the study, all of whom reported lack of time as a major influence in their decision not to play. The athletes who did continue their sport experiences disregarded this notion as untrue. The six themes established at the mid-way point of this study represent one of the few exemplars from which this project can make direct comparison. Unfortunately, the difference between the men and women in the study was not a focal point for the authors. Women's transitional experiences may be interpreted differently than men's.

Women have demonstrated their ability to adjust better to college than men and all athletes have shown better adjustment than non-athletes (Melendez, 2006). This is contradictory to literature that contends high profile athletes struggle to adjust to college life because they are less prepared for college (Bowen & Levin, 2003). The first semester of college is a difficult transition (Miller & Kerr, 2002), one scattered with new and raised expectations requiring a rededication of priorities that can evoke feelings of survival (Tracey & Corlett, 1995). Considerable stress, extensive time demands, and raised expectations are common among first year college athletes. The ways in which these experiences are interpreted by women athletes, or specifically women soccer players, have yet to be a focal point of research.

Soccer's Relevance

Many athletes whose competitive season is in the fall arrive on campus prior to the official welcome week and commencement of classes. Soccer is an interesting sport to

examine because it is one of the fall sports that begin early. Time spent on campus prior to official functions varies across institutions due to different academic calendars.

Once freshmen soccer athletes arrive on campus they are thrust straight into the demands of athletic training. Freshmen who are not athletes or who are in sports that start later in the academic year have a period of un-obligated time during their adjustment to college life that may be beneficial. Freshmen soccer players, however, do not have that luxury.

The number of training hours for soccer is often higher at the start of the season because student course-loads at the beginning of the semester are light in comparison to the rest of the semester. Soccer participants are focused on soccer, with two or three practices every day, well before they begin classes. This may impact how students adjust to the collegiate lifestyle and academic expectations.

Use of Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interaction (SI) is a theoretical framework that gives priority to the meanings and interpretations individuals give to their own experiences. In this study, SI allowed participants' perspectives to guide the interviews, analysis, and subsequent discussion. Giving voice to collegiate athletes themselves captured the perspective of the athletes, which is who Chelladurai and Reimer (1997) called the most important constituent of college athletics. Use of SI influenced the shaping of the two guiding research questions, which were designed to capture the perspective of the participants. Hearing what the participants have to say disclosed their perception of their experiences, not simply what outsiders think those experiences to be.

The interviews conducted in this study were impacted by the use of SI in multiple ways. The interviews were designed to be open-ended to allow participants the opportunity to discuss what they perceive. The interview guide (see Appendix C) used during interview contained short and open-ended questions that were organized around periods of time and divided participants' lives into three aspects including, soccer, school, and free time. The journaling questions were also constructed with the aim of giving participants open-ended questions that provided a pathway for their perspective.

During the course of the interviews, the interview guide served primarily as a way to prompt discussion rather than rigidly shape it. Participants' responses influenced how discussion took form and not the guide. With the exception of the three spheres, little influence about what to talk about came from the interview guides. For example, question two on the interview guide (see Appendix C) asks, during the first few weeks of school, how did participants' lives take shape with soccer, school, and free time? This question inquires into their experiences within those specific spheres, but it was the participants who dictated how the conversation progressed. Though every participant invariably discussed similar and different experiences, each participant took the discussion in a unique direction.

Summary

College athletics is a hotly debated topic throughout scholarly literature. Revenue producing sports have traditionally shown disparities between athletes and the non-athlete study body with regards to academic achievement. Adaptation to college academics has been shown to occur at equal or quicker rates in non-revenue sports, and specifically women's sports, than the regular student body. During the tremendous transition from high school to college a plethora of emotions and experiences are negotiated that stem from the

commitments students have made. For athletes, involvement in sport brings about many additional hours of obligated time, responsibility, and expectations. Managing time, prioritizing commitments, and meeting expectations, are all necessary to collegiate success and contentment. What is not known is how women athletes negotiate the transition to college. Therefore, this study will examine the following two questions:

1) What are freshmen soccer players' experiences during their first semester at college?
2) How do freshmen soccer players balance sports, academics, and other aspects of their first freshmen semester?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

"They just need to keep in mind what's gonna make them happy and I guess for me it was realizing that soccer wasn't what I wanted any more. You know I just did what I thought was gonna make me happy." ~ Sarah

The purpose of this study was to explore how incoming freshmen on the women's soccer team perceived and negotiated the transition from high school to college during their first semester of college. The guiding research questions were:

1. What are freshmen soccer players' experiences during their first semester at college?
2. How do freshmen soccer players balance sports, academics, and other aspects of their first freshman semester?

This chapter begins with discussion of participant selection followed by a brief profile of the participants and the context of The University. It then presents data collection techniques and explains data analysis procedures. This chapter discloses my subjectivity, the steps taken to manage my subjectivity, and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection and summary.

Context

The University soccer team, which was located in the Southeastern United States, was composed of 27 women, aged 18 to 22, including nine incoming freshmen; it competed at the

NCAA Division I level. The following were expectations of being a team member: attend all training sessions and games; travel, occasionally across the country on selected weekends, for competition; have high individual skill level; actively engage with intense competition in training and games; participate in activities outside of training games, such as film analysis and weight lifting; and as a freshman, complete eight hours of study hall in accordance with the NCAA.

The Fall 2007 academic term commenced with classes on August 16th. Students were allowed to move into residence halls on the 12th of August. Soccer team members arrived on campus on the 8th or 9th of August and training began the 11th. The following were expectations of students in their coursework in accordance with the NCAA: keep a minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) of a 2.0/4.0; complete twelve hours of coursework each semester and 24 inside of an academic year; and attend all classes in accordance with The University athlete academic policies. Additionally, The University athletic department monitors athletes' class attendance their freshmen year with "class checkers" who take attendance specifically for athletes. Athletes that the athletic department determines are at risk for dropping below a 2.0 GPA are also monitored regardless of their academic year.

The University soccer team was founded in the mid 1990s and has been successful on the national level multiple years since its inception. Academically, they consistently achieved one of the top team GPA's among The University sport teams and did so again during this study. During the season in which this study occurred the team qualified and advanced out of the first round of the NCAA Tournament. Additionally, they placed near the top of the standings in their conference, one of the most competitive in the country, and had one of the

best seasons on record for The University. Their final season ranking was inside the top 25 for every major poll in the country.

Participants

Eight women who were freshmen varsity soccer players on The University team were the participants. All eight participants were Caucasian and came to The University from relatively affluent backgrounds. Three of the participants attended high school in the state in which The University was set, three were from the Western United States, and two were from the South Central United States. All eight participants were full-time students, in accordance with NCAA regulations, and were taking a course load of twelve or more credit hours for the fall semester of 2007, which was their first semester on The University campus. Of the nine incoming players, eight chose to participate fully and immediately when offered an opportunity to participate in this study. These eight participants signed a consent form (see Appendix A). One soccer player declined to participate and said that she was uncomfortable being involved in the project.

The participants played soccer in high school and in club soccer prior to coming to The University. Participants achieved accolades for their soccer participation ranging across local, state, regional, and national levels. The following are examples of participants' achievements in soccer before arriving at The University: State Olympic Development Program (ODP) team, Regional ODP team, and National ODP pool -though not selected to the national team-; Club soccer state champion, club regional champion, and high school state champion; high school all-American, high school all-city, high school all-state, high school team Most Valuable Player (MVP). Their recruiting class was ranked in the top 25 in the country and they were regarded as some of the best players in their age group.

Academically, they all met criteria to gain entry into The University and were cleared to play soccer under the NCAA.

Participant Selection

In selecting a sample, a researcher should be in a position to record or elicit behaviors that are relevant to a concept, hypothesis, proposition, or theory (Denzin, 1978). Participants for this study were selected using convenience and criterion sampling procedures (Creswell, 2003; Henderson, 2006). The women's soccer team at The University was selected out of convenience since I was serving as a volunteer assistant coach with that team. In many respects beyond convenience, this was a good team for the purposes of this study because the athletic association at The University is one of the largest and most prestigious in the country and the soccer team has been a successful program. This gave me an insider perspective not normally taken advantage of in research on athletes. Criterion sampling requires that all participants must meet some criterion in order to participate. (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 1998; deMarrais, 2004). A criterion sampling strategy is appropriate when the population fitting the required criteria is "quite small" (deMarrais, 2004, p. 60). The sample of incoming freshmen who were on the women's soccer team was appropriate for this project since the aims of the study pertain to the transition of freshmen college athletes.

Each participant met these two criteria:

1. They should be women on the varsity soccer team for the fall of 2007;
2. They must be incoming freshmen to The University.

Since this project was exploring women's transitions into a major Division I college soccer program, these criterion ensured a sample of individuals who would experience that transition.

Data Collection

Participant journaling, researcher journaling, and interviews were the three methods of data collection used in this project, with interviews serving as the primary data source. Data collection was aimed at gaining participants' emic perspective (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) around their experiences in soccer, school, and their free time during the first semester of their freshman year of college.

The initial stage of data collection involved the use of journaling for both participants and the researcher. Participant journaling was a useful in obtaining the language and words of participants (Creswell, 2003) and represents data that is "thoughtful" (p. 187). Given the head coach's concern with the time requirement for players' participation in the project, journaling was an amicable solution because it was convenient for the participants and was unobtrusive (Creswell, 2003).

The participants kept a personal journal from October 2007 through December 2007. I prompted participants with open-ended questions on a weekly or bi-weekly basis (see Appendix B). Questions centered on participants' experiences and emotions around school, soccer, and their free time. For example, two recurring questions were as follows: tell me about the best things that happened since your last entry; and what pressures and concerns do you have right now? Participants had the option of disclosing journal contents to me. Regardless of disclosure, the journal was used directly before and during the interview process to help participants remember their thoughts, feelings, and emotions during their first semester at college.

During the fall, I was able to view entries from three players, one of which helped inform the interview guide. The question about feeling *settled* stems directly from Sarah's

journal. Participants' journals were collected upon their return to campus in January of 2008, following the winter break between academic semesters. Three players returned completed journals, two returned partially completed journals, two did not return journals and had no explanations as to why, and one woman chose to keep her journal. After transcribing the journals that were partially or totally completed, they were returned to the participants for recollection purposes prior to interviews.

Unfortunately, the journals were not as influential as I had hoped. Many participants did not return journal entries and did not give reasons as to why, they just said they forgot them. I believe that four or five participants did not write in their journals. Because of this, I decided not to use the journals as a data source and instead relied solely on the interviews.

During the same time that participants were journaling, I kept a field journal that was used to record observations and experiences throughout the course of the competitive season for the women's soccer team. I recorded information on an action-oriented basis. When I observed something that I thought might inform the project I recorded it. For example, one morning a participant had stayed up through the night to study for an exam and then performed poorly in training, which resulted in frustration from teammates and coaches. These observations and experiences were limited to the soccer environment and this is further discussed in the *Delimitations and Limitations* section. Observation gave me first hand experience with participants and helped identify patterns for discussion later (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). These notes were recorded as soon as possible after an event (Henderson, 2006), such as the one mentioned earlier, but not within the presence of team members and coaches. This record was generally developed in the evening after a notable moment occurred, helping me draw a clearer line between my roles as researcher and

coach while engaged with soccer. So, I intentionally did not write in the journal until after an event or experience was finished, often until I was out of the sport setting.

Like the journals, my field journal did not develop as a significant source of data. Because I was limited to observing participants in the soccer setting only, often in training or games, and the effort I made to distinguish myself as a coach in the soccer setting, I did not feel the data gathered was substantial enough, in size and quality, to include. It was difficult to determine the usefulness of the journals as a memory recollection tool because I did not know if participants had completed their journals. I saw two participants reading their journals before the interview but I was unaware at what length, if any, other participants used their journals before interviews. The interviews, because I chose not to include the journals and observation, became the sole source of data.

Interviews utilize thick and rich description giving a sense of the interviewees' experiences (Creswell, 2003; Henderson, 2006). Interviewing was selected as the primary data source because the informal structure, which is akin more to a conversation than a formal event, allows the participant's perspective to unfold as she or he sees it (Taylor, 1984; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Interviewing provides the opportunity to learn about what cannot be seen and to explore possible explanations of what is seen (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The goal of the interviews was to discover how participants perceived, negotiated, and felt about their experiences during their first semester at The University. Specific areas of interest included: experiences within soccer, school, and events outside of those spheres; the first two weeks of being on campus; the experience of becoming or not becoming "settled" at The University; and expectations that were held, met, and unmet, before and during the first

semester of college. Open-ended or semi-structured interviews allow the rsearcher and participant to shape the interview as it progresses (Wollcott, 1999).

An interview guide was constructed (see Appendix C) and served as the basis for interviews. The interview guide is a list of general areas to cover and not a structure schedule or protocol, according to Taylor & Bogdan (1984). The interview guide was developed with consideration from my initial interests and insights developed from the participants' and my journals (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), and was modified as additional interviews were conducted. For example, I was initially under the assumption that the players had very little free time during the fall. Thus, my initial interview guide included questions about balancing commitments and setting priorities. Another series of questions revolved around the idea of becoming and being "settled" at The University. The concept of being "settled" was derived directly from one participant's journal from the fall. As interviews progressed there were five questions that framed the interview but the participants were free to engage with the questions as they saw it, thus directing much of the interview themselves.

In an effort to encourage participants to provide their own accounts and to limit confusion in the way they interpreted questions, the questions were open-ended, neutral, singular, clear and short (Henderson, 2006; deMarrais, 2004). For example, the opening question for players who had turned in some portion of their journals was: Before classes began, what was soccer like for you? Near the end of the interview one series of questions began with: What were your expectations before coming to The University? The opening question for participants who did not disclose their journals to me was : How has writing in this journal helped you to reflect on your experiences this past semester? The sequencing of

questions was general to specific, and controversial or sensitive questions were incorporated once rapport had been established.

Interviews took place between January 15th, 2008, and March 15th, 2008 and lasted between 45 minutes and 120 minutes. In-depth interviews require an atmosphere in which the participant can "respond comfortably, accurately, and honestly" (Henderson, 2006, p. 108) and they become more like conversation than formal events (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The first effort to build rapport and put interviewees at ease was accomplished by asking participants to choose the location at which the interview would take place. Locations such as dorm rooms, offices, common study rooms on campus, coffee shops, the soccer facility, and empty classrooms were offered. The first interview took place at The University Student Study Building, which contains multiple small private study rooms. I offered each participant the opportunity to choose a location and also told them where the previous interviews had taken place, but all participants chose to use The University Student Study Building.

Prior to each interview I discussed my brief personal history about the project (Henderson, 2006; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I spoke about my struggles with the project, my ambitions for a Ph.D. program, and current activities with the team. To some, I disclosed details about my life, such as where I have lived, my family, and my experiences during graduate school. I did this to build rapport with participants and to ease any tension that they may have felt.

Then I explained the purpose of the interview and reviewed the consent form again. Because consent had been given prior to the journaling period, four to five months earlier, I wanted participants to reread the consent form. This was to ensure that participants were

aware of the following precautions: that this project had IRB approval; that the use of interviews was designated only for this project; that they knew participant rights and subsequent protection of those rights; and that they were aware of the risks to participation and the safety measures taken to provide protection. At this point in the interview, it was important to ask if I may record the interview and tell the interviewee that they did not have to answer any questions with which they were uncomfortable, that the tape recorder could be turned off if they felt it necessary, and that the interview could be stopped at any time. Having already signed the consent form many months earlier, I asked participants to give their consent verbally on record. Finally, from the moment interviews began through to their end, I employed the attitude that participants' views were "valuable and useful" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101).

Once consent was given and rapport had begun to build, conversation shifted to the study's purposes. Throughout the interview process, probes were used to expand, explore, clarify, and tighten participants' perspectives (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Creswell, 1998; deMarrais, 2004, Henderson, 2006). According to Taylor & Bogdan (1984), "Qualitative interviewers have to force themselves to constantly ask informants to clarify and elaborate on what they have said, even at the risk of appearing naïve" (pp. 96-97). Probes allow researchers to form clear pictures of people, places, experiences and feelings, based on participants' messages (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). As Henderson (2006) stated, "The key to successful interviewing is getting people to talk" (p. 115).

Multiple strategies were used to get people to talk. When informants sat down for an interview, I immediately became an active and involved listener (Henderson, 2006) by maintaining eye contact; acknowledging statements by nodding, saying "ok," smiling and

laughing; and by being attentive to participants' questions, which were often for clarification of questions asked. This signaled to participants that I was sincerely interested in what they had to say (Taylor, 1984). Being attune to variations in each interviewee was a complex task that required my full attention (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; deMarrais, 2004).

When possible, I used informants' own words when forming probes, which served to keep the focus of descriptions on experiences (Patton, 1980; deMarrais, 2004). Probes were formed from participants' journals, the interview itself, and previous interviews (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Prior to the first interview a list of potential probes was developed based on my thoughts, readings, and participants' journals. During the course of the interview I asked follow-up questions for more information. I sought to explore the participant's perspective and frequently found myself asking questions that were not on my interview guide. Each interview yielded a different perspective and therefore gave me probes across which similarities could be made or refuted. Additionally, I intentionally, as best I could, did not use the question *why,* because the question *why* can turn an interview "toward a causal analysis or rationalization" (deMarrais, 2004, p. 58). Unfortunately, I was unable to keep the question from my mind completely and asked *why* on occasion. Often, I caught myself within moments of those instances and tried to reshape questions immediately afterward.

Participants' experiences of events were sought, not analysis or rationalization of those events and experiences. Questions that were closed-ended, or that could be answered with few words, were consistently avoided (Henderson, 2006). The use of silence was important to give informants time to think, which prevented the cutoff of thoughts and ideas (Henderson, 2006). Remaining neutral, not being judgmental, and refraining from giving

advice are important tactics of interviewing (Taylor, 1984; deMarrais, 2006). I made every attempt to refrain from these actions or reactions.

At the conclusion of each interview, I gave informants the opportunity to add anything they wished to the interview and to ask questions. Most declined to add anything but one participant added information about her family that she had previously not mentioned. I also told participants that I might request an additional interview or contact them with questions. I did not request another interview but I did send participants the descriptions I constructed and asked for feedback. I received clarification on a few simple facts, like from which city a person was from, that I inaccurately recorded.

Security of Data

Once participant journal entries were transcribed the transcriptions were kept in a locked drawer to which only my faculty advisor and I had a key. The journal transcriptions were also located on computer in my office on campus to which only I have access. The interviews were also transcribed and the transcriptions were kept in a locked drawer to which only the researcher and his faculty advisor had a key. Participants' real names were changed in the data so as to ensure that they could not be recognized by anyone except myself.

