

## Exploring Sport Migration through International Student Athlete Recruitment: The Sojourn of Male Soccer Players from Trinidad and Tobago

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### Abstract

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In the realm of sport, international student athlete (ISA) recruitment to US colleges and universities may be viewed as the most prevalent form of sport migration today. This is supported by the fact that ISA enrollment figures have doubled within the last decade. From the expectations placed on them from coaches and teammates, ISAs are exposed to a great number of stressors that often put them at a disadvantage. However, despite these stressors ISA recruitment numbers are still increasing. Framed by the concept of life satisfaction where an individual assesses the meaningfulness of his/her life as a whole, the purpose of this study was to explore sport migration through ISA recruitment while revisiting some of the stressors that accompany such a journey. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, eight participants were interviewed on two separate occasions and the data analyzed using a phenomenological approach. Perpetuating the desire to migrate to the US was the need for personal development and aspirations of playing professional soccer abroad.

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**Keywords:** Collegiate Sport, International Student Athlete, Life Satisfaction, Migration, Recruitment.

### 1. Introduction

A review of the literature surrounding the journey of foreign students to American colleges and universities paints a rather foreboding picture filled with indecision, financial concerns, interpersonal strife, and issues related to cultural adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1986). Schram and Lauver (1988) describe such a journey as "student alienation", with feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social estrangement. As a subgroup of the international student body, similar arguments can be made regarding the recruitment of International Student Athletes (ISA). Their journey similarly can be rather convoluted and difficult from the onset.

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Bartolacci (2010) and Yukelson (2008) argue that ISA recruitment may be the most prevalent form of sport migration today. This is supported by the fact that ISA enrollment figures have doubled within the last decade (DeHass, 2009). However, the literature also alludes to a multitude of issues pertaining to leaving one's home country and traveling abroad. From the expectations placed on them from coaches and teammates alike to the increased competitive nature of collegiate sports, ISAs are exposed to a great number of stressors that may put them at a disadvantage and create an environment prone to failure (Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore sportmigration through the lens of male soccer players from the country of Trinidad and Tobago recruited to play collegiate sport in America.

## 2. Literature Review

On the professional level, migration involves political, cultural, geographical, and economic pressures. Individuals in positions of power have a profound influence over the structuring of a migrants life in the new host culture (Maguire &Falcous, 2010). College athletes from foreign countries are also exposed to these same pressures. Additionally, ISAs go through a resettlement process which may include, gaining access to better coaching and training facilities, working towards a degree and financial gain or for an opportunity for a better life. While these actions have contributed to the globalization of sport, it has conversely created an environment of 'dependent development' (Maguire &Falcous, 2010) where sport organizations including US institutions of higher education, have placed a heavy emphasis on foreign talent.

To compound these issues, the collective presence of international students on US college and university campuses may elicit some negative behaviors from faculty and even domestic students (Lee &Rice, 2007) making this a very difficult transition for the newcomers. There are also sporting organizations like the National Junior College Athletic Association's (NJCAA) trying to limit the number of ISAs a coach can recruit. Recently, the NJCAA board of directors elected by a 30-21 margin to limit the participation of international student athletes to one-fourth of a team's allotment of scholarship players as a means of curbing what was described as the recruitment of individuals with unclear amateur credentials (Wieberg, 2011). This, according to Lapchick (2011), is a policy designed clearly around exclusion and against the popular and socially acceptable notion of 'inclusion.' These examples clearly depict the paradoxical nature of recruiting ISAs.

Numerous studies have since documented the many issues faced by ISAs once a decision to travel to the US is made. Noteworthy are Ridinger and Pastore (2001) who report that ISAs have a difficult journey ahead once they arrive in the US. Hanton et al. also(2005) reported on the many stressors ISAs face in the expectations of coaches and teammates. Conversely, Trendafilovan, Hardin, and Kim (2010) looked at satisfaction levels of ISAs participating in Division I of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Their results revealed that ISAs were satisfied with on campus services provided for academics, personal treatment, medical services, and the social ties formed by their interactions. These findings appear to contradict earlier reports and may indicate a shift in the ability of ISAs to navigate and adjust to new surroundings.