Audio files were immediately downloaded from the voice recorder to my office computer on campus, to my personal computer, and to an external storage drive for backup purposes. Only I had access to my office computer, my personal computer, and the external drive. In accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies, these precautions helped ensure that the participants' identities were protected.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

No single method of analysis is used across qualitative research. Instead, Creswell (1998) suggested examining common features used by different researchers. Thus, works from several authors and texts informed my analysis.

After all interviews were finished I immediately began transcription of half of the interviews, or four. The other four interviews were transcribed by a transcriptionist. I did use a transcriber in an effort to save time but chose to transcribe half of the interviews myself in an effort to remain close to the data. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Henderson (2006) held that during the transcription process nonverbal data, such as body language and tone of voice, slip away. There is much that is lost during transcription (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In an effort to manage this, during the interview I made note of nonverbal cues, such as animated or idled mannerisms. Also, during the transcription process I included nonverbal actions including stressed words or the informant's behavior, and I made space for comments and notes I had written down during the interview. The nonverbal data that I collected was captured only by what I could remember or by what I could hear on the tape. For example, one participant cried on numerous occasions. I did not write this down each time she cried, for how long, or at what intensity, but I could hear her on the tape and made note of it in the transcription as best I could. Examining audio cues from participants' voices was far simpler than trying to recollect the exact body language and meaning of that body language after the interview because I was able to listen to how a word, phrase, or topic was formed by participants. It was impossible to capture body language and other nonverbal data beyond my recollection, which was highly infrequent relative to the amount of time I spent interviewing.

After each interview was transcribed, I read through transcripts and listened to the audio recordings of each interview multiple times to become intimately familiar with the participants and their words. This was a time consuming process. Transcripts and recordings were read and listened to together as well as independent of one another.

Once a transcription was complete and I was well familiarized with an interview, I began to develop categories, or codes, to sort the text (Creswell, 2003). Miles and Huberman (1984) described codes as "retrieval and organizing devices that allow the analyst to spot quickly, pull out, then cluster all the segments relating to the particular question, hypothesis, concept, or theme" (p. 56). When data analysis is conducted simultaneously with data collection, analysts are able to focus and shape a study as it proceeds (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Unfortunately, due to time constraints I was unable to interview, transcribe, and code between any interviews. Instead, I coded transcriptions only after all interviews were completed. Occasionally, interviews occurred one day after another, making it relatively impossible to complete transcription and coding from one interview before an interview the following day.

Once an initial coding scheme was established with all data sources, I began putting "like-minded" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 133) pieces of data into "clumps," which provided an organizational framework for the data. I first coded transcriptions according to the two research questions. Each clump of data was compared and broken into numerous subcodes (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) according to themes, such as playing experiences, living arrangements, mentors and tutors, and so forth that were initially broad in scope. These clumps and their corresponding subcodes were then meaningfully organized. For example, one theme that I found was time constraint. Time constraint was first organized under

research question two, which sought to identify how soccer players' balance their lives during their freshman year. Once this organization was complete, the most common themes or patterns were selected. Within time constraint, the following organization was used: expectations of free time before college; experiences with time constraints; and uses of free time. This reduction brought out only the most prominent themes within the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and resulted in theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation was reached when themes were seen again and again.

With a number of established themes from the data a second literature review was conducted. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) recognized the importance of a second review because other studies "often provide fruitful concepts and propositions" (p. 135), which help inform and interpret data. The second literature review allowed me to more deeply understand the data and provided information in areas with which I was not familiar. For example, additional readings around gender gave me a sense of men's and women's values. Women's values across the literature helped to better inform my interpretation of the women in this study as they transitioned into a new phase of their lives.

After comparing the most frequent themes with the literature, I further reduced the data to consolidate the themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This additional delimitation of categories allowed me to confidently draw conclusions about the data. It is from this involved process that conclusions were drawn and became the anchor for writing the final chapter.

Negotiating Access

Prior to speaking with participants about the project, I spoke with the head coach about gaining access to players. The coach served as a gatekeeper (Creswell, 2003). His

approval was one step needed for gaining access to the desired participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I informed the coach of the aims of the study, and assured him that I was in no way seeking to expose negative behavior. We agreed that players were busy in the fall because of their commitment to school and soccer, and that involvement would be kept at a level that allowed me to reach theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) but that would not cause any undue stress or risk to the participants. Additionally, we agreed to keep an open and on-going dialogue during the data collection to ensure no undue stress or risk was being placed on the participants. To accommodate this, the methods were left open to slight modification during data collection. The type and amount of modification was to be handled on a case-by-case basis for each participant. Fortunately, no problems arose and no modification was needed.

Duality

I served as a volunteer assistant coach for The University women's soccer team while this project was conducted. My primary concern during this project centered on my dual roles as a developing researcher and as a volunteer assistant coach. It was imperative for me to manage these roles because failure to appropriately monitor my position could have led to major flaws in this study, the loss of my position with the team, and potentially the harm of a participant. I balanced my dual roles by using multiple strategies.

First, I told participants at our initial meeting that I would never speak to them about the project in the soccer setting unless they initiated the discussion. It was understood that no one on the team, apart from the head coach, needed to know that they were participating in this project. During the first month of their participation not one person approached me in the soccer setting about the project. Afterward, approximately once a week one of the

participants would speak to me in the soccer setting about something they were experiencing. No one on the team outside the eight participants spoke to me concerning the project.

Second, I sent a visual cue to participants when I was the researcher and when I was the staff member. I did this through my appearance. In the soccer setting, wherever I may have physically been, I wore soccer attire and in other settings when I was in the student and researcher role, wherever that may have been, I wore school-appropriate attire. When I first approached the students with the project I wore school attire, which was typically jeans and a casual shirt. I tried to never wear soccer attire, which was team-issued shorts, pants, and shirts when discussing the project and I made an effort to speak with them only when I was dressed as a student and not as a coach. On occasion, participants asked me questions or wanted to know how the project was going and I discussed their inquiries regardless of my present role or attire. The difference was that they approached me and I did not approach them. When dressed as a coach, I tried not to initiate contact with the participants. My dress helped me change my mindset appropriately and helped them recognize that I was making strides to keep their participation confidential.

Third, as I mentioned before in the data collection section, observations in the soccer setting were recorded only when I was able to extract myself from that setting. I realize I may have lost valuable data because of this but it was essential for me to maintain my duality.

Lastly, confidentiality of names was assured. Because I was a member of the coaching staff at The University I had to assure participants that information shared within the study would not reach the head coach or any other member of the athletic staff. The participants were told that no personal information shared within the context of the project would go beyond my thesis committee members, individual participants, and myself.

Additionally, using pseudonyms protected individual identities and the identity of The University. This was an important ground rule to implement considering the information shared and my position as a coach and researcher. To further protect confidentiality, I have changed the name of The University, the names of the participants, and other identifying information. Participants selected pseudonyms for themselves.

I also told participants that information from the study would not be shared with the coach or anyone else, apart from the thesis committee members. This was to ensure that participants were able to speak freely without fear of reprehensive action on behalf of the coach or team policy. Information that would be perceived as negative by the coach was kept to a minimum unless it related specifically to the research questions for this study and necessary for better understanding of participants' experiences. Behavior that could result in participants' punishment was not shared. For example, I would not inform the coach of team rules that players broke if they disclosed that information to me.

Researcher Subjectivity and Bias Management

Serving as the research instrument for this project, I invariably had an impact on the willingness of participants to volunteer, which questions to ask, and ultimately what to reveal after analysis. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) stated, "My subjectivity is *the* basis for the story that I am able to tell" (p. 104). As a researcher, it is important to recognize my bias and to provide ways for managing and strengthening validity (Creswell, 2003). This was managed in multiple ways.

The three methods used (interviews, observation, and participant journaling) contribute to the project's credibility and validity. Denzin (1978) refers to this as "between method-triangulation" (p. 302), whereby one method is able to strengthen the deficiencies of

another. According to Creswell (2003), triangulation or use of multiple sources provides more credibility to a study.

Before conducting the first interview, I asked a colleague to interview me using the interview guide that I intended to use during the interview process. This interview, according to deMarrais (2004), disclosed the assumptions and beliefs that I carried into my study. When I was a freshman college athlete, my fellow soccer players were my confidants and at the same time were my only friends. I was isolated from the regular student body, living and associating almost entirely with soccer players. I assumed that this was the case with my participants as well. Also, given my own experiences I assumed that players had little free time during their competitive season and that their lives were scheduled for them.

My own interview reminded me of the negative and positive experiences I had during my freshman year as an athlete. First, the relationship I had with my coach had influenced my experiences and ultimately guided my decision to transfer to another school. Also, I realized my assumption that coaches engage in behavior that pressures athletes to become more involved in the sport and consequently less involved in academia and other aspects of collegiate life. Overall, my experience in college sport as a player gave me a negative attitude toward college sport. I have since turned that negativity into a critical eye aimed at improving the college sporting experience for athletes. It is possible that my critical interest in college sport has grown from that negativity.

When issues of negativity, limited social circles, and structured time came up in the transcripts I asked myself did this come out on its own or did I look for it? For example, it was found that athletes engaged in few activities outside of soccer and school during their first semester. However, the trustworthiness of this finding was upheld when I found that all

eight participants used multiple examples that attested to the lack of free time they had during their first semester.

During the course of analyzing data, I enlisted the help of two colleagues. This strategy, known as peer debriefing, enhances the accuracy of findings and is accomplished by having a reviewer read and ask questions of the data, the analysis, and of the researcher (Creswell, 1998). Profiles were given to participants to read and revise if need be and that helped to ensure I described them accurately. During the course of writing Chapters Four and Five, I attempted to use multiple quotes from the data to support my conclusions. Because I used a great deal of support from the data, the description found in Chapters Four and Five is, at times, repetitive. I also kept a research journal, which was separate from the project, throughout the interviewing and coding procedures. This journal was comprised of notes about personal feelings and values in order to keep checks on personal bias (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Lastly, the *Personal Reflection* section includes a detailed account of the background with which I approached this project. Method triangulation, subjectivity interview, peer debriefing, profile checking, concepts supported by multiple participants in that data, and clarifying personal bias before coming into the study, all speak to my attempt to enhance the trustworthiness of the study and manage my biases in interpretive research.

Delimitations and Limitations

The researcher's interaction with the participants was almost entirely limited to the sporting context. Thus, the researcher's journal reflects observations and notes from that context. No notes or observations were collected outside of the sporting context except for chance encounters around the campus and the city. This is problematic because this study seeks to examine the life of the college soccer player, which involves all spheres of life and

not just the sporting environment. Being able to have access to other spheres might have added insight into college athletes' experiences during this transition to college beyond the experiences discussed and described during participant interviews.

One problem encountered while preparing for interviews was that only three individuals turned their journals over to me. One participant decided to keep her journal and the other four were ambiguous about how much they had completed and if they would turn them in. In order to adjust for this I began interviews with individuals who did not return journals with the following question: How did the journal help you to reflect on your experiences this past fall?

Participant journaling may not be authentic or accurate. It is possible that given the freedom to write at any given time and at any length, some participants neglected to devote appropriate energy or time into the journal. In efforts to hide this, participants could have written when prompted or at a later time without having given much thought to what they wrote. In these instances, the information relayed by the participant would be less valid than another participant who followed directions and devoted time to the journaling questions. However, the journals were intended only to aid recall and participants with incomplete journals still provide valuable information during the interviews.

This study provided rich data on eight freshmen athletes who played on the women's soccer team at The University, but their experiences do not represent the experience of transitioning to college for all college athletes. In particular, The University is unique in regards to university culture, location, sports offered and not offered, administrative and coaching mentalities, and participant characteristics. Colleges across the country cultivate an

environment unique to their college or university in regards to academics, sports, and student life. Invariably, different colleges and universities influence college athletes' experiences.

Also, different sports begin at different periods in the year making for a drastically different first semester. For example, baseball is a spring sport and baseball players do not have a preseason prior to the opening of campus and classes, nor are they involved in baseball during their first semester to the extent they are in the spring. Different coaches and different sports may also require different commitment levels. Basketball players, for example, travel a great deal every week, which requires more time away from campus resulting in missed classes. Additionally, education level, gender, socio-economic status, and individual variability may impact athletes' experiences during their first semester at college.

Personal Reflection

Undertaking this project was a product of personal motivation and passion for soccer, the complexity of college sport, and my interest in women athletes. I viewed this project as a challenge and asked myself the question, 'Can I accomplish a research project?' I am passionate about the topic. An explanation of why I chose this area of interest deserves an explanation because I understand that the qualitative researcher "cares deeply about the substance of the inquiry at hand" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 11). My interests carry potential biases.

I am a former collegiate athlete and I experienced a transition to college at a Division III school. My experiences in college soccer helped shape my interest in research of college sport or soccer and specifically the first year of college for student athletes. My first year of college was mixed with positive and negative experiences.

One of my earliest memories is playing catch with my father. Sport has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. During high school I wanted to play college soccer and chose a school based on its soccer reputation and not on my educational needs. During my time there I failed to connect socially and did not work well with my coach. However, I succeeded in the classroom. Sport was no longer a place where I felt free to express myself. I realized that I would not become a professional soccer player and wanted to pursue something else. I identified that something else as school and thought it best to transfer to a major research university.

Michael Messner's piece on female athletes as contested ideological terrain (1994) spoke to me personally because of my passion for sport and preference for working with women in a sport setting. Sport developed as "a world apart from women" (p. 70) and the male body became a "symbolic representation of … strength, virility, and power." I found this fascinating since the growth of women's sport has opened multiple opportunities for women in the last 30 years. The challenge that women's sport represents against the norm of masculine sport is something I want to explore further. The explosion of women engaging in sport has created a vast array of research possibilities.

My experiences are most certainly different than others, including the participants in this study. However, I can certainly use my experiences as a starting place because they have motivated me to learn. As a researcher, I hope to better understand the nature of sport in American education system with focus on the athletes themselves (Chelladurai & Reimer, 1997). I aim to contribute to the body of knowledge surround sport in American society.

Summary

This project was designed to explore women soccer players' transitional experiences during the first semester of college. A symbolic interactionist perspective was used in order to capture participants' perceptions. The two guiding research questions were informed by symbolic interactionism, which in turn informed the types of questions that were asked of participants during the journaling and interviewing processes. Ultimately, it was the participants' voices that shone through in the data, bringing new light to the understandings of their experiences during their first semester as a college athlete. The interpretations in this study will hopefully provide researchers, education administrators, collegiate administrators, coaches, and players with a window into the collegiate sporting experience of women soccer players. From this view, new questions may arise leading to future research ideas.

CHAPTER FOUR

FIRST SEMESTER EXPERIENCES

"Obviously you've chosen to play a Division I sport at college and that is a huge commitment" ~ Lisa

The focus of this study was two fold: to examine freshmen soccer players' experiences during their first semester at college, and to learn how freshmen soccer players balance sports, academics, and other aspects of their first semester as freshman. This chapter presents the eight participants' individual profiles and then describes participants' experiences in soccer, school, and free time during their first semester at The University. Soccer experiences consist of six themes: (a) commitment; (b) body shock; (c) place on the team; (d) bonding and team chemistry; (e) competition; and (f) coaching. School experiences is composed of four themes: (a) class size; (b) difficulty; (c) exams; and (d) time commitment or workload. Free time experience is comprised of four themes: (a) independence; (b) family and significant others; (c) social experiences; and (d) living arrangements.

Participants

Participants' backgrounds are described here to provide context to this chapter and chapter five. Each participant chose a pseudonym for herself except for Sofia. I assigned her pseudonym because she did not have a preference for a one. Personal description has been limited to protect participants' identities. Every participant was a recruited player

except for one, which was Lisa. She was a walk-on player. The seven participants who received scholarships earned varying amounts for playing soccer. Players were also enrolled in many of the same courses during the fall. Not every course was shared among them but participants all described courses in which fellow freshmen soccer players were also enrolled.

Yolanda

She considered herself a “more independent” person and living on her own was not a concern of hers before and during the fall semester. Her dedication and commitment to school and to soccer were apparent in the way she composed herself during the fall semester.

Yolanda prioritized her life in the following order: school, soccer, and social. During the fall semester two things she wanted others to perceive about her in relation to soccer were her work ethic and “attitude.” For school, she aimed for a 4.0 and though she did not achieve that, she was happy with her academic performance and set the same goal for herself the next semester. Throughout the semester she felt pressure from soccer to perform well that “never really went away,” which she regarded as positive. Her performance in school was influenced by “self-pressure.” Her relationship, which she regarded as a friendship, with the coaching staff was important to her and that relationship was one of the reasons she came to The University.

Unfortunately, she felt there were two aspects of college she was not able to fully experience as a result of her commitment to soccer. She felt she “missed opportunities” such as “clubs, activities and events.” She also wished she would have “branched out and met some people who weren’t athletes.” Yolanda attended high school in the same state in which The University is set and she ultimately felt comfortable and safe at The University.

Susie

Susie lived less than two hours away in the same state in which The University is located. She was a casual person, who appeared to rarely get upset or have conflicts with others, and was brief with her words in the fall. Friendships were important to Susie in high school and almost every one of her friends did not play a sport. She often pondered, “Why do I play soccer?” and her friends asked her that same question and she often found that she “didn’t have an answer.” She felt she “missed opportunities” to engage with friends or activities in high school and during her first semester on campus. As a soccer player she had to watch what she ate and that is something she wished she did not have to do because she loved food. She described soccer as over constructing her life and was a “burden at times.”

Susie regarded her high school soccer experiences as a “joke” because the quality of play was so low and her club team, by contrast, played at a high level. Her club coach and her coach at The University were friends, and had similar personalities and coaching philosophies. Training sessions were similar and the style of play was also similar to what she had previously experienced. The coaches at The University were “almost one of the most important relationships” in Susie’s life, and that was something she did not anticipate. Soccer became central to her life at The University. For her, “school didn’t seem like a priority,” she “cared a lot more about soccer.”

Bee

Before coming to The University Bee was “very dependent” on her mother for even the simplest things. She was homesick during the fall semester until mid-October when she finally considered The University, and not her parents home in the Southwestern United

States, her home. Unlike her experiences in college, she considered herself a “big fish in a small pond” during high school.

Shortly before she arrived on campus Bee, like Lisa, suffered an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tear in one of her knees. As a result of this injury, she was unable to compete or train during the fall. The injury she suffered meant her experiences in the soccer setting were different than many of the non-injured players because she did not practice or play in games. Bee’s injury gave her a different experience in the soccer setting compared to the six participants who were not injured as she spent the fall season rehabilitating her knee.