At the same time, several other areas have presented opportunities for future research. The first area has to do with economic factors. Very little consideration has been given to the ability of an ISA to pay upfront fees associated with traveling to the U.S. (visas, airline tickets) or the funds that are needed to support themselves beyond the monetary scholarships provided by their coaches and athletic departments. The monetary consideration is imperative because it brings into focus factors influencing the intentions/decisions to migrate such as the insurmountable fees associated with foreigners attempting to travel to US. This in it can become a deterrent for many. Significant fees are associated with obtaining student visas, air travel and in some cases tuition. Here the journey can end even before it really has an opportunity to begin.

In addition, researchers were usually confronted with the task of dealing with the vast amount of variability that came with this line of inquiry. For example, someone originating from the Congo and traveling to the U.S would potentially have vastly different cultural experiences than someone traveling from England. Furthermore, controlling for variables such as gender, country of origin, and sporting differences usually presented design challenges regarding sampling techniques and participant selection. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to explore sport migration through ISA recruitment by building on the strengths of prior research and controlling for some of the variability mentioned.

### **3. Conceptual Framework**

To get a better understanding of what influences one's decision to migrate, the concept of life satisfaction was researched. Life satisfaction according to Veenhoven (1995) is a personal life assessment conducted on oneself where an individual evaluates the meaningfulness of his/her life as a whole. Hence, a decision to migrate brings into the equation the reality of an individual's perception of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Otrachshenko & Popova, 2012). Graham and Markowitz (2011) conveyed that unhappiness is usually correlated with higher migration intentions and hence may have a profound impact on migration decisions. Thus, dissatisfaction with current life situations at home may lead to the likelihood of migration. The opposite also holds true (Jong, Chamrathirong, & Tran 2002). Additionally, the concept of life satisfaction deals with how an individual feels about their current situations, how personal expectations align with reality, and how success or failure outcomes are assessed (Mara & Landesmann, 2013). Issues pertaining to economic status, income potential, employment opportunities or more importantly, standard of living, all play a factor during this personal assessment process.

Furthermore, life satisfaction according to Selezneva (2011) hinges on what is called subjective well-being where the level of a person's happiness is used as an indicator of his/hers life satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Subjective well-being therefore is influenced by what Layard (2005) calls the 'Big Seven' factors. Listed in order from most important to least they are: family relationships, financial situation, work related, community and friends, health, personal freedom and personal values. Non-pecuniary factors Stark (2003) argues play an equally important role when it comes to migration decisions. For the purpose of this study, life satisfaction, and its connection to family relationships, and finances will be contextualized.

Positive family relationships are reported to have a positive influence on individual well-being and therefore on life satisfaction and happiness (Frijters, Haisken-DeNew, & Shields, 2004). Therefore, positive well-being is indicative of low migration intentions which may affect one's decision to migrate. However, positive family relationships do not necessarily negate a desire to migration when issues of economics, income potential, and employment opportunities are on the forefront (Veenhoven, 1995). Pecuniary factors likewise are important when assessing life satisfaction. In a longitudinal study involving varying countries, Easterlin (1974, 2001&2006), Blanch flower and Oswald (2004), and Blanchflower (2009) reported a positive association between higher earnings and well-being. In this scenario, the pursuit of financial independence is what may perpetuate a desire to migrate. In sum, life satisfaction deals with how individuals see their life situations where a personal assessment may increase/negate intentions to migrate depending on the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Factors usually in play are economic status, employment opportunities, and one's standard of living. Framed by the concept of life satisfaction, the purpose of this study was to explore sport migration through ISA recruitment while revisiting some of the stressors that accompany foreign travel.

#### **4. Method**

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to explore the items of interest. This approach guided the interaction of the interviewer and interviewee by the use of a list of questions. The participants were asked to respond to specific questions in a free manner and this allowed for more in-depth responses (Bryman, 2004). These interviews were conducted over the telephone, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Interviews ranged from twenty two to forty seven minutes in duration. Once transcribed, a phenomenological approach (Kvale&Brinkmann, 2009) was employed to analyze the collected data which aided with the interpretation of given responses (Kvale&Brinkmann, 2009).

##### **4.1 Procedure**

Eight participants were interviewed during the first round of interviews and only six were interviewed a second time due to scheduling conflicts. The first interview was used to gather pertinent data and allowed for the identification of themes and areas for exploration. The second interview gave time for elaboration and clarification of chosen themes and was purposeful in addressing validity and trustworthiness of the data. Discussion points were sought from the theoretical underpinnings found in the literature on immigrant studies and the educational literature concerning international student adjustments.

##### **4.2 Participant Selection**

The participants chosen for this study had to meet several requirements prior to being recruited. These individuals had to be: 1). citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, 2) identify as male, 3) play soccer, 4) currently enrolled in college, and 5) representing The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics member institution. These outlined criteria assisted in controlling some of variability present with researching groups from differing national origins. In sum, eight male international student athletes agreed to participate in this study.

Participant ages ranged from eighteen to twenty five years and were all starters for their respective teams. There were three college seniors, four sophomores, and one freshman. These individuals were recruited on a voluntary basis and interviews were conducted until responses became repetitive, which are indicative that a point of saturation has been reached (Bryman, 2004). Table 1 provides detailed information about player demographics.

### **4.3 Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using a phenomenological approach which according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) requires five main steps: 1) each interview was reread and a sense of the whole was gathered, 2) themes were conveyed from the text, 3) themes were explained in simple terms, 4) In-depth meanings were considered as they pertained to the study at hand, and 5) non-redundant themes were brought together to formulate descriptive statements. Pseudo names were assigned to each individual in order to maintain confidentiality.

### **4.4 Coding**

Bogdan and Biklen (2006) defines coding as a process that involves searching through the collected text for regularities and patterns framed by the purpose of the study with word and phrases used to communicate these topics and patterns. These words are coding categories. This process is categorized as subjective in nature through a family of combined approaches: 1) definition of situation codes and 2) perspectives held by participants, these were helpful in sorting the descriptive data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). The first was used to capture how participants would define their own roles within their respective settings and the second was used to capture that meanings and perceptions attributed to these settings.

## **5. Researcher Positionality**

Like all of my participants, I was driven by the chance to play post-secondary football (soccer). Since there were no meaningful options to play football after high school in Trinidad and Tobago, traveling to an American college or university seemed like an excellent idea. However, the steps necessary to get to the point of college admission was convoluted and complex from the onset and having to navigate a new host environment athletically and academically on my own only exacerbated this issue. With thoughts and attempts to leave within the first few weeks of my arrival in the US, my perceptions regarding such a journey are mixed despite playing for four years and graduating from college.

My own experiences as a former ISA bring a strong bias towards a process I believe is designed for failure. Even though the outcomes are possible and fruitful, getting to that point can be an emotional and financial rollercoaster. LeCompte (1993) states that a researcher's concern regarding subjectivity is normative; proceeding with this in mind, one should remember that the objective in this case is not to render judgment about this journey but to bring added value and knowledge to a degree it leads to the development of theory, and a greater understanding of this social phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

Bogdan and Biklen (2006) went on to say that any analysis undertaken with a prejudicial lens can delegitimize a study and be labeled as superficial by readers. Therefore, my approach will be one of reflection, and the mindfulness of how my own experiences would influence the study at hand and use it to my advantage. To address my own bias a very open-minded approach to data collection and analysis was needed. One thing that is paramount is the issue of time. It has been more than fourteen years since I graduated from my undergraduate institution so things have certainly changed. Remembering to keep this in context was important so as to avoid asking leading questions or imposing certain points of view on my participants. Second, my goal was to collect as much information as possible during the interview sessions and making detailed notes during the analysis so I can purposefully make informed categorizations.

### 5.1 Trinidad and Tobago

The twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is the most southerly of the islands in the Caribbean. They are located just off the northeast coast of South America and have a combined landmass of 1,981 square miles (encyclopedia.com) and may be considered one of the better performing countries in the Caribbean with natural resources including oil and petroleum that account for a large proportion of the country's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) . These two islands are home to a melting pot of approximately 1.3 million people. The sport structure is one of diversity with youth programs available to all in areas of track and field, football (soccer), cricket, netball and rugby just to name a few. The majority of participation however, occurs overwhelmingly in cricket and football, with these two disciplines receiving most of the national support and attention.

The success in football especially is seen through the establishment of a professional league. Back in 1999, the Trinidad and Tobago Professional Football League (or TT Pro League as it is called today) was launched with the vision of strengthening the country's local talent. This developmental plan paid huge dividends when this small twin island republic qualified for the 2006 FIFA World Cup for the first time in the country's history. This accomplishment opened many doors for various local football players. Some were able to land major professional football contracts in the world's top football leagues while others were able to compete for, and win collegiate athletic scholarships to universities and colleges in the United States. Recent financial problems within the TT Pro League have resulted in a greater number of local football players perusing opportunities overseas.