Soccer is something Bee enjoyed greatly because of her satisfaciton of exercise and the pleasure of play. Two reasons she came to The University were the competition level at which the soccer team competed and the coaching staff. Academically she was “intimidated” by the size of the campus and classes. Despite opening her semester with poor exam scores, she eventually found better ways to prepare for coursework and exams to secure the grades she desired.

Bee kept soccer friends and other friends separate in high school. She valued that difference and appreciated both sets of friends. At The University, she initially had a difficult time with only soccer and athletic friends without having a group of friends independent of the athletic world, but she got to the point where she “would not change that for anything.” When asked what she would say to future freshmen she responded that they should “make new friends early” and not “stress out too much” about soccer and school. She suggested that, though her busy schedule made her feel “rushed,” it “all plays out” in the end.

Lafonda

Lafonda is from the Southwestern United States and had never known anyone who had attended The University. Initially, Lafonda was uncomfortable coming into The University. She cited “expectations” from coaches, players, school, and instructors; and “not knowing anyone” as her major concerns before she arrived on campus. In spite of that, her personality was relaxed, somewhat unconcerned, and light-hearted throughout the fall.

She considered herself a “committed” player and was eager to learn about how to improve her play. Coming into The University, she intended to “prove” herself to coaches and other players and felt good about her performances during the fall. One change from high school to college was the culture in her training. In club and high school soccer the atmosphere was light, often with jokes going around. In college, soccer became more serious and developed early as her first priority. School did not become a priority for Lafonda until grades from the first round of exams were returned and she realized she needed to prepare better for school. After those exams she was able to balance her commitments “easily.”

Lafonda frequently smiled and laughed in the midst of conversations throughout the fall. Like Sarah, she had a room to herself for the first time when she came to college. Growing up with three brothers and four sisters she learned not to make a “big deal” out of boys or “mean” people. She said, “I kind of go with the flow.”

Lisa

Lisa came from a “really, really small” high school where her instructors “preached” the importance of going to a “small liberal arts college.” Her graduating class was 32 people. She chose The University because it was a large school and she wanted to be “just a number” among many people. Despite her conscious choice to attend a large school she was worried

about missing the “student-teacher relationship” she had in high school. She attended high school and her family resides in the South-central United States.

Of the nine freshmen soccer players who came into The University together, Lisa was the only freshman who did not live in the athlete dormitories and instead chose to live in “normal dorms.” Additionally, she chose to join a sorority, which is generally atypical of athletes. Because of her living arrangements and social outlet with the sorority, she was able to “meet a lot more people” than the other freshmen on the team.

Shortly before she arrived on campus Lisa, like Bee, suffered an ACL tear in one of her knees. Because of this, she was unable to compete or train during the fall. Additionally, two months into the season she re-injured the same knee, which set her back because of two months of rehabilitation. The injury she suffered meant her experiences in the soccer setting were different than many non-injured players because she did not practice or play in games. Academically, she had been the valedictorian of her high school but she described herself as the kind of person who “waited until the last minute to do things.” College was no different. Regardless of that fact, “everything worked out” in her courses.

Lisa’s sister, who is also a Division I college athlete, was a source for Lisa to ask questions about college and about choosing to be an athlete. Her sister was instrumental in Lisa’s decision to play soccer in college and served as a confidante by giving her guidance on how to succeed athletically and academically during her first semester. Before coming to campus she was nervous about “the whole college thing,” but by the end of her first semester she regarded her college as a “totally different world than what you’re used to [in high school], but it’s definitely manageable and doable.”

Billy

Billy's family is highly important to her and it is difficult for her to be a great distance from them. Growing up, she had a "rebellious" period during her freshman year in high school when she was kicked out of school. During that same period she almost quit soccer. After attending an alternative school for one year she returned to her high school. She regarded herself as "not the nicest person" and said she tried to "intimidate people" upon first meeting them. She made few friends and frequently fought with others. Eventually, she decided to dedicate herself to soccer and it became her vehicle to begin anew.

Attending The University was her way of making a fresh start because of the distance from her hometown in The South Central United States. She came with the mentality to meet new people and to learn about whom she was and what she wanted to do for a career. Her personality has changed as she is now slightly shy and is often brief with her words. She felt she made the right decision by coming to The University.

During the first few weeks she was pleased with her coaches and the friends she made. Although she missed her family she never felt "homesick" and found comfort in the friends she made on the soccer team, and especially the other freshmen on her team. Competing against others motivated Billy to try harder and she enjoyed the challenge of playing at The University even though she was often frustrated with limited playing time during the fall. School is something she doesn't particularly enjoy but she understands it is a means to a career. Classes were "stressful" at times, but she regarded them as easy and she prefers courses in which there is little personal attention.

During the fall semester Billy learned that "a lot of decisions" she made in the past hurt her "in the future." Past acquaintances, outside of her closest friends, had a negative

view of her and still “think of [her] in that way.” She intended to break down the barriers that kept her from making and keeping friendships. She attributed her “fun college experience” to making new friends, getting along with her team, and liking her coaches.”

Sarah

Sarah was very close with her family and it was difficult being away from them during the fall semester, especially during a period when a relative was sick and she was unable to return home. Fortunately, she is from the state in which The University is situated and her family was able to visit campus more frequently than those players who were not from the same state.

When identifying colleges at which she had opportunities to play soccer, she chose The University because it was a nationally competitive soccer program and a place where she believed she could be happy without soccer. Two of her goals were to play college soccer and start a game, both of which she achieved. And though she loved her coaches and teammates she ultimately decided she did not want to continue playing competitive soccer in college after that first season.

Shortly before coming to college she got into a “slump” with soccer where she was not playing well. That slump carried into pre-season where she became “frustrated” with not being able to do “the simple things” like “playing a ball to feet.” Interestingly, the fitness aspect of soccer became her success during this time. She continued to enjoy the fitness facet of soccer more than practicing into the season. Soccer was important to her but she understood that it was school that was eventually going to get her a job. She achieved the goal she set for school, which was to keep her academic scholarship. Though she is no longer

playing soccer, she has kept the academic scholarship that she received because it was independent of soccer participation.

When asked what she would say to future freshman soccer players if she could speak with them she expressed that making decisions based on what made her happy was important during her first semester. Founded on her decision to attend The University with the knowledge she could be happy without soccer and because of her experiences during the fall Sarah elected not to continue playing.

Sofia

Being away from home was difficult for Sofia. And was the most significant reason she choice to return home at the completion of her first year. She was close with her family and the friends she made in her hometown. School was highly important to her and her intelligence materializes through her personality.

Soccer was not a priority for Sofia but she constantly put herself “under pressure” to perform at a high level during the fall. She said she experienced only five days that she felt she “played as well as [she] should have.” Additionally, she said she liked her coaches and teammates. Academically, Sofia was a strong performer. She was disappointed with her coursework and said it was easy. She said she was “starting [in soccer], doing well in school, [liked] her coaches and really [liked] the girls.” However, despite those positives, she really was not happy at The University.

Socially, Sofia never felt at home. Even though she made friends during the fall she felt like no one really knew her. She said she developed friendships but that did not keep her from feeling “really alone and lonely” at The University. The distance between her and home was not overcome by great coaches and everything, and she believed she would be happier at

home. Sofia was one of the two participants who decided not to continue playing soccer after the fall season.

First Semester Experiences

During analysis the data regarding participants' lives were divided into three categories, athletic, academic, and free time experiences. This model was originally developed by Miller and Kerr (2002) with *social experiences* in place of free time. For the purposes of this study, social experiences were relabeled with free time experiences to better capture the breadth of non-soccer and non-school activities. These three categories helped organize interviews with questions that focused on each grouping. Within soccer, the following six themes were established from the data: (a) commitment; (b) body shock; (c) place on the team; (d) bonding and team chemistry; (e) competition; and (f) coaching. In school, the following four themes were determined: (a) class size; (b) difficulty; (c) exams; and (d) commitment. In free time experiences, which was designed to capture information outside soccer and school, the following four themes were identified: (a) independence; (b) family; (c) social experiences; and (d) living arrangements.

Soccer

Soccer was imposed as a category because, like school, participants were bound to engage with soccer during the fall. One criterion for participation in the study was that participants were soccer players, thus making soccer experiences highly important to their lives and to this study. Relative to school and other experiences, soccer dominated the discussion from every participant. Six themes were developed through the analysis: (a) commitment; (b) body shock; (c) place on the team; (d) bonding and team chemistry; (e)

competition; and (f) coaching. These six themes were identified because they were the concepts that influenced participant's descriptions of their soccer experiences during the fall. Themes that were less relevant, such as travel experiences, were discussed by relatively few participants compared to the six prominent themes and were not used. They are ordered in this fashion because the earlier themes help inform the later themes. Each theme will be described alongside the data used to characterize each theme.

Commitment. Players recognized soccer as a significant commitment of their experiences. They discussed their commitment to soccer through preseason training and throughout the semester. A frequent comment was participants' lack of free time during the semester, which is strongly linked to their time commitment to soccer.

The initial commitment participants made was in the form of preseason training. Players arrived on campus before the student body to participate in training. Preseason training consisted of three days with three sessions per day, one session on the day before the beginning of classes, and two sessions per day during the first week of classes. These sessions included Saturdays and Sundays as well. The commitment level during preseason was described by Lafonda, "During preseason it seemed like we were just at camp, regional camp. Get up, go to training, eat, go to training, eat, go to training, go to bed." Lisa, who found soccer was the only activity she was involved with, discussed her experience during preseason, "there was nothing else for you to do, no other things that you were obligated to do for that whole week." She also said that because she was a freshman when the team received an afternoon off all the freshmen had to go to a "meeting that was four hours long." For the freshmen, preseason was more time consuming because of extra meetings designed to acclimate them to the campus and to prepare them for the start of the school year. Yolanda

spoke about the periods between training sessions when asked about what she disliked about preseason:

> I would probably say the quick turnarounds from one practice to another. It was one of those things where we would all rush back to our dorms and lock ourselves in our room that period. It always felt like too short from the time the alarm went off.

She continued to describe her sleeping behavior between sessions:

> Luckily I had curtains because we would just all go in our separate rooms and we would barely say anything to one another. Just walk in, go under our covers, and I would shut my curtains. It would be pitch black and I would just fall asleep, and then two hours later, whatever time, I woke up and then go do the whole cycle again like we did in the morning and then went back, took another nap, woke back up.

The commitment to soccer carried into the beginning of and throughout the season and semester. A typical week for a player involved the following: an optional lifting session on Monday; training Tuesday morning and lifting in the afternoon; training Wednesday morning; training Thursday morning and lifting in the afternoon; a team meal Friday afternoon before a game on that night; training on Saturday morning; and a game Sunday afternoon.

Lisa understood college athletic participation was a big commitment and she recognized the commitment level prior to coming to campus:

> Obviously you've chosen to play a Division I sport at college and that is a huge commitment, not only in time but to yourself because you're giving up so much compared to what normal students go through. I would definitely say that as an athlete your workload and task-load is a lot more.

Billy said that she "didn't get to sleep in 'cause practice was at 7:00." As a result she said she was tired throughout the day. Lisa was aware of the extra time she put in compared to non-athletes. She discussed the opening hours of her day too:

> Practice was a little over two hours but you had to be there at least 30 minutes before so it was like waking up at 5:30 or 5:45 and not really leaving soccer until 9:30. So that's almost four hours right there and a lot of people have not even started their day yet and you have already put in four hours of hard and intense physical activity.

Susie, who felt soccer was often a priority over school, described her activities during the day as revolving around soccer:

> When I thought about it, everything I did during the day was for a reason for soccer. I didn't feel good. I would have skipped every day but the class checkers – and I would never have class checkers without soccer which so miserable. But they are also good or else I would probably be out of school right now. Everything just seems to go back to soccer.

Sofia, despite enjoying lifting twice every week, said, "it was just one more thing" that she had to do. Lisa was injured for the entire fall season so instead of practicing she was involved in rehabilitating her knee during training sessions. Additionally, because she was injured she was "doing double time":

> I always had to go to every single day again, to the training room, in between classes or after classes and put in more time because [our training] had to focus on practice when we were at practice. I did rehab at practice but there's more equipment in the actual training room so I would always have to go there.

Lisa's time commitment with soccer was exacerbated while the team was in town because she was injured and had to participate in additional rehabilitation sessions every day. While the team was traveling Lisa had more time independent of soccer than those who traveled because the trainer was away as well. Participant in multiple physically activity sessions every day was something that Lisa, and many others, to which they were not accustomed.

Body shock. Initial experiences with soccer took place during preseason training. The most frequently discussed topic during that time period was fitness. Fitness was discussed in terms of effects on players' bodies, successes, and difficulties. During preseason players ran a fitness test in the morning and had two training sessions later in the day.

Players experienced exercise and fitness at a level to which they had not previously been exposed. Sofia, who "just wanted to get it over with," described preseason as a period that was "taxing" on her body. Yolanda, who believed she came in fit, had a similar bodily reaction. She reiterated Sofia's sentiments about preseason and the exercise level,

> It was a shock on my body. Preseason was kind of what I expected it to be but still, I never really knew what is was going to be like. The first two days were the worst and the second two days I was adjusting to it. My legs were numb.

Lafonda, who was motivated by other people around her, also found she too was exhausted by the end of preseason. She stated, "By the end of having three practices a day your legs are giving out." Sarah, who took pride in her fitness level, also had a tough time physically. She said, "by day three your legs are dead and then you gotta come back out and have two-a-days, so it doesn't get much better. Your body is tired by the end of the whole preseason."

Susie, who believed she did not come in fit and tried not to think about it to get through, said, “I haven’t done that much ever in my life” and to get through it by putting her “emotions to the side.” Additionally she said:

> We would complain and just be like, oh my god, we’re in pain. But I never thought about it. I just kind of did it for those first couple days. And right when it was over, I was like, oh my gosh, I don’t know what I got myself into. But there was no time to think. It was just crazy. Painful.

Successes and failures during preseason were often discussed in terms of performance on fitness tests. Lafonda discussed her difficulties only in terms of fitness. When asked about difficulties during preseason he said, “just the fitness I guess, not doing as well on that as what I hoped.” Yolanda, who passed two out of three fitness tests felt good about that achievement. She expressed those sentiments, “I think it was a good accomplishment because I had worked so hard that summer and to be able to pass fitness tests and actually get a pat on the back for it.” Susie, who did well on fitness and was frustrated with her playing performance, also recollected about her fitness success, “sadly, I think I enjoyed the running. I guess I was so down on my playing that running was that part I liked the best. Passing fitness tests was a big success” Sofia was “fine” with her performance in fitness. She indicated it was “just hard.” And Billy, who did well on all of the fitness standards, stated she enjoyed fitness and that it helped her “perform her best.” Susie, who performed poorly and battled fatigue throughout preseason, understood the need for fitness to be an aspect of soccer. She contextualized fitness in a team atmosphere,

> I didn't want to do the fitness tests, no one did. But I couldn't see how they do anything different because they have such a short amount of time. Just to get it all out of the way was nice.

Fitness was a source of pain, pride, failure, and understanding for the participants. During the course of preseason they were subjected to strenuous amounts of physical activity that produced a range of emotions and feelings. Fitness continued to play out through the semester but never was it as prominent as it was during preseason.

Place on the team. Fitting in was an important part of participants' description of their soccer experiences. Place gave accounts of place primarily in terms of soccer experiences and not in the contexts of social or academic experiences. Participants discussed their place or role on the team, respect, and the need to prove themselves.

Place within the team was recounted by participants from the first day they arrived on campus for preseason training throughout the season. Yolanda viewed preseason as a "time to find your place." Coming into preseason her mentality was to make positive a first impression. She said,

> Being a freshman it's definitely a lot harder coming in so I think my focus in the summer through my workouts and through preseason I wanted to be as prepared as possible so I would make a first impression. You really want the coaches and team to be able to see.

During preseason Susie was also curious where she would fit in with the team and the coaches' opinion. Susie thought,

> We had not started games and I wanted to see where I was going to be on the team, my place, and always wondering what the coaches were thinking. That's a lot of what I thought about.

Sofia thought not just about playing but also about how she fit with the girls on the team. She said preseason was intimidating because she was trying to find where she "fit in with all the girls, with the team" and had to find where her "place [was] gonna be for the rest of the season." Lafonda said finding her place and proving herself was stressful when she came into training. A stand out player for the fall, she said,

> We had to prove [ourselves] to the coaches and the players. None of them knew your style of play. Within just a few days you have to try and show how much you could do with the ball at your feet and I guess without it. So it was just stressful because you had to prove yourself in such a short amount of time.

Lisa, who was injured throughout the fall, simply wanted to fit in and was not particular about how of where that occurred. She stated, "it was definitely really exciting to know that I would be a part of the process somewhere, wherever I fit in."

Throughout the season, participants continued to search for their place on and within the team. Respect was frequently used as a descriptor of place. Yolanda was specific about her place and discussed actions on the field as part of that place. Over the course of the season she said her "work ethic," her position on the field, and some of the actions she took during games like "taking free kicks" became part of her role and place. Sofia, though she said she never found her place, defined her role with her position as an "outside mid," doing her "job," and that she was not in a "leadership role." For her, position was her place on the field.

Respect was a common ground in which participants described their place. Bee, though injured for the fall began to practice towards the end of the season. She spoke about her experience with place once she began to practice. She described anxiousness when she came back from injury and began to train. She said,

> My anxiety came when I actually started play. It began because it's what a coach sees, will the other players respect me, it's like gaining respect within each other and it's just kind of comparing yourself with others. Do I play well with these girls, do I fit, does my style fit with theirs, and just playing well?

For Susie, place and respect were important as she saw it through games. Susie spoke about her reflections on her performance,

> I thought about how [my play] was affecting our team and what they thought of it, how they were going to respond to it and if they could look at me and they could trust me on the field. And lots of times I don't think I proved that enough. You don't want people to loot at you when you get in the locker room and have them letting you know that they know you can do better and you need to step it up sometimes.

Sarah, one of the players who decided not to continue playing after her first semester felt she was not respected on the field. Ultimately, she decided not to continue playing after the fall season. She said,

> As time went on I feel like I would have been respected more at another university, so I think that was kind of a big thing. And I feel like I would have been happier for that reason. I just feel to be respected as a player is big and I feel like that would have happened somewhere else more than it did here.