**Table-1: Participant Demographics**

Participant Name	Age	Classification
Collin	22	Senior
Joe	24	Senior
Philip	23	Senior
Ross	19	Sophomore
Mark	22	Sophomore
Ben	22	Sophomore
Richard	23	Sophomore
Steven	18	Freshman

## 6. Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore sport migration through ISA recruitment. An examination of the collected data revealed that the experiences of this group of ISAs were atypical when compared to the reported experiences of the foreign student athletes and the wider international student population in prior bodies of literature. Specifically, the desire to migrate was strongly perpetuated by the need for personal development, and a desire to play professional soccer abroad. However, finances were a constraint to these aforementioned factors and limited an individual's ability to make such a journey. These will now be discussed in detail in the following sections.

### 6.1 "Exodus"

Exodus is defined as 'the departure or emigration of a large number of people' [from one place to another], (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>) and was fitting because it allowed for the interpretation of an increased number of people which in this case are male soccer players leaving their home country and traveling abroad. Throughout the study all participants expressed a strong and overwhelming desire to leave home and migrate in search of something 'seemingly better.'

### 6.2 Personal development

Being recruited by a collegiate coach in the US was seen as a legitimate avenue and means for personal development. Personal development then can be viewed a conscious and purposeful pursuit of personal growth. This can be achieved with improvements in self-awareness and more importantly increases in one's knowledge base ([businessdictionary.com](http://businessdictionary.com)). These players strongly believed that a greater opportunity for a better life and higher standard of living awaited them in America. This was something they said was not achievable on the same scale at home which highlighted a level of dissatisfaction. Bale (1991) reports that ISAs travel abroad to gain access to better coaching and training facilities. While these all appear to be valid, for these participants in this study however, it went beyond these initial findings. They all appeared genuinely concerned about their future prospects and in their minds they believed that leaving their native country was worth the risk of achieving success. Ross defined success as, "Making something of yourself [and] being something positive in society." When asked if personal development was possible in his native Trinidad and Tobago he responded, "There is a better chance of making out here [America] than back home."

The desire of a migrant to leave one's country in favor of another according to Otrachshenko and Popova (2012) lies with whether individuals interpret their life experiences as either more positive or more negative. The more positive someone's experience the more likely they are to stay. The opposite holds true. If the gains of migrating is perceived as better than staying in one's current location (Layard, 2005), then the individual is more likely to leave. These eight male soccer players were therefore of the belief that the net gains of traveling to the US far outweighed the benefits of staying in their native Trinidad and Tobago. Philip's feeling about his desire for personal development was shared when he stated,

To be honest it was all about watching my older peers and I saw there was a way to advance your education as well as your style of play in soccer and also adapt to being away from your family. I wanted to further my education and get a degree too. I wanted to come here and grow and move on so at the end I would have my degree. After high school I just wanted to start my journey.

A concern that seemed to resonate with this group was the limited number of opportunities available to high school students after graduation. Ross claims that with tertiary level education being free in Trinidad and Tobago, there is a greater amount of people competing for fewer employment opportunities. To compound this issue he says, those who are already employed are staying on even longer in their respective positions and not retiring when they are supposed to. Ross concludes his thoughts on this issue by saying,

That is the main factor for leaving Trinidad...I mean it is not that easy in the US but it is so big that you have a better chance of getting a job there.

For Mark, his line of reasoning was very similar. He echoed, One of the major reasons for coming over to the US is because of the opportunities. After secondary school [in Trinidad] you have [few] options: stay and play professionally back home but things were really bad with the league and with people (both teams and players) dropping out due to the money crisis, [or] you can go to the universities like UWI (University of the West Indies), UTT (University of Trinidad and Tobago), and COSTAATT (College of Science Technology, Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago) or whatever but I mean you going to those schools, your football life is going nowhere.

For Joe, his drive for personal development was intertwined with not only being able to play soccer but being able to help provide for his family. Joe stated, My family is important, my mom, dad, sister, nephew and girlfriend. I just want to be able to take care of them. This [journey] could build a life for myself and [put me] in a position to help others because some have helped me along the way. My motivation is basically my family. Collin had a more critical outlook when it came to personal development. For him, looking at the choices some of the players who graduated high school ahead of him assisted him in putting things in perspective. Collin said, If you think about those high school [soccer] stars at that point of time who stayed in Trinidad to play in the pro-league and did not get an education, those are the ones you see today still working today and not having much money that they deserved to earn compared to if they were on a scholarship.

So for Collin, his need for personal development was driven by the realities and failures of other players in Trinidad and Tobago who made the choice of not furthering their education beyond high school. These were also the players who settled for playing in the domestic professional league. Their struggle was motivation for Collin to strive for something more. Aside from the desire to play professional soccer abroad, Ross, Mark, Joe and Collin all saw greater opportunities for personal development in the US. These opportunities were based on their respective life experiences combined with interpretations and expectations of a series of events that can unfold in the near future. Therefore, the net gains of traveling from Trinidad and Tobago to the US in their minds were perceived to be better.



This desire for bettering oneself finds support in Popp, Hums, and Greenwell's (2009) study that looked at the purpose and view of sport between domestic collegiate athletes and ISAs. It was found that ISAs deemphasized the competitive aspect of college sport and attached themselves more to their academic roles while their domestic counterparts saw competition and good citizenship as highly important. Despite this, a shared characteristic was that regardless of national origin, student athletes indicated their experiences with collegiate sport were important towards enhancing one's career prospects. This finding lends supports for the need for personal development expressed by these eight participants.

For Ross and Mark, it was about having more opportunities after high school which according to them was clearly available in the US. For Joe, it was about being able to take care of his family. Collin saw the hardship associated with not furthering your education and pursuing a soccer career in his native country and decided he wanted more.

### **6.3 Professional soccer**

In regards to the desire of playing professional soccer, this journey to the US therefore was used as a stage of planning and preparation. In the United States there exists a rare opportunity to showcase one's talents and abilities while working towards a college degree. This journey was undertaken in anticipation of moving on to play professionally but in the event that that did not happen, having a college education and undergraduate degree would serve as their safety net. This notion rang through with several of the study's participants. Ross explained: "It was a better investment for my life and I [felt] that I could excel in both fields [knowing] that if one field [didn't] work out I will have my education as a backup." Ross cited 'future investment' as the main motivational reason for traveling to the US. Being awarded an athletic scholarship and playing soccer at a US college or university was seen as a legitimate avenue of moving one step closer to playing on the professional level. The overwhelming sense here was that this opportunity would likely be one of the very few chances, if any, to make this happen. Joe offered the following statement regarding his desire to play professional 'football' (the global term for American soccer):

It may sound bad but my main desire was not to come here and get a [college] degree, but to come here and play ball and get ready to go to the next level. It is because of 'football' that a lot of guys are over here because it helps their 'football' talent and the ability to pay for their education so at the end of the day, it is always about football.

For Collin, part of his motivational reason to leave home and travel to the US was tied to soccer. He said, The main motivation was I really wanted to be a soccer player, play on the national team, and be a professional player but my parents always instilled in me to get an education, and this was my way of getting both things, playing soccer and getting an education.

Philip on the other hand had a more critical view and was not necessarily in favor of the American style of play but knew playing in the collegiate system will allow him to stay fit and develop his playing abilities. He stated,

America is a stepping stone for me and not a concrete decision. I never wanted to come here and stay. I wanted to come here and grow and move on so at the end I would have my degree, my fitness and move on. I always had dreams and aspirations of playing soccer professionally. The place was never an issue. I want to play in Europe primarily because of the popularity of the sport over there but it doesn't really matter. I'll go Asia if I could.

Bartolacci (2010) and Yukelson (2008) argued that the increased number of ISAs recruited serves as the most prevalent form of sport migration and in these instances, this appeared to hold true. Therefore the overwhelming desire to leave Trinidad and Tobago was partially tied to a chance of playing professional soccer in the future. When asked to choose between an opportunity to play professional soccer on a contractual basis abroad, and a chance to work towards a college undergraduate degree if both were presented simultaneously, the contractual professional soccer opportunity was the preferred unanimous decision. Richard saw an undergraduate college degree as beneficial however; he was driven by some of his peers that went on to play in the pro-ranks. He indicated,

I would say [I am] self-driven because of [where] I see myself in the near future...and seeing [that] some of my friends have had opportunities to play professional and semi-professional soccer,[these] opportunities are available to you if you play your cards right.

Richard is hopeful that an opportunity to play professional soccer is nearby and did not hesitate to say he would have opted for a contract if it presented itself.

Through their respective lens, a chance to play abroad would eventually lead to a better life and a higher standard of living. The United States collegiate system provided the launching platform and opportunity for these players to put their talents and abilities on exhibition with the hope of achieving fame and fortune.