Lafonda said training was important but it was games that were the times when proving oneself were most important. She recounted, “in training there is so much you can prove, but then in the game [coaches] are going to want to start the people that can play best in a game.”

Finding a place on the team was important to participants. Fitting in, gaining respect, and proving oneself were used as descriptors for place. Apprehension and stress were common among participants’ in their search for their place. For some, their place was found quickly and for others their place was never settled throughout the season.

Bonding and team chemistry. The most significant theme about soccer experiences was the social connection players developed within each other. During preseason team meals were an important function for players. Throughout the season, experiences in the soccer setting, like the locker room or during training and games, and off-field experiences were venues in which participants bonded. More senior players on the team also played an important role in the socialization of the freshmen.

Team meals, especially during the first few weeks, were cited as a place for participants to being to learn about their teammates. During preseason, team meals were the main group activity for players between training sessions and served as an arena in which players could escape the pressures and stresses of training. Participants spoke about meals as an event to connect with others. Susie, who struggled with fatigue during preseason, said that during meals she “didn’t have to worry, the stress was off for a little, and felt better and ready to go out and play again.” Lafonda, who had a casual demeanor but has a high work rate on the field, described her experiences during team meals, “coming in and just getting to hang out. It was time to sit back and relax and hang out with everybody. Kind of start getting to

know each other." Sarah, who was somewhat shy, found team meals as a setting in which she felt comfortable and could learn about others. She commented,

> We sat around big tables and got to learn about each other and about our families, where everyone played soccer, about college experience, and we could ask questions. Just sitting around the table spending time was just a good way to feel comfortable and get to know everything about everyone.

As the season proceeded players began to develop relationships with their teammates. Those friendships became a crux for players during their first semester. Yolanda revisited meals as a way to connect with her teammates further. She recounted her experiences during team meals, "Well, food is great. Usually really good restaurants that we go to and I don't know, just another chance to be together again. It's not like we don't do that but they're always fun." Once she began to feel comfortable at The University and with her teammates Lisa, who was around her teammates less because she lived in a separate housing facility than everyone else on the team, felt connected to something greater than her. She stated,

> Before I was on a sheet of paper, like a part of the team, or I knew them socially and was friends or whatever. But once I was settled I felt included, like I was actually part of something. For soccer, it was more than just being a name on the roster.

Lafonda was an easy going person and is highly sociable. She commented, "I liked the fact that we were starting to bond as a team and getting to know the older girls' personalities." She felt that friendship carried over to the field of play as well and stated, "all the girls, they would say like little comments on the field, like keep it up or little things."

The senior players on the team were important for the freshmen to connect with socially.

Lafonda, who saw a great deal of playing time, said they were helpful. She noted,

> They accepted us in really well and welcomed us in more than I expected. I think that carried over onto the field too. I think they were very helpful older girls, got to know us, and helped us with what needed to do differently on the field. It made it a lot more comfortable on the field.

Billy, though she was shy about it, described how the older players welcomed the freshmen as well. She said, “they weren’t mean to the freshmen, they didn’t seclude us or anything. They kind of talked to us and stuff like that.” Bee said she was friends with everyone on the team and that as the season progressed she became closer with teammates. She recounted,

> I’m close with everyone on the team but I’m closest with the freshmen, and then a couple of older girls too. I’ve gotten really really close and I think I’ve definitely gotten closer to everyone on the team than I was at the beginning.

Sarah, who was frustrated with her playing performances, found comfort in her teammates. She commented, “Everyone was extremely caring. I guess what I really liked about the team was that they were a fun group of girls.”

Players’ friendships with teammates allowed them access to support both on and off the field, though most players discussed their friendships within the confines of soccer. Older players were also welcoming to new players and that helped the participants acclimate to their new team and life. Friendships and social experiences were a vital part of soccer experiences.

Competition. Each participant discussed experiences of competition during their fall semester. Players discussed competition within the team, competing for playing time against one another, competing against other schools, and how the competitiveness affected them.

Competition was referred to as “the college level,” meaning that “everyone’s good, everyone’s big, there’s just not really any bad players” by Susie and Sofia respectively. Sarah also discussed the difference between previous soccer experiences and college soccer:

> I feel like there’s definitely a difference in the speed of play and it is a lot quicker and in college there is really no one that’s that slow. There might be every once in a whole, you’re gonna come across people that aren’t quick but they’re at least fast.

Bee described her view of the competitiveness despite not being able to play during the fall:

> I think there’s just a lot more [competitiveness] because the whole team is good, everyone is at close to the same level, and it’s just really competitive for a starting spot or playing time cause you are fighting for the same thing.

Before coming to The University each player was regarded as a regional or national caliber player. But because of the high level of competition on the soccer team at The University they had to adjust their style of play. According to Sarah even the “simple things” like “playing the ball to feet, a good first touch, and having the ball under control to do something with it” were more difficult than before. Lafonda also recounted how she changed her style of play because of the competitiveness:

> I wasn’t comfortable. I wasn’t taking on people as much as I know I could have before, like I knew I was capable of doing more but I was adjusting to the system and learning how the team played and what coach expected out of us.

Billy, whose playing time was in a state of flux throughout the season, described competition in terms of “fighting for a spot” and “trying to impress” coaches. She also said she was competing with another specific individual for one position and that angered her at

times because she did not always get along with that individual. Daily competition at training was expected of the participants. Lisa, though she was not able to play because of injury, said

> You had to come out and perform every single day. It's not just like show up for practice and do how you want. I mean you could that but it would not reflect well on you as a player and if you didn't put as much as you needed to into it you obviously would not see the reward later of playing in games. It is hard, intense, and demanding you're supposed to put forth your best at every point if you want to have the reward in the end.

Lafonda, who received a great deal of playing time, described games as an arena in which competition was higher:

> The games are a lot more competitive. Every single game meant so much more, so it was just really exciting to go on and play hard and it was fun. You could sense the rivalries between the schools. I liked how you could already tell which school you hated before you even played them. It was fun.

Players also described how the high level of competition played on their emotions in the soccer context. Sofia and Susie said that it "felt good" and that they became "comfortable" when they realized that they could "play with the older girls." Billy said that the high level of competitiveness made her "want to work harder and try harder." Sarah accomplished the goals she set for her first semester. She said she gained a sense of accomplishment when she was able "to be actually playing college soccer, getting a little playing time", and "starting a few games."

Coaching. Interaction between players and coaches were frequent during the fall. Participants described their instructional feedback and their relationship with the coaches.

Primarily, the head coach took on most of the coaching responsibility during the fall and he was the subject of most of the discussion.

Coaching feedback was a common topic among participants. Feedback came during training sessions and games. Participants described positive, negative, and instructional feedback. Sofia, who was often critical of herself and of her performance on the field, felt she received more negative feedback than positive. She said, “I thought that the coaches would remember the bad things easier.” She also felt that coaches did not need to say positive things because the level of play was high enough that positive feedback was not necessary. She stated, “I feel like it’s just expected for us to be good and therefore, [the coaches] didn’t need to say positive things as much.” The expectation to perform well was reiterated by Bee. Though she could not play because she was injured she said the coach “expects a lot out of us”. She also stated, “Because he has so much pressure and it’s his job to do well, he doesn’t have a choice but to put pressure on us to be the best that we can do that he can do the best he can as a coach.” Susie felt her playing was inconsistent throughout the season and she was on the end of negative feedback because she was a relaxed person. She said the coach behaved different on some days without cause. She explained,

> He would come out and you could tell something was on his mind that he wasn’t happy about, waiting for us to do something so he could make a point. He would call people out sometimes. It was me a lot of days.

Sarah, who was in and out of the starting lineup and had varied amounts of playing time, felt she received positive feedback when she was playing more. She stated, “It was good to get feedback and a little encouragement.” Lafonda focused on one aspect of her game before arriving on campus found she needed to focus on many other aspects. She said she received

feedback to help improve other areas of her play. She said, “I don’t know if it was negative or positive, it was things I needed to change. I got a lot more insight about how I was playing.”

The relationship players had with the coaches, and more specifically about the head coach, were frequently discussed. Yolanda and Billy found that they could speak with the coach as friends or confidants while Lafonda and Sarah discovered that they were not close with the coach. Yolanda, who started every game and often played the full 90 minutes, said

> With our coaches, you can really talk to them about anything. We talk about problems with my game, things I need to work on, or sometimes leisurely. Our relationship is not only based on soccer, it’s more like a friend to friend relationship.

Billy, who was more reserved socially, used the coach to discuss family issues. She said, “I talked to him about family issues and he was understanding, gave good advice, and made me feel better.” In contrast, Lafonda, who was talkative and comical, said, “In recruiting is was all about you and then when I got here it was all about the team. You didn’t have much interaction with the coaches.” Sarah also felt disconnected with the coach when she approached him with a family problem and wanted to go home. She said, “I tried to go home once and the coach wouldn’t let me go. That was a big concern. If it were his family member he would want to go.” Sarah and Sofia also said they felt a disparity of communication between certain players. Playing ability were disclosed as causes from both people. Sarah said,

> The coach will only call the players he really respects and I don’t think he ever said a word to me before I actually started to do something on the field. Then when I was in a slump I wasn’t told anything, not even how are you doing?

She went on to say that she did not feel respected as player or person when she stated, “Sometimes I felt like I was being lied to. It was frustrating because I am supposed to look up to him and he’s my coach and he won’t even tell me the truth. I felt like I was never respected on and off the field.” Honors and awards are common on The University team. Sofia, being a freshman, obviously did not receive any collegiate awards before coming to school. She recounted the following about different players receiving different feedback, “If you’re [honored highly by the conference] I feel it’s more likely that you’ll get treated better or your mistakes won’t be treated as badly as somebody who isn’t as recognized.” Sofia also described that at times periods of interaction that were unexplainable. She said, “I feel like some people were treated better and some were treated worse and on different days it could be different people.”

The player-coach relationships were important to these freshmen soccer players. Feedback was perceived as positive, negative, and educational. Relationships with the coach ranged from friendly to professional, though some participants felt like interaction depended too much on performance.

Participants discussed soccer more frequently than any other theme. The commitment level to soccer, even for those who expected a large commitment, was surprising. Soccer was described as stressful at times because it occupied much of participants’ time during the fall. The fitness standards on the team were extremely high and participants were said they were scared and intimated by the fitness aspect of soccer. As the season progress out of preseason fitness was less prevalent. When asked about preseason, the first word out of most participants’ mouths was “fitness.” Place on the team, which was discussed in terms of fitting in and role on the field of play, was a concern of many participants. Fitting in with the team

and learning roles on the field developed throughout the season. Participants discussed team chemistry as highly important to their experiences and their performance on the field. Senior players played a major and positive role in facilitating freshmen into the team. Every participant, both in training and in games, discussed higher levels of competition. Throughout the season, competition was one of the themes that was constantly present. Experiences with coaches were important for participants because they were in the frequently in the soccer setting. Coaches were influential in participants' experiences in soccer and some described coaching influences that carried over to other areas of their lives. Participants experienced influences from soccer experiences outside the soccer setting. Many aspects of participants' experiences in the fall were influenced by soccer. The connection to other areas of participants' lives is further explored in chapter five.

Academics

School was imposed as a category because, like soccer, participants were bound to engage and experience their courses during the fall. A criterion for participation in this project was that participants were enrolled in as full-time students, thus making school highly important to their lives and to this study. Academic experiences played an important role during participants' first semesters. The following themes were established during analysis: (a) class size; (b) difficulty; (c) exams; and (d) time commitment or workload. Participants discussed expectations and experiences of class size and difficulty more than exams and time commitment, which were primarily discussed only in terms of experiences. Exams and time commitment were interrelated and help to inform one another. Less prevalent themes, such as length of class or start and end times, were not supported across the participants and were not

included. The themes are presented in this order so that they earlier themes inform the later themes. Each theme will be discussed with supporting examples from participants' words.

Class sizes. Every participant discussed their class sizes during their first semester. Participants described classes of 200-300 people and classes with 6 total students. They explained the atmosphere and experiences they had in classes; how the class size influenced their behavior during and outside of class; and in doing so, participants described which class sizes they preferred and did not prefer.

Participants discussed their preferences for class sizes. Sarah preferred large classes that took place in large lecture halls. She said,

> I went to a small private school for high school and so I thought it was really neat being in a class with 300 people. And I still now really love my big classes for whatever reasons and I guess it's just a change from a small 20-person classroom in high school. So I think those lectures are pretty neat.

Lisa also preferred the large classes and her understanding and expectations of class sizes was present during her decision about which college she wanted to attend:

> But I like did not want to go [to a small, liberal arts college] with like that focus on the individual stuff. But I like did not want to go there obviously, I chose like a huge school. But everyone would also talk about how the classes are so big and you're just a number, but that's like what I wanted to be: just the number.

Some students, because of the anonymity, preferred large classes and the new experience offered at college as opposed to high school class experiences that were primarily small in size. Participants detailed their experiences in at least one large class during their fall semester. They emphasized the class size as influential in the atmosphere of the class. The

description of the size of a class was described generally with terms like “huge” and “big.” The specific number of students that constituted a large class was over 100 students. Lafonda was shocked at the size of her large classes. She said, “it was kind of shocking just going into like bigger classes where they would go in and there were like 200 kids.” Like Lafonda, Yolanda, who had multiple classes that were large, detailed those classes. She stated, “It was different having like 400 people in your class classes as opposed to 30. I think all my classes except for my math class were huge.”

The atmosphere in larges classes was also discussed. They were described as “lectures” with limited student and teacher interaction. Students in those classes were able to engage in activities not associated with the course and the pace of the lecture was often fast. Sarah, Susie, and Billy said they often fell asleep in courses. Yolanda, who was not used to the large classes, declared, “you don’t really get the personal experience with your teacher” and she used the internet during some of her courses. Bee and Lafonda, who were also unused to large classes, felt there was little “room for the students to give feedback or ask questions if they’re confused.” Lafonda stated, “not many people would ask questions and I definitely wouldn’t ask any questions,” and Bee felt, “in a lot of my other big lecture halls I could never raise my hand and say something if I felt a certain way.” During her semester, Lisa found anonymity in the large classes, “a 300 person class” was a place where “the teacher wouldn’t notice” if “you didn’t show up one day.” The large class atmosphere yielded little student and instructor interaction, which created an atmosphere of one-way communication between teacher and student, acceptable of non-academic behavior, and a student’s namelessness.

Yolanda tried to never fall asleep in classes. She offered a contrast to Sarah, Susie, and Billy:

> I don't know how someone can sleep though a class, but I just like could never do that because you never know what you're missing. But then at the same time, going through the motions is almost the same thing because I would have my computer and I would be online or something and [the instructor] would be giving notes.

Not every course accepted this kind of behavior, but according to Sarah "there [were] definitely some other {classes} where you [could] definitely kinda zone out and still be okay." When asked about what she would think about when she was "zoning out" she stated, Usually it would happen right after practice or weights and I would get the campus paper and I would always read about our games and stuff. So I guess I was just kinda thinking about the comments that coach had made about the game or about certain things players did or reading what players had quoted. So I guess it was mainly thinking about that kind of stuff and the games and games to come.

However, being an athlete allowed participants to escape anonymity associated with large class sizes because participants introduced themselves when they were required to give instructors a letter from the soccer coaching staff containing information on the dates of competition that could cause absences from class. All athletes at The University are required to give their instructor a note from their coaching staff. Bee found this a good way to introduce herself and increase her interactions with instructors. She described this experience in one of her classes:

> It was nice to give our teachers this little letter so they knew we were gonna be gone or whatever and especially in big lectures. I had one teacher, we had a huge lecture hall over 300, and she always said hi to me because of the first few days when I talked to her about playing soccer.

Soccer players immediately became more prominent in classrooms with 300 to 400 students because they were identified as athletes once they handed in their letter from the athletic department.

Every participant experienced at least one class with over 200 students in the classroom. These experiences were new for each participant because the high schools from which they came did not offer courses that were of similar size. As discussed here, little teacher interaction, anonymity, and non-academic behavior were present during these "lectures."

Smaller class sizes, those 50 students and under, were discussed less than the large class sizes because participants likened small class sizes to high school, an experience with which they were at least familiar. Participants described what constituted a small class, the atmosphere of the smaller classrooms, and one stated she preferred smaller classrooms.

Small class sizes were described by participations with either a numerical value or as "like high school." Lafonda characterized her 50-student class as a "regular classroom." The atmosphere in the smaller classroom was "a little more personal" for Lafonda and Lisa said they were "a lot more intellectually motivating." For large courses, the breakout session, which is a large lecture that has a small discussion based class once a week with fewer than 50 students, was described by Lisa,

> Even like the big classes still have a breakout session for that class every Wednesday, so you would get divided into smaller classes and do a lot more individual stuff and like your TA would get to know you and that would be basically grading most of your stuff.

Sarah succinctly captured her experiences in small class when she stated, “yeah, the smaller one you pretty much have to pay attention in those.”

Fewer participants preferred the small classes than the large courses. Billy stated, “I don’t like them because you have like more attention on you,” she didn’t like “answering questions in class and having to talk and stuff.” When she had a course with “7 people” she “hated it.” Lisa was the only student who stated she preferred the small classes:

> I mean I definitely like the smaller classes better because I am so used to them from high school and I feel they are a lot more intellectually motivating. For smaller classes, you have to do a lot more for them whereas the big classes I wouldn’t look forward to because I know I could just go and sit there and not do anything if I didn’t want to because they post the notes online.

Classroom experiences were impacted by the size of their classes. Only six participants voiced which class size they preferred and of those six five of them said they preferred the large classes. Anonymity and the capacity to engage in behavior not associated with the course were cited as reasons for preferences of large classes. Examples of this behavior were sleeping, reading the campus paper, and “spacing out” or “zoning out.”. It is interesting that most students preferred course in which they did not have to pay attention most of the time and only one students preferred classes that were intellectually stimulating.

Difficulty. Participants also discussed course difficulty among their academic experiences. Throughout their discussion, seven of the eight participants described their courses as easy and one characterized them as difficult. They explained how their courses were difficult or easy and the feelings they associated with courses.

Only one participant, Yolanda, said her coursework was difficult. She felt "like the whole information giving or the information about each class was a lot harder. I mean it was just more depth than anything that I had ever had to do." She attributed her difficulty to "the speed of the course" and the "large class size." Instructors spoke faster and she found it difficult to get help from instructors. She stated, "if you need help from the professor, it's a lot harder to get it than if you were in a smaller class."