Additionally, having three seniors in this group provides an opportunity to see what outcomes can potentially materialize given the motivational need of personal development. When questioned about this, these seniors were happy that graduation was around the corner. However, in discussing their 'desire of playing professional soccer,' it became apparent there were no concrete plans in place to allow this to come to fruition. What was clear was that at this junction, these players were going through a resettlement phase where they were reassessing their current status and desired outcomes. The stage of when this reassessment period was initiated could not be clearly assessed, but it seemed to have occurred within the last two years. Collin surmised:

When I get out of college I would be 23 years old. Yes I love the game and if I had the opportunity to play professionally I would. I am just thinking about it more realistically because as you get older you gain other passions. Yes when I left Trinidad it was my desire to be the best football player and play for the national team, and become a professional footballer but as time changes you start to learn the value of an education and what you can do with it. You develop other goals in life...yes my passion to play soccer/football is always there but I am thinking about it more realistic in the sense of the limited number of players that get an opportunity to go on professionally.

There is a higher chance of me not going professionally that there is of me going professionally. I would say there is about a 20% chance of me getting that opportunity to play professionally.

Joe likewise was driven to play soccer on the next level. He was the only senior of the three that had an opportunity to showcase his talents and abilities in two major league soccer combines (professional tryouts). Unfortunately, he did not make the final cut. Joe stated:

Well at the end of the day and even though I may not go professional there is life after soccer. There are a lot of things that I could do and [there are] a lot of people that have impacted my life. Having a degree allows me to do other things like coaching. Coaching is something I always wanted to do and I have always been interested in it.

Even though things appear to not have gone exactly as planned for these players, a return to Trinidad and Tobago was not a high priority for these players. In essence, it seems that there are fewer meaningful opportunities in their native country for aspiring soccer players and soon to be college graduates, and the motivation to return is diminished. Collin believed that this issue was as a result of poor leadership. Collin indicated,

I would say that they do not really give players a reason to comeback... I don't think there is enough motivation.

#### **6.4 Financial concerns**

Social and psychological factors have been shown to be influential in prompting migration (Layard, 2005). Conversely, Stark and Yitzhaki (1988) report that economics may be more of a consideration when an individual decides on whether or not to migrate. Therefore despite the drive for personal development and a desire to play professionally abroad, the ability of an ISA to travel to the US is contingent upon the player and their families' ability to finance some of the upfront costs associated with such a trip abroad (airfare, visa fees etc.). Also, the ability to maintain the continuous monetary support needed beyond the awarded scholarship is equally important. Economics therefore was a major factor in whether this international travel was even a possibility. Steven provided testimony which highlights some of the complexities involved in securing the necessary funds to finance the travel:

I was not offered a full scholarship so my father had to come up with the [additional] money, so we went to the ministry [of education] but unfortunately we were unable to get any money from them but he [father] had enough saved. The next year if I didn't get any money from the ministry, or from scholarship, it may be a little tougher so he [father] may have to get a loan.

These players were quite aware of the financial burden that came with going to school in the US. Ben was on a full athletic scholarship but yet he still had to work two part-time jobs in-between practices, to make ends meet. This would have likely been a challenge for any student athlete to maintain.

This example especially highlights the importance of a player's family's economic standing in relation to a player being able to capitalize on the opportunity to study abroad and play collegiate sport.

Adding to the financial stress of this situation is the currency conversion rate of the US dollar to the Trinidad and Tobago dollar. The exchange ratio fluctuates daily due to the floatation of the Trinidad and Tobago dollar by the government in the April of 1993 (Farrell, 2013) but most recently this has been in the vicinity of \$1 US dollar to \$6.41 in Trinidad and Tobago currency. (<http://www.trinidadexpress.com>).

Relating to this matter, Joe stated:

I had a year's scholarship and it would have been too expensive to pay out of pocket especially coming from Trinidad. It was always a financial strain because of the conversion rate. There are always some fees that they do not include on your scholarship letter.

Here Joe is explaining the task of navigating within his personal financial limitations. These are some of the challenges reported by Altbach (2004), who went on to say that some internationals 'fail even before they leave due to finances.' Economics clearly, was a major determining factor as to whether a player would be able to travel to the US to take advantage of an opportunity to study and play collegiate sport abroad. A family's ability to finance some or all of the initial upfront costs that went beyond the parameters of US athletic collegiate scholarships factored significantly in these situations.