The other seven participants said there courses were not difficult. When first asked if her courses were like, Billy said only one word, "easy." Billy described her courses as the "basic classes, like health, food and nutrition, and psychology," which "weren't difficult class." Lafonda stated one of her courses was easy because the instructor was a Teaching Assistant: "you could tell that was just more of like an easy class and it was going to be easy like the things she would relate and what she was teaching." Susie said she could learn her coursework on her own and did not need to pay attention in class. She described her biology course:

> I just was always really tired. It was the first class of the day and I would just go to bed [in class]. It didn't really make that big of a difference. I could learn it on my own if I wanted to. I had such a bad attitude, but it's what I had.

Sofia attributed class difficulty as low because she believed she took "easy classes" set up by her academic advisor. When asked what she would tell next year's incoming class if she had

the opportunity, she said “My advisor made my whole schedule” and she wished she had not let her academic advisor create most of her schedule because she did not like the courses she took.

Bee said that she “expected [courses] to be harder.” And when asked how they should have been harder she responded:

> Just because, it’s like college, because it’s a higher grade level, because The University is good academically, like I just thought it was gone be more about like testing and knowing your stuff basically.

As the semester wore on, Bee found her courses became “easier to pay attention to and make better grades.”

Feelings of disappointment, negativity, and pressure were associated with courses. Sofia, who enjoys the “challenge of learning,” expressed feelings of disappointment in the ease of her coursework. She disclosed, “I was expecting to have challenging classes and I wanted to have challenging classes and I was disappointed” because the courses were easy.

Interestingly, Billy stated her classes were stressful, despite being easy for her, because she had to “go and actually do the work” and she “didn’t like school.” She then went on to say, “I mean it’s not stressful but it sucks.” Beyond disliking school she was unsure how her courses “sucked.” Yolanda, the one student who said her classes were difficult, described the pressure she felt in terms of evaluation,

> I think it was harder to make up something that if you didn’t do well on the test, it’s hard to make up but in soccer if you had a bad practice you can usually make it up more. School was kind of harder because you only had a few chances.

Participants discussed their coursework as relatively easy throughout the semester. One participant, Sofia, was disappointed that she was not challenged academically. One participant described their coursework as difficult but all participants said they achieved their goals in the classroom. It is curious that participants described both easy and difficult coursework also said they met their goals by the end of the semester. Courses also elicited feelings of disappointment, negativity, and pressure throughout the semester. Courses, whether in class or out of class, were a significant source of participants time and energy.

Exams. Evaluation was a large part of participants' discussion within academia. Exams had a full range of emotions attached to them. First exams were part of participants learning curve during their first semester because they had never taken a college level exam. At times participants were stressed and worrisome, and at other times participants expected good grades because exams were easy..

Initial exams were the most difficult for participants. Sarah, Yolanda, and Bee described the first exams as "difficult" or "hard." Sarah, who struggled in the first round of exams but was successful on the whole of the semester, described her first exam experience:

> When I was taking the test I actually felt okay about it. When I got my grades back, I was like whoa. And some of them weren't bad, I mean none of them were, and I don't think I failed any of them. So I think when I got my grades back, I realized it was gonna take something else. I thought maybe I should spend a little more time on those last few questions that I'm not too sure about.

Yolanda also struggled during the first round of exams. She took them to be a learning experience from which she could build. She recounted experiences with her first exams:

> That first test kind of showed me if my study skills could actually last in college or if I needed to change something,… or like how much I needed to work towards getting the grades that I wanted or thought I could get.

She also stated that "the tests were a lot harder" in college. Bee also reiterated the idea of difficult exams during the first portion of the semester. She said, "I think I did really bad on like every single test I took in the first couple weeks."

Interestingly, exams ranged from easy to difficult, but the difficulty of courses in general was largely voiced as "easy." Susie characterized exams as "stressful" but also said that in one of her classes she "got a 100" every time. Content was a major contributor to participants' feelings of stress or perception of difficulty. Lafonda felt exams covered more material than she was used to. She discussed her experiences with content in a sociology course:

> I felt there was a lot more information I had to review and go over because it was a broader range of stuff [the instructor] could test us on. I don't think the class was hard but his questions were random. So, I guess [I was] more worried about the classes where I didn't know what was going on – like what was coming on the test.

Susie described the process he went through before exams, "just trying to make sure I was going to get all my grades. Figuring out what I needed to make an to get them all and getting the studying done that I hadn't done."

After the first round of exams students were better able to prepare for future exams. Bee, who performed better on exams later in the semester, said "you just have to get used to like what each teacher wanted. Like you were just getting used to what they expected." Bee went on to say,

> Like I failed 5 mini tests in biology and I think I failed the first two, awful. I tried to drop the class but it was too late. I had never done that poorly on anything ever, so that was stressful. But then around midterms I think was when I really started to get my grades where they were at the end of the semester. But after I got settled it became a lot easier and it was just like all my grades went up.

After performing poorer than she wanted on initial exams, with the feeling that she "had studied enough," Sarah said, "I think it was good because it showed me what I have to do to prepare for a test in each class, and what I should expect on each exam. And after that I did really well on all my tests."

Exams were a main source of discussion within academia for every participant. Initial exams were viewed as the most difficult and only one person described exams in one class as easy. Curiously, exams were regarded as difficult but courses overall were regarded as easy. Participants recognized instructors' expectations and styles after the first round of exams, which provided students' with confidence during preparation for future exams. Participants all said grades went up and courses and exams were easier as the semester drew on. Students adapted to college level coursework only after their first exams were taken, they began to gauge instructors expectations, and they understood the effort level needed to achieve those grades.

Time commitment. After the first round of exams participants realized that college level coursework required more preparation to perform well. One person, Sofia, said the course loads and commitment were not significant. The hours spent outside of courses and independent of tutors and mentors was central to their academic experiences. Discussion centered on little to do at the beginning of the semester, increased workload and preparation

as the semester progressed, increased and more focused preparation for exams, and mandatory classes.

Sofia, described the semester course load as easy. She described her perspective on the course load she had her first semester, “fall semester school wise was easier than I thought it would be.” Her brevity indicated that she achieved the grades she desired and the ease with which they came to her.

Participants believed that they had very little to do for their courses. Lisa said that she had “very little to do” during the first few weeks of classes and it was “awesome” because she had more free time and could focus on soccer. Susie said that the semester “seemed really easy” and that she “took [her courses] for granted.” Also, she “just didn’t do enough” as she believed she should have, and when she came home she “never opened a book.” Interestingly though, Susie prioritized soccer over school:

> School didn’t seem like a priority I guess. Put it that way. Um, I care a lot more about soccer and what was going on with soccer than I did about my schoolwork. So yeah. That was that.

Susie was the only participant that voiced that soccer was her priority over school. Most participants did not state their priorities but the few who did stated school was more important.

After performing poorly at the beginning of the semester Bee also repeated their statements. She said, “I’m the kind of person who has to learn from my experience and then say oh, this is what I need to do.” After the first few weeks, participants became aware of what they needed to do and recognized the commitment they needed to do well. Lafonda

recalled that she was “worried about soccer the next day” more than she was about classes during the opening of the semester.

Coming back from summer, now in a new college environment instead of high school, Lisa said that her independence allowed her to do anything she wanted “any night of the week” because her parents were not there to tell her what she could and could not do. It was “hard to get back into that school mode” coming back from summer with no authority figures guiding her daily decisions. Bee, who did poorly in courses at the beginning of the semester, stated that “if you’re the kind of person that can jump right in then get your grades up to begin with and you won’t be so stressed at the end of the semester.” Bee indicated that though she did well on the semester she had to make up for the first few weeks with better habits and performance later in the semester. After the first series of exams is when students began to realize the time investment they needed to make in coursework. Lafonda recounted that after her first round of exams she “realized she needed to read the text more and study the textbook” to do well. Sarah also recollected that college exams take “much more preparation” than high school tests. Susie could not recall when she would and would not study, only that she did do “not enough” to achieve the grades she wanted.

One of the most unique aspects of these eight participants is that they were required to attend their classes. Where most freshmen have the choice to attend, athletes at The University have class checkers, which monitor athlete attendance in courses. Not all classes are checked and not all students have class checkers. Large classes, freshmen, and at risk students are targeted for class checkers. And interestingly, only Lisa mentioned her class checkers specifically. Sofia said that if someone missed class then “the team would probably

have to run." Soccer players, and many athletes at The University, have an external requirement, (i.e. a non-class requirement) to go to class that non-athletes do not have.

Participants' experiences in school were discussed in terms of time demands by every participant. Levels ranged from very little to great. As the semester progressed many participants increased their level of commitment to reach their performance goals. Unique to the athletes at The University is a system of athlete class checkers that is sponsored by the Athletic Department.

Initially, participants did not spend time on their coursework outside of class time. After they received their grades back from their first exams, participants realized they needed to commit more time to school during their free time. Upon doing this, social experiences and sleep were sacrificed. Classes were described as easy for all but one participant despite having to spend more time outside of classes than expected. Large class sizes were generally preferred because large classes allowed participants to engage in behaviors not associated with the class. Class attendance was required of the participants as The University used a class checking system for most freshman athletes and is unique to athletes.

Free Time

Free time was imposed as a category in order to capture participants' experiences outside soccer and academic settings. It was well known that participants would have experiences in soccer and school but outside of those categories, little was known about how participants perceived their lives during the fall. Free time was a broad category that captured any experience that participants discussed.

The following themes were established during analysis of free time: (a) independence; (b) family and significant others; (c) social experiences; and (d) living arrangements. These four themes were discussed more regularly other concepts. Independence and family were interrelated as participants spoke at length about their newfound freedom from parental figures during their first semester. Social experiences and living arrangements could very well have been group together under one theme but it was important to differentiate the two so that the similarities were more evident. Each theme will be discussed with supporting examples from the data.

Independence. Participants discussed new independence during their first semester. Every participant came from a city other than the one in which The University was located and some came from across the country. They described experiences with living on their own and gaining a sense of responsibility with that independence.

Before coming to college participants' had not experienced the level of independence that they found their first semester. Lisa she was "totally independent" for all of her "decision making." Her parents still paid living expenses but it was up to her to "search for things, look things up, buy books, go to the store, manage a budget, and everything." Yolanda described herself as "an independent person" but that it was "weird the first few weeks with no one really down your back telling you do your homework or this is the time you have to be in, like I would hear from my parents." Sarah "had her own room" she enjoyed it greatly. She stated,

> It was neat actually living on my own and doing the things that for so long I have been hearing other people talk about. Your parents and everyone tells you they are the best years of your life and to finally be doing it is neat.

Participants found they had much responsibility with their independence. Billy, who chose The University because she sought that independence, said, “It kinda sucked cause you don’t get dinner made for you or certain things you have to do yourself.” Sarah, who was used to a large family, also found she had to learn to do things on her own:

> I felt prepared. The only thing I didn’t know how to do was my laundry. So my mom and I had a crash course before I left but I still didn’t really completely understand. So I had the girls help me and there were a few of us who didn’t know and a few who did, so that was fun.

Bee found that she needed to be responsible within the freedom she found away form her parents and family. She reiterated the responsibility associated with independence:

> I like living on my own. That was a big thing at first. I have been really dependent on my mom for everything, like getting up in the morning and all that so it was hard getting used to doing everything by myself. Doing my own laundry, which I had never done before, going to the grocery store, and meeting new people. I think a lot of people didn’t think I would adjust well because I was so dependent on my mom in high school. I don’t think I struggled with doing things on my own and I think it really helped me to become more responsible and more mature than I was in high school.

Independence from family was an experience shared by all participants. Tasks such as making dinner or doing laundry, were new experiences for participants. A sense of responsibility was forged out of the independence found at college during participants’ first semester at college. Experiences within independence from parents is likely not unique to athletes in college.

Family and significant others. Participants discussed their family and close friends from home. The people that were closest when participants were in high school were an important aspect of their lives in multiple ways. Family was discussed as difficult to be away from and as a line of support. Visits from family on campus were also described.

Family members and close friends were important to participants in high school and being away from them was difficult. For Bee, being away from her parents was a "big deal." She said,

> I thought was gonna go crazy because my mom has been such a big part of my life and my dad's been such a big part of my soccer life. And my sister has been a big part of my life too. So I thought it was gonna be really hard not having them around. When I first got to school I was homesick.

Billy had a strong relationship with her family and described being away from them:

> It's hard. I don't get to see my family every day or every weekend. I have four brothers, so I'm kinda like the mom. And so it's hard being away because I don't get to help out my dad or help out my brother or anything.

Sarah also told of her need to be near her family during a time of crisis though she was unable to do so. She explained,

> The big thing outside of soccer was that my grandfather was really sick. My dad called and said that if everything goes well, he'll definitely live but that there is a good chance he'll pass away or we may have to amputate his legs. And so all this stuff was going wrong and it was really hard not being with my family during that time and having to hear all of that on the phone. It's just been a whole roller coaster of problems.

The head coach would not “let her go,” which was a “big concern” of hers.

Lafonda, who is from across the country and whose parents visited only once in the fall semester, described her experiences, “There wasn’t somebody always saying ‘good job,’ even when you had a bad game. I just wish sometimes that I were in-state my parents could have watched me more.” Sofia also said she felt lonely at The University and described her feelings, “whether it was being far from home or whether it was just living on my own or whatever, I felt there were definitely times that I just felt really alone and lonely here.” Sofia, who enjoyed learning and characterized school as disappointing and easy, related her love of academia to her father. She stated, “When I was in elementary school my dad would just write me a paper of math problems just for fun because I liked it.” She ultimately decided not to play after her first semester, saying “it’s just not worth it to be so far from home and not be happy. I think that being far away has a large role in my decision of playing or not.”

Close friends, or boyfriends, served as support for players during their first semester. Sarah discussed her relationship with her boyfriend. She said, “it definitely made things hard” not to be near him. Sarah also discussed her relationship with him during times when she reflected negatively about herself, soccer, and being away from home. She recounted,

> I would tell him how I was frustrated and he told me things would get better. He would always tell me that so many people supported me and my decision. So many people were rooting for me and were there for me.

Family, more than friends or boyfriends, was discussed as supportive during the fall. Lisa portrayed her sister, who played volleyball at The University concurrently, as support and as a role model:

> My sister and I were exactly the same type growing up. She would tell me that she misses out on a lot like we did in high school but that she loves to play volleyball. She just got over it and it became her way of living. So that's how I began to think about soccer. When I visited her she took me around and showed me everything. She was a really big help and I relied on her so much. She had managed to do well and so I knew that since she could, I could too.

Participants who were not from the state in which The University was set were relished opportunities to see their parents when they visited and when they visited home. Lafonda discussed her family coming to visit as one of the highlights of her fall semester:

> It was nice just to see them and get to hang out with them. I didn't really get homesick like some other freshmen but it was just nice to see them and spend time with them.

For Bee, a visit home to her parents and friends in October was a period when she realized she "didn't want to go back to high school" and that she could not be "happier" at any other school or at home. Billy said her "dad came up twice," which was "good." In fact, she has since become closer with her father: "Me and my dad have gotten really close and we talk a lot so it was good to see him and family."

Susie, who frequently battled fatigue, discussed her parent's support during preseason, which was a time of great physical exertion:

> And I feel like my parents made it easy for me to give myself excuses. They called a lot in preseason and I didn't even answer. I didn't talk to them until after preseason because I knew all they were going to say was are you okay or stop if you need to.

In contrast to other participants' parental support, Susie's parents were worried about her and approved of discontinuing her participation in soccer.

Family and close friends were often difficult to be away from. In Sofia's case, family was one of the motivating factors that led her to discontinue playing. Family became an avenue of support for participants during their struggles. Opportunities to visit with family were positive experiences for players during the fall. Participants discussed them as lines of support and also about how being away from family was difficult. Family were important to participants' in the fall as they transitioned to a new period of their lives.

Social life. Participants' friends were primarily team members, other freshmen soccer players, or other athletes. Players did not tend to have friends outside of the athletic world. Yolanda described her thoughts on meeting other athletes: "Living in our dorms and having the athlete-academic center where it is all athletes, and evening the dining halls, everyone we met were athletes unless it was in classes." She also connected those friendships to the field of play:

> I saw myself becoming closer to people once I finally got to know who they were. Being as comfortable as we were with each other on and off the field was one of the things that contributed to our success.

Sofia, though she felt lonely at time regarded her teammates as friends. She reiterated Yolanda's sentiments:

> I really liked all of the girls that were on the team and we had fun spending time together. I feel like it brought us closer that we could relate on everything and all had the same schedule and were all going through similar things.

Lisa, who did not stay in the same dormitories as the other freshmen, said that the soccer players “got to know each other pretty quickly” because they were “always with each other.” Lafonda and Billy also described getting to know other athletes, “We just hung out with each other a lot, the girls on the team” and then “we kind of started meeting some people, just other athletes from in our dorm.”

The participants used their friendships with each other as a support group as well. Sarah found her fellow freshmen helpful when adjusting to campus. She recounted her feelings,

> We were all intimidated together and we all just needed each other because I know it was a big adjustment being away from home. During the first couple weeks we all needed each other and then we were all intimidated by the busses. We were all just glad we had each other. There was always someone by our sides so we became settled in to the whole school and classes thing together.

Bee found a common bond between herself and the other freshmen because of soccer. She told of similar experiences:

> There are nine of us freshmen and eight of us live together. Soccer gave us a common starting point, it’s something we all have in common and sometimes that works out and sometimes it doesn’t. But I feel that it was easier to relate to them and it’s easier to be friends with them because we’re all going through the same thing.

The only individual who said she had a separate group of friends away from athletes was Lisa. Lisa lived in a dormitory that included people from across campus and was not specifically for athletes. She also rushed and was accepted into a sorority during her first semester. She recounted her expectation to meet new friends:

> I have had the same friends basically since kindergarten and one of the things that excited me about college was getting to meet new friends. I didn't really feel settled until I had a group of friends not only in soccer but also outside of soccer.

Making new friends, athletes and non-athletes, was important to Lisa. However, spending time with non-athletes proved difficult because of her commitment to soccer.

> I feel it was all sort of better than athletes or non-athletes, I had the best of both worlds. I didn't have as much of a social life as non-athletes because I didn't have time to spend on weeknights or weekends. It was hard to get a group of friends when you're not seeing them as much. They have all this free time to go meet people or be social.

Compared to the other freshmen, Lisa was able to make more friends. Living in non-athlete dormitories aided her in her desire to meet new people. Unfortunately, even choosing to live in non-athletes dormitories did not allow her the freedom to be as social as non-athletes. She recounted,

> I was able to get to know people because I lived in the regular dorms but I remember the other freshmen would always say that they hadn't met anyone. I got to know a lot more people just because of where I lived and because of the whole sorority thing, but even then I felt like I was missing out on meeting people and I am sure they felt it a lot more than I was.

Bee said soccer was a major source of friendship but also limited her ability to make friends outside of soccer. She illustrated,

> When I got here it became more about soccer and we were too tired to do anything on the weekends and weeknights. It was just harder to have a social life, which you think

> you would have more of in college. The first couple weeks it was hard getting adjusted but then afterwards I had a more positive look on it and I didn't mind giving up my social life for soccer.

Bee became accustomed to sacrificing her social life for soccer.

Yolanda reflected on her first semester and spoke about one of the things she wish she could have done differently, "I wish I would somehow have been able to branch out and met some other people that were not athletes." Sofia had a hard time making new friends and described her feelings like this,

> Even though we did develop friendships with each other on the team, I felt like nobody here really knew me. People don't really know who you are and it was just a weird feeling.

Sarah also described her experience with having few friends outside of soccer:

> It was definitely really hard for me because you spend every second with the soccer team so as much as you love every single person on the team, sometimes you would just want a break from everyone. I didn't really have anyone I could talk to. I really just wanted some other friends outside of soccer.

Participants' friendships were limited almost exclusively to soccer players and other athletes. Only Lisa, who lived in non-athlete dormitories, developed a social world outside of soccer and athletics. Participants found that they had little time to designate for social experiences, dormitories were one of the main sources of establishing friendships, and they missed having other friends.

Living arrangements. Seven of the eight participants lived in an athlete dormitory and one participant, Lisa, lived in a non-athlete dormitory. Participants said that the athlete

dormitory was like an apartment rather than the traditional dormitory. Dormitories were comprised of four individual bedrooms per unit with two bathrooms, a kitchen, and a living area between the four bedrooms. Billy, Sarah, and Susie used the phrase “apartment” to describe their dormitory. Bee, who greatly enjoyed her dormitory, described the following:

> We each have our own room. There’s for of us and there’s two bathrooms, a kitchen, and a living room. So it’s basically like an apartment. And in our dorm, it’s not just freshmen, we’re in the football dorm. So a lot of our neighbors are older than us. In a lot of freshmen dorms they have activities, get to know people, and you kinda leave your door open and people walk in and out, but that’s not how ours is like at all. It’s more like an apartment. You have everything you need in your room and you don’t really need to leave. We don’t have to go to the dining hall, we have a kitchen. Some freshmen have to go to the bathroom down the hall and our bathroom is in our room. We have a sitting area and all of that. We don’t really have to leave unless we want to.

Participants used dining halls but they were not a necessity because they could make meals in their kitchen if they desired. Bathrooms were shared between two people. This is interesting because in general many people living on one floor share dormitories bathrooms. The common living area inside of a unit is also unique to the athlete dormitory as in general dormitories there is a common area shared by a floor just as many share the bathroom. Lafonda and Yolanda said that the dormitory allowed them to be by themselves if they wished.

Lafonda said, “It’s really nice because it was like an apartment. It was almost like living in an apartment. You had your own room and if you wanted to take a nap or close your door and be quiet you could.”

Having apartment like dormitories also created problems. Participants discussed how they did not meet as many people as they wished and it was sometimes difficult getting along with roommates. Susie said her dormitory was “amazing” but she “didn’t meet as many people” as she would have in other dormitories. Lafonda explained how she felt:

> I almost wish that we could have been in a regular dorm because I feel like we didn’t get to meet nearly as many people as we would have living in the regular dorms because in our apartment all the doors are closed. It’s not like if you were to go another dorm and they all block their doors open and just go in and out of rooms. So it was more like an apartment where all the doors are closed. You don’t really see people unless you’re just passing them through the hallways.

Billy spoke about friends she had at other colleges that had two girls to a room and open doors. She said they “meet a lot of people that way” and that in her dormitory “people are in their world kinda.” Yolanda raised the point that living with roommates was sometimes difficult at times. She described her experiences living with others:

> It’s a lot of fun but at the same time there are little things, like nitpicky things. We had to have respect for each other’s space because we were in one small area. Having to deal with that was a little different.

Bee explained the stage of moving in with fellow players as “awkward.” She said she had to learn to negotiate different styles of living:

> Some people stay up later and even in my room I noticed this. Some people stay up and some people wanna to go to bed earlier and it's about being noisy and stuff, messy, doing the dishes, taking out the trash, and buying groceries. Our room struggled with groceries because some people would eat them and some people would not, some people would pay for them, and others were not. We finally decided to eat what you buy, that's it.

Billy found living with people she had just met was "weird." She found that different "routines or environment stuff" was something with which she was not used to living. However, she claimed getting along with her roommates as one the most positive experiences during preseason and that she was "disappointed" that two of her roommates would not be roommates next year.

The one participant who did not live in the athlete dormitories was Lisa. Her experience was vastly different than the other seven participants. She recounted her experience in the dormitories:

> You live in a dorm with so many people, as a freshman, that if you want to go talk somewhere or hang out somewhere or watch a movie or even a TV show there's someone a foot away from you in another room. And so it's easy to get distracted because at home you have your siblings but you wouldn't necessarily run into your brother's room. I feel there is a lot more stuff going on, a lot more people in such close proximity that it's a lot easier to waste time.

She said she "got to know a lot more people than [the other freshmen who lived in the dorms]" because she lived in a non-athlete dormitory.

Participants' had positive and negative experiences with their living arrangements. The apartment style living, for seven of the participants, was spacious and allowed for seclusion. They also experienced living with new people who were not family members and negotiated different styles of living. However, participants felt that they did not meet as many people as those who stayed in regular dorms. Living arrangements for these eight people were highly important during their first semester.

Free time was a category of participants' lives that was imposed prior to analysis in order to capture experiences outside of school and soccer. Four themes were determined form the data. Within independence, participants found simple chores, such as laundry or making dinner, new responsibilities that were incorporated into their lives. Family and significant others were discussed as difficult to be away from, lines of support, and highlights of the fall when participants were able to visit with family. Social life was largely limited to other athletes and the inability to connect with more people and non-athletes was troublesome. The apartment style living was described as luxurious but at the same time inhibited participants from exploring life outside of academic and athletic experiences. Participants were also challenged with negotiating roommates that were non-family members for the first extended period of time.

Summary

Soccer experiences in the fall were detailed in six themes: commitment, body shock, place on the team, bonding and team chemistry, competition, and coaching. Soccer was the most frequent category discussed. The commitment required to participate in soccer was often stressful. Fitness was a major concern for participants in the beginning of the season but subsided as the season progressed. Fitting in with the team and learning their role was

important for participants and the transition into the team was eased by senior player mentorship. Participants experienced higher levels of intra-team and inter-team competition than in previous soccer experiences. Interactions with coaches on and off the field were negatively and positively influential in participants' lives. Soccer was more than a game: it became an aspect of participants' lives that stretched into their school and free time experiences.

Experiences in school were talked about in four themes: class size, difficulty, exams, and time commitment. Not until participants received their first round of exams back did they realize the commitment level necessary to achieve their academic goals. In making more of an effort outside of the classroom, participants gave up free time and social experiences. Classes were largely regarded as easy but stressful because of the constant demands on participants' time. Large classes were generally preferred so that participants could remain anonymous and engage in non-academic related activities during class time. Unique to athletes at The University is an athletic department sponsored class-checking system, which monitors freshmen athletes and athletes that are deemed at-risk of being academically ineligible.

Participants free time experiences were discussed in terms of independence, family and significant others, social, and living arrangements. Independence from parental figures was an experience shared by all participants, one that initiated a sense of responsibility. Family and significant others were important to participants as lines of support. The few times that participants were able to see their family were regarded as some of the most memorable experiences during the first semester. Participants' social lives were confined primarily to athletes. The women on the team became friends and that friendship carried onto

the field. Their dormitories also contributed to their inability to make friends outside of soccer. Dormitories, which were athlete exclusive, were described as apartments and isolated participants from the student body. Because participants had the necessities to live in their rooms, unlike traditional dormitories, they did not need to go out of their dorms.

CHAPTER FIVE

TIME DEFICITS, TIME TRADEOFFS, AND ASSISTANCE

"We didn't have really as much control over what was going on like day to day" ~ Lafonda

The focus of this study was two fold: to examine freshmen soccer players' experiences during their first semester at college, and to learn how freshmen soccer players balance sports, academics, and free time aspects of their first freshman semester. This chapter focuses on how participants balanced soccer, academics, and free time.

The demands of soccer and school situated participants in an environment with constant structured activity that required them to use their time away from those activities to meet the expectations placed on them. The commitment necessary for soccer and the workload for school were overwhelming at times during the fall semester. The level of soccer commitment was surprising to participants, even those who expected soccer to occupy a large portion of their time. Activities, such as film review or weight lifting, in addition to regular training hours, games, and travel occupied much of participants' time. Throughout the semester participants increased their commitment to school, although seven of the eight participants described school as not difficult. Combined with mandatory class attendance, in accordance with athlete academic policy at The University, school made up a significant source of the demands placed on participants' time. Together, soccer and school entailed a commitment level that rendered participants tired throughout the day as they shuffled from

one activity to the next. Periods of time between soccer and school activities were important because it allowed participants to balance and organize their time.

Balance

Analysis produced three themes: (a) time deficit, (b) time tradeoffs, and (c) assistance. During their fall semester participants described activities from early morning to late evening, which limited their free time. In order to meet the demands for school and soccer participants used their free time to prepare for school and soccer, and they were required to attend mentoring and tutoring sessions organized by the athletic department.

Time Deficit

Participants described having little free time during their first semester. All eight participants discussed the lack of free time as a significant aspect of their first semester. Participants recounted expectations about college life; experiences with time constraints; and uses of free time.

Yolanda was surprised at how much time soccer occupied despite feeling prepared for the time demands before coming to college:

> Coming in as a freshman you think you know how much time [soccer] is going to take up but it ends up being more than you expected. Coming in I was just thinking about practices and games. But then you forget about the other aspects of soccer, like video, team meetings, team dinners, and jog and stretch the next morning. It was a little bit more of a commitment than I thought, which wasn't necessarily a bad thing, but it's something I didn't realize I had to get used to.

Bee, who was used to an active social life, had similar notions of free time prior to arriving on campus:

> I thought I would have had more free time because I didn't have such a strict time line for classes every day like in high school. I thought I would have more free time, more independence but I ended up not having as much free time as I liked. It was stressful, more stressful than I expected.

Lafonda was upbeat, positive, and light-hearted throughout the semester. Though she did not view her lack of free time as negative, she recounted the amount of free time she felt she had: "We were really busy all the time. You don't really have that much time to yourself." She characterized her life succinctly, saying "you pretty much just played soccer, went to classes, ate, slept, and went to the athlete academic center."

During a session with her mentor, Sarah tracked the amount of free time she was likely to have during the semester. She said, "We did this thing with our mentors about how many hours of free time we had and it was actually pretty depressing what the number was."

Sofia, in addition to recounting her lack of free time, had trouble motivating herself because she was displeased with her soccer performance and she found school disappointingly easy. She gave an account of the overwhelming feelings she experienced amid the many activities in which she was engaged:

> Sometimes it felt like things were never ending because you always had something to do after you finished whatever you were doing. It was hard to stay enthusiastic about things that you're involved in when there's so many things.

Susie said she had “no free time, not at all” and that she “didn’t have a life.” She explained how her commitments occupied the majority of her day in the form of structured activities or how much time outside of classes she needed to devote to coursework. She said,

> All I thought about was school, trying to get organized, trying to get a feel for college because it’s so different. Not knowing what to expect in my classes or how much I needed to study. I was overwhelmed with school. Soccer was the hardest it could have been. More fitness, really intense practice, everyone was trying to prove themselves, everyone fighting for a position, so I was fighting too. I didn’t know what to do so I just tried like everyone else. All I did was nap, play soccer, and go to class. Just insane.

Participants spoke about what they were giving up versus what they were getting by participating in soccer at The University. Susie described it like this:

> I was disappointed because I feel like I was missing out on a lot. But I realized I was also getting a lot instead. That’s probably one I struggle with the most is wondering what I missed by playing soccer and wondering how it would be different without it. All I would have to worry about was school. It would leave my days completely open.

Yolanda, who understood the commitment she made to soccer and school, had similar thoughts about what she might be missing as a result of playing soccer at The University. She expressed, “I feel comfortable here but there’s a lot of stuff out there from The University, like what it offers, that I still don’t know about.” Lisa discussed her perception of the give and take relationship she had with soccer participation. She asserted,

> You're not a normal college student. You're a student-athlete so you have this whole other life other than being a normal student. It's hard having both the student and athlete name because of everything you give up. You give up a lot but you get a lot too that other people don't experience or don't have.

When asked if she had experiences other than school and soccer Susie replied, "Probably not many, I don't think anybody really did. If they did, kudos to them, I couldn't." When faced with the same question, Sofia said, "Um no, not really, I don't think." Sofia went on to say, "My whole life was going to school and playing soccer and I don't really remember anything else that was going on."

When they did have free time participants were unsure how to use that time. Sofia described her experiences when she did find free time: "We were so used to always having something to do so when we didn't have something to do we didn't really know what to do with ourselves." Lafonda stated a similar experience when asked what she would do if she had more free time: "Probably just nothing. Just kind of hang around, sit around, just relaxed."

Every participant stated she felt free time was scarce during the fall semester. Even those who expected the time demands of school and participation in soccer were surprised at how much time those activities took up and how little free time was left. Some felt they were missing out on opportunities around campus but no one could describe what exactly they were missing. Others did not know what they would do with extra time or would use that time for school or personal maintenance purposes like sleep. Participants' lack of free time demanded they manage their time effectively.

Time Tradeoffs

Participants frequently discussed time management and balancing commitments. They spoke about unstructured and structured ways of managing their time. Participants said that they used extensive amounts of their free time to prepare for their school or soccer commitments. Mandatory study hall helped them manage their school commitments as eight hours of study hall were required to be completed at the athlete academic center.

Participants described being busy with chores, errands, and schoolwork during periods of time that were not obligated to soccer or school. In the time between classes, meetings, and other commitments Billy used that time for herself, “chores, and errands.” When asked about how she used her free time, Bee, who was not used to doing chores or laundry growing up, replied, “it was used for other things like getting school stuff done or doing laundry, stuff like that. I became more organized.” Sofia she said that she used her free time hours to take care of some of the responsibilities that came with independence,

> I had a couple of hours when I got home at night before I went to bed. There was usually four hours a day, four hours you weren’t playing soccer or lifting, going to school or tutors… maybe four. But usually during a couple of those hours you had to run an errand or do laundry or something else.

Using the evening to study or preparing for the next day by getting to bed was common among participants. Because their schedules were heavily regimented coursework could not be left to complete until the next day. Physically demanding training sessions, classes, and evening activities required that participants be rested at the beginning of a day.

After tutoring in the evenings Billy said she was faced with three options, she “studied, slept, or hung out with the girls” but that she “usually chose to sleep or study.”

Lisa found that she needed to be organized most of the day otherwise she would stay up later than she desired. She expressed the following,

> If I took an hour or two to just do nothing and relax then I would pay for it by staying up later. If I got it done right away I could go to sleep earlier. It really depended on my mood that day. If I want to watch television or do this or that, I would have to make time to do it. It wasn't like I just had the time, I had to allocate certain time for it and give up other stuff, like sleep.

Sarah, like Lisa, said she spent much of her free time doing homework or chores to prepare for bed and the next day. She sectioned out her time according to the demands of her courses or schedule. She commented,

> I wanted to get everything done so I could get to bed and get ready for the next day. Soccer was always great because since I was little [I told myself that] I've got this amount of time to get everything done in a time frame. It's kinda kept me on track.

Participants frequently sacrificed social experiences to study, sleep, or prepare for the next day. Bee, who had an active social life in high school, said time with friends was limited. She remarked, "If I did go out I would have been crazy busy, I wouldn't have been able to get a lot of sleep and manage classes.

Lisa, who did not live in the athlete dormitories, also said that she could not put off academic work like her friends could,

> All my friends would go to bed at 11 pm if they were tired and would get up early to study. But I can't do that. I had to stay up later and if I waited until the morning I would be screwed, so there was no way I could do that.

Yolanda and Bee said they prioritized their commitments to soccer and school over social experiences. Yolanda said, “You need to worry about your grades first and then you are here to play soccer, so soccer second, and socially comes third.” And Bee said, “I did what was required for soccer, that’s kind of non-negotiable. And it was a choice for social life. I could go do something tonight, study, or go to bed early so I could play well tomorrow.”

Methods of organization helped participants manage their commitments. Susie said that she organized her entire day, “You had to arranged your day, how you were set up to go, when you were getting back, and when you were going to catch up on rest.” She said, “every week was different, we never had two weeks back to back that I could call the same” and it forced her to be organized. Sofia used to do lists and became more efficient with her time,

> To do lists are really a great option because you don’t have much time to do anything. I feel like with the busyness of last I’ve gotten better at being efficient with my time since there was not very much time on my own.

She went on to say, “I’ve become more efficient because I had to deal with so many commitments and so little free time so I just had to adapt to it.”

Managing time was highly prevalent in participants’ experiences during their first semester. Participants used a great deal of their time between activities to manage their commitments. Getting to bed at a reasonable time was motivation for using their free time to work on schoolwork. Additionally, a few participants developed strategies and priorities that spoke to performing well in soccer and in school while forsaking social activities.

Assistance

The athletic department at The University requires incoming athletes to meet with a mentor one or two times per week. The University also has tutors available for athletes. Every participant had a tutor for at least two classes during their first semester. Seven participants discussed their tutors and of those seven, four also discussed their mentors. Sofia, who said school was disappointingly easy, was the only the participant who did not discuss mentors and tutors. Attending mentoring and tutoring sessions counted towards the students' study hall hours as required by the NCAA and were free of charge.

Participants cited the athlete academic center as a place that helped them manage their time and commitment. The eight hours of study time that were required to be completed were fulfilled at the Athlete Academic Center. Tutors and mentors were available only at the center. Susie described, "Every week was different so I found different time to study, go to the Athlete Academic Center and do everything." Billy commented on the center as a place she could do her coursework, "I think study hall helped out. Having to be at the [athlete academic center] to study made me do my work." Bee also said her tutors and mentors helped "us manage our time" by giving them support for coursework. Lafonda said that her courses were manageable because of the center:

> Having to be at the Athlete Academic Center you could balance school pretty easily because you had to be there eight hours anyway. By the time you went to all your tutors and stuff you were able to study for all your classes. I didn't have to worry about school as much just because of the tutoring.

Yolanda, who felt good about balancing her commitments, reiterated Lafonda's sentiments about the study center as a place to balance her life. She stated,

> Having our tutors and mentors and study hours allowed us to balancing to be a lot easier even though it was annoying having to get eight hours every week. It did help with the studying and keeping us on the right track. I feel like I did a fairly good job balancing it but having those people and rules that were set a lot.

Mentors were discussed largely in neutral terms. Participants often said they were not helpful but that they were able to use their time with their mentors to complete schoolwork. Bee felt she did not need a mentor and used her time there for schoolwork. She described her experiences:

> I didn't really like my mentor. I understand how they are good for some people but I didn't want or need her. I feel like it was more of a hassle than it should have been. I would get there and we would talk about how my classes were going and then I would do homework. I feel I could just do that on my own time and I didn't really need her to sit me down and tell me what homework I needed to be doing.

Lafonda described her initial meetings as cumbersome and how those meetings progressed throughout the semester into a period of time that she could focus on coursework:

> I did not like going to the mentors. A lot of time she would sit there and type down what was going on in your classes and it wasn't benefiting you at all. So that time was wasted and just pointless. It got better though because after we would get off the computer she would let me study and she would read her book or something or work on other stuff.

Sarah and Yolanda also used their time study. Sarah said, "I just felt like it wasn't helping me, and my mentor, she was so sweet but she would just sit and watch me study." And

Yolanda reiterated experiences with her mentor as a time to “get caught up with what I needed to do.”

Participants described tutors as both helpful and not helpful. Students completed part of their required study halls hours in their tutoring sessions. Susie explained that her tutors served as a time for her to fulfill hours and to study, “ Most of my [study hall] hours came from tutors. It was a good thing. When I came home I didn’t open a book so it was good. It forced me to study.” She went on to say, “Tutors were good. They helped us go over what we had learned and made it easier. They were there to teach us and they were definitely good.” Bee also liked her tutors and thought they were helpful, “I liked my tutors and I had a lot of them. I think they helped me know what teachers expected on their tests and stuff like that.” Billy recounted her tutors as both helpful and not,

> Sometimes they’re good, sometimes they suck. The good ones help you out. I left those tutors understanding class better but [in the fall] it didn’t really do anything for me. I felt it was a waste of time because I could do the same thing on my own.

Sarah described the activities she was engaged with during her tutoring sessions. She reported specifically on multiple tutors:

> My political science tutor was great. He helped lead us in the right direction for tests. He also helped us figure out the right direction to go for answering essay questions. Some of mine, I would sit and reread my notes that I took that day in class, which doesn’t help me very much. And some other ones would give you all this work that was supposed to help you for the test. But none of it ever helped me for the test.

Lafonda, who enjoyed her tutors because once tutoring was over she had little to do for coursework during the evening or night, explained how her tutors were helpful and how they were not:

> My math tutor was good. That was helpful because I could do my homework there and if I had questions or anything you could ask a question to the tutor and he would answer you. It was nice to get your questions answered. Psychology tutor, I didn't like that one much because he would lecture on different stuff than the professor and it was more information. It seemed like a waste of time. My science tutor was really good because she knew a lot of stuff that was going to be on the test. It was more like review each day, like studying, so when we went home we didn't have as much to do.

Lisa, like Lafonda, described the type of help she received from her tutors. She relayed specific tutors,

> Some are more helpful than others. I had a math, science, and then asked for a Spanish tutor. Science was helpful because it was like a second lecture and it helped to have someone else explain things in a different way or make it more clear. Math was a waste of time sometimes but it helped when I had questions. He was good because he said you don't need to come you don't have to. I feel like I wasn't there a lot and that was good because I could use my time better doing other things. And my Spanish one, I exchanged through email with her more than actually seeing her. She helped me with my compositions.

Tutors and mentors were a form of structural support for participants that helped manage coursework. Lisa said, "It's something you can definitely take advantage of, to have

tutors available to you." Yolanda described her tutors as a way for her to balance the many commitments she had during her first semester,

> The tutors had basically been through the class. They knew about study skills and some had the same teachers so they knew how they presented their tests. It was another check and balance to see how you were doing in the class.

The demands of school and soccer were under constant negotiation. In addition to the many ways participants employed time management, tutors and mentors were one significant source of help for managing demands.

Summary

On the whole, the semester was largely a positive and successful experience for these participants. However, it came with an acceptance of a lifestyle that participants were unaccustomed and unprepared. Stress and tension were common experiences in both times of great success and ease. Participants were disconcerted with constant activity every day, lack of perceived free time, and devotion required to meet school and soccer expectations.

Participants used mentors, tutors, and their own free time to balance their commitments to school and soccer. Tutoring and mentoring, which was fully funded and supported by the athletic department, was regarded as cumbersome at times. However, students got help with their coursework or simply use that time to work independently.

As the semester progressed participants realized that school needed attention in the evenings after finishing daily activities like training, weight lifting, classes, and tutors. Unfortunately, dedicating themselves to school occupied much of their free time and they sacrificed social engagements and sleep in order to meet their goals. During periods when coursework did not need attention in the evening participants often chose to sacrifice social

engagements in order to prepare for the next day, which was often physically and mentally demanding.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

"This summer if you would have asked me if I would be happy if I were starting and doing well in school and really liking my coaches and really liking the girls, I wouldn't think I would be able to be any happier. But I had all those things and I really wasn't happy."
~ Sofia

This chapter presents a summary of the study, explains findings and interpretations through discussion and comparison to relevant literature, proposes implications for researchers, offers reflections on notions indirectly related to the purpose of this study, and gives the researcher's final note.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how women soccer players perceived and negotiated the transition from high school to college during their first semester at a major Division I university in the Southeastern United States. The research questions that guided the study were as follows: (a) What are freshmen soccer players' experiences during their first semester at college? (b) How do freshmen soccer players balance sports, academics, and other aspects of their first freshmen semester?

A symbolic interactionist perspective guided this study from initial data collection to the representation of the findings. Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection for this project. Field observation and participant journaling helped inform the interviews. Broad categories were used for initial coding, were meaningfully grouped, and

were then broken into sub-codes. This analysis delineated interconnections and yielded theoretical saturation.

The findings presented in Chapter Four produced a total of fourteen themes that described participants' experiences with soccer, academics, and free time during their first semester at The University. Soccer experiences yielded the following six themes: (a) commitment; (b) body shock; (c) place on the team; (d) bonding and team chemistry; (e) competition; and (f) coaching. The commitment level required to participate in soccer was extensive and was often described as stressful but enjoyable. Fitness was intimidating but over the course of the season, fitness was less of a concern. Participants were concerned with fitting in on the team and wanted to fill a role on the field. Team chemistry on and off the field was one of the most positive experiences during participants' fall semester. The level of competition, both in training and games, was extremely high compared to what players had previously experienced in soccer. Intense competition lasted the entire season. Interaction with coaches was important and influential in participants' lives during the fall.

Academic experience produced four themes: (a) class size; (b) difficulty; (c) exams; and (d) time commitment. Large classes were new for participants and generally preferred because little interaction with instructors allowed participants to engage in non-course related behaviors like reading the campus paper or sleeping. Seven of the eight participants characterized coursework as easy despite having to use free time in addition to class, mentors, and tutors in the evenings. Exams were initially difficult because of participants' insufficient preparation. As the semester progressed participants learned how to better prepare and improved performance. Often, participants made the commitment to sacrifice social engagements or sleep to achieve academic goals after the first round of exams.

Free time experiences produced four themes: (a) independence; (b) family and significant others; (c) social experiences; and (d) living arrangements. Participants experienced independence from their parents for long periods of time for the first time in their lives. From their independence, participants developed a sense of responsibility for their choices and necessities like doing laundry or making dinner. Participants frequently found it difficult to be away from family and close friends. Visits from parents were cited as important and parents served as lines of support. Friendships outside of soccer and other athletes were rare for participants. The obligations participants had for school and soccer kept them from establishing friends outside of soccer and other athletes. Living arrangements, which were described like apartments rather than traditional dormitories, also limited participants' abilities to make new friends. Only Lisa, who lived in a traditional dormitory, established friends outside of athletics. The apartment-like dormitories for athletes provided individual space not typically found in traditional dormitories but still required participants to negotiate living with people who were not family members.

The findings in Chapter Five described how participants balanced their lives during their first semester. Three themes were constructed to capture that aspect: (a) time deficit; (b) time tradeoffs; and (c) assistance. Participants discussed that they had little free time, which was disconcerting and stressful. To successfully meet expectations in school and soccer, participants chose and accepted a lifestyle that did not allow for many social experiences and often limited their time for sleep. Mentors and tutors, though described sometimes described as cumbersome, were generally helpful because of the quality of instruction or because participants could use mandatory time with mentors and tutors to work on their coursework.

The 14 themes illustrated in Chapters Four and Five suggest that participants perceived soccer to influence virtually every aspect of their lives. The most exceptional experiences that contributed to that premise were socialization into soccer before school, a lack of free time, and athlete isolation. As the semester progressed, participants realized they needed and chose to dedicate their free time to schoolwork. That choice gave them even less free time.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the major findings. These findings will be presented with supporting contentions from the data and compared and contrasted with related findings in existing literature. Issues around soccer as a priority, academic performance, free time scarcity, athlete isolation, and a comparison of athletic and academic support will be discussed.

Soccer First

The first semester for soccer athletes is drastically different than for non-athletes. Non-athletes begin the semester as students, which sets up school as the dominant priority. In contrast, the athletes in this study began their semester as athletes first because preseason soccer, which takes place prior to classes and welcome week, was the focus of participants' time and energy. Kuh (2005) recommended that universities limit who comes to campus before welcome week because students who arrive on campus before the official welcome week can "acquire anti-intellectual habits" (p. 104). Kuh (2005) also suggested that "students' time be structured with meaningful, educationally sound, and socially cohesive activities that are consistent with the academic ethos from the moment they arrive on

campus" (p. 104). In this study, preseason was a period when school was of little importance giving room for soccer to develop as a priority.

Division I college sport is a big change for athletes as they move from high school to college if you take into account the facilities, amount of preparation, demands, and expectations (Adler & Adler, 1985). Similar to Adler and Adler (1985), who used men basketball players at a major Division I institution, participants in this study were surprised at the demands and expectations placed on them during their first semester.

> Within the Division IA scholarship schools the so-called 'minor sports' of another day have sought to share as fully as they can in the attributes of the ambitious, well-funded High Profile programs. Many more specialized coaches have been hired, facilities have been improved, and scholarships have been provided. (Shulman and Bowen, 2001, pp. 285-286)

This study explored women soccer players, who were considered low-profile athletes, and the findings resonated with what Shulman and Bowen (2001) describe as low-profile sports "emulation" (p. 285) of high profile programs.

Participants perceived intensity of training and intra-team competition as extremely difficult from the first day of training throughout the season. Similar to Adler and Adler (1985), Eitzen (1987), Miller and Kerr (2002), and Jolly (2008), the intensity of physical activity and competition level were consistent with larger Division I universities athletic programs. Prioritization of athletics over academics can result from of increased training, intense competition, and coaches expectations commonly found in Division I sports (Adler & Adler, 1985; Eitzen, 1987; Miller & Kerr, 2002) and this study demonstrated consistencies

with previous literature. Additionally, this project offers a new contribution to sport as a priority for college athletes, the commencement of sport before school. The participants

This study found that the slow start to the academic semester gave participants little to work on outside of class time and having already been socialized into soccer, the slow start to the school semester may have strengthened participants' perception that soccer was more important. The combined effect of sport established before school and the slow start to the semester has yet to be explored in the literature.

Academic Performance

Combined with the commitment and attention received in soccer, school was interpreted as both less demanding and less important during the first few weeks of classes. Participants described many of their classes as large lectures in which they could sleep, read the campus newspaper, or browse the internet. Adapting to college level courses has been cited as an important factor in adjusting to college life, and large lecture halls and impersonal professors can hinder academic development (Franklin et al., 2002). The consequences found in this study were that participants might have suffered a decreased ability to adapt to academic life at college, indicated by poor performance on midterm exams, because of their sport participation.

However, participants' initial poor performance on exams was short lived and those first exams served as a wake up call that academic performance needed to be a priority and necessitated more devotion. This is similar to Meyer (1990) who found women volleyball and basketball players increased their academic drive over time in college. Though Meyer (1990) and Eitzen (1987) illustrated women athletes perform on par with or better than non-

athletes, this study is at odds with Shulman and Bowen's (2001), who explored college athletes over a 25 year period at a variety of college athletic levels, contention that there has been a "falloff over time in the academic performance of women athletes" (p. 156). Although no comparison was made to non-athletes, the findings of this study were consistent with Meyer (1990) and Eitzen (1987) in that academic performance increased because participants' were self-motivated to achieve better grades.

According to Adler and Adler (1985), the commitment level required to participate in Division I athletics conflicts with academic time. The findings in this study contrast Adler and Adler in that participants chose to sacrifice their own free time rather than academic time. Raised expectations in sport with longer and arduous training sessions and the decision to prioritize school over personal and social opportunities suggests that participants experienced "role conflict" and "role overload" (Miller & Kerr, 2002, p. 354) as a result. The lifestyle cost of participating in soccer was drastic for these eight women and had profound implications. Participants experienced a reduction in sleep, sacrificed social activities and campus engagements, and had difficulty being involved in experiences outside of school and soccer.

This study demonstrated that participants experienced stress associated with higher education experiences, like volume of coursework and autonomy. Similar to Tracy and Corelett (1995), who explored women and men track athletes, participants adjusted their study habits and uses of free time to meet increased expectations in school and soccer. Additionally, like Tracey and Corlett (1995), this study displayed that participants were surprised at the volume of work for school rather than the difficulty.

Free Time Scarcity

According to Schilling and Schilling (2005), the first year of college is a period when independence, self-development, and maturation are important. When young adults move from high school to college, they engage in a major transition as they begin life away from parents. During this period of transition, life is marked by instability, lack of adult responsibility and commitment, which allows individuals an opportunity and time to explore identity, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000, 2006; Keup, 2007). As evidenced in the data, participants in this study experienced reduced hours of free time in which such exploration could occur. Commitments to soccer and school possibly rendered participants unable to explore identity, self-development, and maturation to the degree that non-athletes, who have less obligated time than athletes, are able to explore. Direct comparison of athletes and non-athletes experiences would provide insight into the levels at which athletes and non-athlete each explore identity, self-development, and maturation during their freshman year.

Without question, athletes are required to balance their lives and commitment at a level that most students are not because of the magnitude of commitment required at Division I college sports (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Some students, when engaged with too many activities, reduce their extracurricular activities in order adjust to their new environment (Keup, 2007). Athletes are unable to do so because quitting sport can have repercussions on scholarships, which makes the decision to quit more difficult for athletes than a non-athlete who might discontinue participation in an extracurricular activity such as an academic club or social group. Unable to detach from sport, the athletes in this study balanced their commitments at a cost to their free time experiences.

Athlete Isolation

Residence halls have been characterized as places where friendships can form (Franklin et al., 2002). During periods of time when studying or preparation for the next day was not needed, soccer players were bounded to a world of athlete-to-athlete friendships, isolated from the general student body. This finding resonates with previous findings (Adler & Adler, 1985; Meyer, 1990; Miller and Kerr, 2002; Kimball, 2007) that illustrated how athletes play, travel, and live together. Seven of the eight participants in this study lived in athlete specific dormitories that were akin to apartments where they were neighbored by other athletes and had sufficient resources, such as a kitchen, that enabled them to remain in their dormitory during free time. Franklin et al. (2002) reported the dormitories were perceived as "uncomfortable, unsafe, and nervous" (p. 77). The eight participants in this study demonstrated a contradiction to this finding, as dormitories were generally perceived as comfortable. By comparison, the one participant who lived in a general-student dormitory was able to engage more socially and form friendships with non-athletes. The impact of the athlete specific dormitories was further isolation from the student body and limited ability to form new friendships.

Bonhert, Aikins, and Edidin, (2007) reported, "the transition to college may provide opportunities to build new friendships" (p. 203) and that intensely involved activities might facilitate the development of intimate friendships. This study corroborates this notion as participants reported friendships within the team as highly important beginning with the first day of preseason. Unfortunately, participants spent vast amounts of time in the athletic arena, reducing their free time. In addition, when paired with athlete isolation in dormitories, the

only friendships athletes were able to nurture were limited to either soccer players or other athletes. Feelings of loneliness and isolation, which were salient in this study, are common among students who do not get involved in campus activities (Franklin et. al, 2002).

However, athlete isolation might have some beneficial consequences as well. Teams that spend time together outside of the sport setting and form bonds of fellowship perform better than those teams who do not spend time together and develop friendships with one another (Weinberg & Gould, 2003). One way to facilitate bonding between athletes is by having athletes live together (Weinberg & Gould, 2003). The majority of participants in this project lived together and that may have created a positive team culture while improving athletic performance. However, it also may have hindered participants' ability to form a broader base of friendships.

Athletic and Academic Stimulation

Once students achieve a 3.0 GPA they are exempt from any further study hall requirements and tutors for classes become optional. Unless athletes drop below a 3.0, the athletic department does not interfere in their academic performance. Even though the athletic department provides tutors, mentors, and facilities for study hall, their concern is simply to meet NCAA standards. Deeper interest in athletes' academic development is not present. Exploring athletes throughout college would further reveal at what levels athletes receive academic support from athletic departments.

Participants described their experiences in soccer as constantly competitive throughout the season and the expectation from coaches was to be good every single day at practice and in games. The high and consistent level of stimulation soccer players received at

The University sent the message that one can always be better and that improving, winning, and dominating are important goals. The athletic department at The University devotes vast amounts of time, money, and energy to winning. That message is a provocative voice being relayed across the ears, bodies, and minds of 18 and 19 year old women and men as they enter college. In soccer, constant achievement and success is required, while in class, athletes need only get a 'B.'

The women in this study were more than involved in soccer, they were consumed by and with it. Daily routines, class attendance, diet, social engagements, and sleeping patterns were all concerns of participants with soccer participation playing a role in decision-making processes. With soccer established as a priority before and during the early part of the semester, achievement in the academic sphere came at a cost of social and personal experiences. Similar to previous findings in major Division I programs (Adler & Adler, 1985; Eitzen, 1987; Sack, 1987), the commitment to participate in sport was extensive. Participants chose to sacrifice their personal and social lives to achieve academically. The title of this project, "The whole soccer package," captures the supposition that soccer was dominant in the lives of these participants during their fall semester.

Implications

This study adds to the body of knowledge about college athletes' first semester experiences and how college athletes balance the demands of soccer and school commitments. Tracey and Corlett (1995) stated that the first semester was described as "a mixture of fun, stress, and challenge mixed with a very busy schedule" (p. 96). This study illustrated the freshman year of eight college athletes who encountered a plethora of experiences that required their devotion at a level not previously faced. The commitment

level these women demonstrated was impressive as they competed for a nationally ranked soccer program and achieved their academic goals at the same time. These women had a demanding but fruitful first semester at The University. Unfortunately, their athletic and academic performance came at the cost of free time.

There are four important issues that this project points to for future research that will aid the understanding of athletes transitioning into Division I college sport. The first is an operation that leads athletes to perceive sport as a priority over school. Different sports commence training at different times during the year and fall sports, such as soccer, often begin training before classes start. As such, fall sport athletes encounter a different transition to college life than other athletes as well as the student body.

This study demonstrated another mechanism that promotes athletics over academics. For those athletes who train before the commencement of classes or during the slow start to the semester, academics appear to be less important than athletics. The effects of such orientation to college for first year students are important to establish. This study aimed to explore women athletes' first semester experiences and how these athletes balanced their commitments. Through their sporting experiences these women transitioned into college differently than the student body and other athletes that do not train before the beginning of classes.

Another focus of future research might be aimed at the time demands placed on athletes. Without comparison of non-athletes and athletes the opportunities or experiences that athletes might not engage with are merely conjecture. The independence and autonomy found in the college lifestyle is important for personal development, though athletes gain different experiences than non-athletes, it is important to know how individual development

is affected by extensive free time constraint for freshmen athletes. This study showed that participants were unable to engage socially as frequently as they wished and that they did not experience the free time thought necessary to fully explore identity. The effect of free time limitations is worthy of future exploration.

Athletes in this study were largely isolated from the student body and formed friendships primarily with teammates and other athletes. The consequence of isolation disappointed participants as they could not forge and maintain new friendships with non-athletes. Benefits to isolation were illustrated by the increased team chemistry felt by participants on and off the field that ultimately might have increased athletic performance. Comparing and contrasting the benefits and disadvantages resulting from the limitation of friendship and socialization would reveal the unique and missed opportunities that athletes' experience.

Lastly, participants in this study received considerable aid from the athletic department in their soccer and academic development during their first semester. Since they have met academic standards set down by the NCAA, participants will no longer need to attend mandatory tutoring and mentoring. The difference in the stimulation they receive academically will be lessened but their free time will increase slightly without eight hours of study hall to complete. Exploring the changes participants' experience as they move from structured academic assistance to relatively completed academic independence, as it relates to academic performance and free time experiences, is intriguing.

These eight athletes' experiences provide implications for practice for collegiate athletic administrators and coaches. Participants' discussed the lack of autonomy and free time that is widely associated with the collegiate lifestyle. It is important for administrators

and coaches to consider how much time sport participation *should* require at the amateur level. Determining what level of participation impinges on athletes' development as students and adults is vital. Though soccer is a non-revenue sport, these participants described experiences that aligned with revenue producing sports participants. The devotion that was demonstrated to these individuals as athletes was superb. However, devotion to them as students and young adults was not equivalent to the athletic fidelity.

Participants described the first few weeks at The University to be oriented almost solely to soccer. The preseason period and first two weeks of classes are the first experiences these players had in college and influenced participants' perception of soccer as the most important priority. During preseason, taking time out of the training schedule every day to explore the college environment, and not just soccer, would be beneficial. One way to do this could include a reduction in training time and increased focus on student activities and different opportunities around campus, especially during the first few weeks of the semester.

During the semester, participants expressed a lack of free time and a desire to explore outside of school and soccer. Throughout the semester, reducing the time demands of practice and training may expedite acclimation to college life while providing athletes the opportunity to explore. The NCAA limits mandatory athletic involvement to 20 hours per week but that time does not include preparation, travel time, post-event activities like body maintenance, and voluntary activities. The number of hours required should be tracked and closely monitored in terms of athletes' time including, the aforementioned activities, and not just the NCAA's countable hours. Doing so may reveal the time consuming nature of sport participation, promote a better understanding between coaches and players, and encourage athletes to engage more thoroughly in freshmen experiences outside of sport.

This study is an effort to contribute to the broader body of knowledge known about college athletes in America. College sport is a hotly disputed topic throughout the academic community and the media. For researchers, it is important for understanding the experiences of athletes. From studies like this, coaches, administrators, and the NCAA can draw conclusions and develop policies about how college athletics is organized, administered, and functioning. If left un-explored, athletes will suffer the consequences from intense time demands of participation in Division I college sport.

Further Reflections

This section is dedicated to considerations that may not be fully supported by the data but are considered to be important to discuss. The difference between men and women athletes is documented in the literature to some degree though studies of men have traditionally dominated the discussion of athletics and athletes. Two participants chose not to continue playing and further exploration of their decision is important. Lastly, the capitalist mode of operation by which The University athletic department operates is considered in relation to the experiences of these eight participants.

Gender

It is important to remember that this study included only women, whose experiences in sport are different than that of male athletes. Birrell (1987) warned that “exposure to the highly competitive male model [of sport] may alter women’s experiences of sport” (p. 92). The model of sport at the university is a model designed to produce winning programs and the soccer team is no exception. According to Shulman and Bowen (2001),

> Differences in values and interests between athletes and other students continue to widen, women's athletic programs look more and more like those of the men, and athletes are increasingly being recruited on the basis of talent that differentiates them from other students. (p. 273)

Further exploration and comparison of men and women athletes and non-athletes is warranted given that the women's soccer team, which a minor sport, so strongly resembles a men's competitive model.

In contrast to Nelson (1990), who contended that women's grades were beginning to drift lower as a result of sport participation, the women in this study achieved their goals in coursework. Eitzen (1987) and Meyer (1990) illustrated that women achieve equally or better than the student body. The participants in this study became intrinsically motivated to succeed academically after their first round of exams. Comparison to the student body and men athletes would identify the differences and similarities of women athletes, the student body, and men athletes.

Choosing Not to Play

In this study, two participants chose not to continue playing after the fall semester. Their reasons were not easily explained. Susie chose to leave the team because she found it difficult to be away from home and the quote that opens this chapter was from her. She was happy with soccer and school, she enjoyed her friends on the team, and it seems as though her experiences were overwhelmingly positive. However, her time at The University did not overcome feelings of loneliness and a longing for home. What, if anything, went wrong? Was it necessary for her to leave home to realize she wanted to be there? Would different

experiences during the first semester have led to a more comfortable adjustment for Susie? These questions are beyond the scope of this paper but they are none-the-less important factors in her life and the lives of other freshmen college athletes.

Interestingly, Sarah left for vastly different reasons. In fact, she made her choice to come to The University because she knew she would be happy without soccer if she no longer wanted to play. After achieving the goals she set for herself in soccer she decided to focus the rest of her time at The University on school and career. Is there something that can be learned from her desire to place school before soccer, and her decision to drop soccer because it impinged on her academic goals and career aspirations?

Tracey and Corlett (1995) had five students out of 21 discontinue track and field participation during their study. The primary reason, and only explanation given, for those who quit, "was a matter of insufficient time available to devote to track and field given the demands of school" (p. 92). For those students, like Susie, the conflicting demands of athletics and academics seemed to impinge on a desire to succeed in college and free time activities.

Susie and Sarah may have had numerous factors at work in their decisions to discontinue playing. They discussed the lifestyle cost of playing in terms of family and to focus attention on the future. Success in athletics or in school is not enough to keep students from dropping out of their sport.

Capitalistic Operation

Major Division I college that support football and men's basketball operate with capitalist ideals and a winning mentality (Miracle & Rees, 1998). As non-revenue sports,

such as soccer, become permeated with the ideology found in big business college sports we must continue to examine how and why low profile sports take on characteristics of high profile and money making sports. This study illustrated the competitive mentality of The University soccer program and the cost of participants' college experiences outside of soccer and school.

> Every major critique of college athletics has offered similar recommendations, centering on the proposition that competitive sports must not be kept separate and apart but rather must be fitted into a university's larger educational aims. If taken seriously, that principle would have far-reaching implications for everything from campus governance to budget allocations." (Finn Jr., 2001)

Continuing to explore and determine effects and implications of business-like operations in college sports is important to provide athletes, within the larger context of college education, a college experience that is not oriented to sport but rather to individual development and well-being.

Methodological Considerations

As this project progressed a number of changes and alterations were made to improve the study. I will discuss those changes and the importance of those changes. I will also reflect on methodological changes I would make if I did this study again.

Initially, this project sought to capture participants' expectations about their first semester at college. To capture this, the interview guide included a section organized around first semester expectations before arriving on campus (see Appendix C). After gaining insight into those expectations, a comparison of what participants expected and what they experienced was going to be made, thus revealing how participants' expectations were met or

unmet. However, during the interview process, participants struggled to recollect their expectations prior to the start of soccer or the academic term and often spoke briefly and generally without detail compared to more current or recent topics. During analysis, I did not extract significant connections across participants about expectations and therefore did not discuss expectations as a topical area within Chapters Four or Five.

To better capture the expectations of participants, I would ask them to sit for an interview before they began practice at The University. This interview would reveal their perception of college and expectations before incurring any influence during the semester. Then, in the final interview during the spring, I would have been able to enter each interview with an index of pre-semester expectations that could be used to prompt participants and foster discussion. Analysis would then likely reveal a great deal more about participants' expectations and be used as a topical area of discussion that would add insight into how participants' transitioned into college life.

Two methods, participant journaling and my observation, did not effectively produce usable data and ultimately led me to use the interviews as my only data source. During the fall, participants experienced little free time, as this study shows, and perhaps participants did not want to use that time to write about their experiences. I intentionally did not ask participants about their journaling on a frequent basis. Journals were issued approximately every two weeks and in my email to them I would send directions, a copy of the new questions, and ask if they had any questions. Since they had the option not to disclose their journals, I never ask to see what or if they had written. Twice during the fall, participants gave me their journals to read but they did so on their own accord without a prompt from me. Three participants used the journals to write and reflect on a regular basis. Of those three,

only two chose to disclose their journals to me. It was unclear whether the other five wrote in the journals because they turned back only small pieces of journals or nothing at all to me. Not completing the journals is significant in of itself. Was it because they did not remember, did not care to complete them, or something else? Because of this, I decided not to use the journals as a data source. With only two participants submitting the journals back to me, I did not feel that I could include them as data because six of the eight would be unrepresented.

Rather than using journaling throughout the semester, which participants might not complete, using brief interviews of less than thirty minutes might have been more effective. Due to the time constraints of participants' schedules and the head coach's request to limit their time commitment to the study, conducting only two or three interviews throughout the semester would be possible. Those interviews would capture participants' experiences close to when they were happening and would alleviate participants from having to complete journals on their own. Before conducting the final interview in the spring, those short fall semester interviews could be analyzed and then used with the final interviews.

My two roles as coach and researcher within the soccer setting were under constant negotiation. The impact of being two people required me to monitor my roles and also impacted how I was able to use my observations. For me, it was paramount to never make a participant feel uncomfortable in the soccer setting because of being involved in my project. As discussed in Chapter Three, I recorded observations only during periods when I could escape to my office and never carried anything to aid in recording observations during soccer activities. Walking the line between discreetness and capturing detailed notes was difficult. Because of this, I feel I missed or forgot a great many relevant interactions.

During the analysis process, I realized how fragmented my observations had been throughout the semester. Sometimes, as long as a two-week gap was present in recording periods. It is unlikely that there was little to record during those gaps since I was involved in soccer and with the participants almost every day. Like the journaling, I decided not to use what notes I had gathered during observation, thus making the interviews the sole data source.

As an insider, I have great responsibility and access to an otherwise difficult sample to reach. Remaining respectful of that position but still using the researcher role effectively in the soccer setting is a difficult position in which to be. I believe there are two ways improvements can be made, though I am not entirely confident with them. A simple effort to record more, or a conscious decision to make notes every day after every soccer activity, even if for two minutes, would increase at least the amount of observational data collected. I did not become Bryan the researcher enough when I had the opportunity to do so. Also, shadowing participants around for two days each throughout the semester might have provided useful data. Being solely the researcher and not the coach while shadowing a participant would allow me to focus on the collection of data, and I could use a pen and pad as well as a voice recorder, which I refrained from as a coach in order to more rigidly define my duality,

My data collection methods were initially strong but two of the three methods failed to be effective. My roles as coach and researcher were difficult to negotiate. As always, there is room for improvement and I have suggested ways in which the data collection methods in this project could be strengthened. Nothing here, however, lessens the trustworthiness of the data, which was based on interviews.

Final Note

This study does not represent every athlete or even every woman athlete at The University or across the country but it does illustrate the experiences athletes might engage with as they transition from high school to Division I college athletics. Even though readers will not meet these eight people, I hope that this project provided you with a snapshot of their lives for one semester. Qualitative research is needed to create and fill gaps left from traditionally quantitative studies. It was my wish to provide these women a voice that is scarce in research on athletes in college.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

I agree to take part in a research study titled "Incoming Freshmen Soccer Players' Transition from High School to College" which is being conducted by Bryan Clift in Counseling and Human Development Services at The University of Georgia, **(217) 621-1288**, under the direction of Dr. Diane M. Samdahl in Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia, **(706) 542-4333)**. My participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

I am aware that the purpose of this study is to explore how college athletes negotiate the changes occurring during their freshman year of college. I will not benefit directly from this research. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to keep a journal of my experiences and to participate in at least one interview and possibly two more, which will be audio taped by the researcher. The researcher will prompt me with questions on a regular basis for the remainder of the calendar year of 2007, and I will respond by writing reflective answers to those questions at the depth that I choose. I can request that the journal remain private so no one but me will read it, but I will use it as a recollection tool during the interview process. Interviews will occur from January to May of 2008 and will last approximately one half hour to two hours.

There are no significant risks to participation in the study. If my reflection on my experience leads to any type of emotional upset, the researcher is prepared to give me contact information for Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at the UGA health center.

I give my permission for information collected during interviews to be used by Bryan Clift for presentation and publication purposes as long as my name is kept confidential. The only people who will know that I am a research subject are members of the research team and Patrick Baker, the Head Coach of the Women's Soccer program at The University of Georgia. I understand that information collected by the researcher will not be revealed to the head coach. I understand that the researcher is not focusing on activities, actions, or moments, in reference to illegal activities, which would bring me harm or put me at legal risk. Information provided by me will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with my permission or as required by law. An exception to confidentiality involves information revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse, which must be reported as required by law or if the researcher is required to provide information by a judge. Individually identifying information, such as my name, will not be published in connection with this study. All results and all tape recordings from this study will be disguised by a fake name and this name will be used on all of the research records. All audio recordings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. The audio files will be destroyed two years after the completion of the researcher's master's thesis.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at **(217) 621-1288** or by email at **bclift@uga.edu**. The researcher's advisor, Diane Samdahl, who can be reached via email at **dsamdahl@uga.edu** or by phone at **(706) 542-4333**, is also available to answer questions. My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction, and that I understand the procedures described above, and that I consent to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Bryan Clift
Name of Researcher
Phone: (217) 621-1288
E-mail: bclift@uga.edu

Signature _____ Date _____

Name of Participant _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX B

JOURNALING QUESTIONS

Journal Instructions and Questions

The purpose of this journal is to ask you questions that will allow you to reflect on your life at The University of Georgia. All of the following questions are open-ended because I want to know what you think. There are no right answers. The length and depth, as well as the style (i.e. hand-written, typed, or both) of responses you give are completely up to you. You can include or omit anything you choose. Please be as descriptive as possible and as creative as you would like to be. This information will be valuable to help you remember your thoughts and feelings during our interviews, and should you choose to give me the journal, it will give me in depth information in your own words.

Initial Journal Questions:

- Think back to your first two weeks, tell me in what ways the experience met your expectations and how it did not.
- If you were not an athlete coming into The University of Georgia, how would this period have been different?
- Tell me about the best things that happened during your first two weeks at The University of Georgia?
- Tell me about what you wish you could have done differently?

Weekly journaling:

- Tell me about your life this past week: talk about school, soccer, and everything else.
- Tell me about the best things that happened since your last entry?
- Tell me about the things that you wish you could have done differently?
- What pressures and concerns do you have right now?

Final journaling questions (Late December):

- Thinking back across this semester, what would have been different if you were not on the soccer team?
- How has the writing in this journal helped you to think about your first semester at The University of Georgia?
- In retrospect, tell me about the best things that happened this past semester?
- Tell me about the things that caused you the most trouble, concern, and/or stress?
- What advice would you give to new freshmen who join the soccer team next year?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Questions:
Transitional Experience of Women College Soccer Players

1. Before classes began, what was soccer like for you?
    - What aspects of preseason did you enjoy?
        - What aspects of preseason did you dislike?
    - What were some successes you experienced during preseason?
        - What were some difficulties?
    - What were your major concerns or stresses during this time?

2. During the first few weeks after school began, how did your life take shape with soccer, school, and free time?
    - What were your experiences in classes?
        - Class "firsts" prompts
    - What role did soccer play in relation to school the first few weeks?
        - Soccer "firsts" prompts
    - What other experiences, other than school and soccer, did you have during this period?
    - What pressures or concerns did you have at this time?
    - What are some of the highlights during this period?
        - What were some of the things you wish you could have done differently?
    - How did you balance soccer, school, and everything else during the first few weeks?

3. Did you become *settled* at the University of Georgia?
    - If yes, what contributed to you becoming settled?
    - If yes, when did you become settled?
    - If yes, what was occurring in school during this time?
        - Soccer?
        - Things other than school and soccer?
    - If yes, how have you felt since becoming settled?
    - What are some of the highlights during this period?
        - What were some of the things you wish you could have done differently?
    - If yes, how has soccer been since being settled?
        - School?
        - Everything else?
    - If no, what kept you from becoming settled?
    - If no, how did not becoming settled feel?
    - If no, what were your experiences with soccer?
        - School?
        - Everything else?
    - How did you balance soccer, school, and everything else after becoming settled?

4. What were your expectations before coming to the university?
    - What did you expect from soccer?
        - School?
        - Free time?
    - How were your expectation met or not met during this semester?
    - How did you feel about those expectations being met or not met?
    - If you could give advice to next year's incoming freshmen on this team, what would you say to them?

5. Are there any questions that I did not ask that you feel are important to address?