The criteria used to make a selection on which institution to attend was therefore based heavily on the amount of scholarship money they would be awarded. Factors such as the academic strength of the institution or geographic location appeared to factor less in the decision making. When asked about the criteria he used in deciding on an institution, Steven stated:

Actually, this university gave me the most money... I did not want to place too much of a burden on him [father] with the costs. Ben put it this way when asked if finances were the determining factor on institution selection: Yeah. This allowed me to be in a comfortable situation without putting a burned on my parents.

When Richard was asked if there were any other factors considered when deciding on an institution, he responded:[It was] just the financial part of it for me.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study was successful in first supporting the fact that sport in this context is being used as a vehicle for migration. Second, the concept of life satisfaction has relevance under this line of inquiry. Third, motivational reasons have evolved, and may continue to do so when one considers an individual's country of origin, the sport played and whether or not financial assistance in the form of athletic scholarships are awarded.

Furthermore, the economic standing of the individual's family should be a strong consideration in successfully transitioning to and competing in US collegiate athletics. Their motivations go beyond gaining access to better coaching and training facilities, as Bale (1991) suggested, as they all clearly indicated a desire to have a chance at 'better life opportunities,' which was something they felt could not easily be achieved in their native island of Trinidad and Tobago. Framed by the concept of life satisfaction, all participants cited the need for a better life and higher standard of living. Participants saw an opportunity to not only play post-secondary soccer, but also sought a chance of transitioning to the professional ranks after their college careers were over and they had earned a college degree. They believed that in order for them to have any chance of realizing or coming close to these goals, journeying to the US to engage in college athletics was the most overwhelming factor that would put them one step closer to this dream/goal.

### **7.1 Implications for Research and Practice**

The global appeal of sport is a constantly changing phenomenon and one of the areas I believe that is fueling this change has to do with the movement of athletes across international borders. Described as the most prevalent form of sport migration, ISAs journey to the US for a multitude of reasons. The complexity under this line of inquiry lies with the ability of researchers to capture their experiences while controlling for the enormous amounts of variability that comes with it. Grouping ISAs together was the typical sampling technique employed in prior bodies of research and this has presented a foundation for additional research opportunities. ISAs come to the US from different walks of life, with different life experiences and with different expectations and outcomes. This study's goal was to highlight these limitations and take a more systematic approach to this line of research.

This study used a controlled sample group: current male soccer players from Trinidad and Tobago playing for member institutions of the NAIA. The theme deciphered here provided a baseline that can now be tested against different populations to further examine whether the motivational reasons ISAs from different parts of the world are similar to the ones outlined herein. By controlling the variability in sport played, country of origin, gender, and institution member affiliation, a more meaningful outcome in terms of findings were sought.

This study also allowed for the comparison of previous research findings and exploration of new research areas such as the economic standing of the players family, and spatial gateways as influential factors. This journey had more to do with personal development and a desire for a better way of life and an improved standard of living. Ridinger and Pastore (2001) reported that ISAs have an insurmountable task ahead trying to adjust to a new host culture. In reality, this was not the case for these participants. These players were highly motivated and communicated that adjusting to their new environment posed little to none in terms of social or emotional issues. The major issue that became evident in this investigation was that of the financial aspect and obligations that the ISA had to face in arriving at their intended US institution and shortly thereafter.

## 7.2 Limitations

This study was limited in its sample size and scope, and was intentionally done. It allowed for the control of important variables that were atypical in previous bodies of research and while the results cannot readily be transferable to other ISAs populations, the findings certainly provide a baseline that can be tested against other groups of individuals and populations. Secondly, while the enrollment numbers of ISAs are reportedly on the rise, access still remains a major hurdle. Lastly, some coaches and administrators are averse to making their players available for interviews especially during respective seasons and this unfortunate event continues to perpetuate the divide between academia and the sport industry.

## 7.3 Future Research

Research into the attractiveness of US collegiate sports as an avenue for migration should continue in the near future as we try to piece together the motivational reasons for such journeys. With the information gathered from this study, ISAs of different nationalities, of different sexual orientations, or even in different sporting contexts can be researched to see if motivational reasons line up with a need for overall personal development. Additionally, whether there are issues pertaining to sport development in respective home countries that may force athletes to migrate to the US remains a relevant question. These circumstances may be directly correlated to athletes coming from less developed nations compared to someone traveling from a first world nation. In conclusion, this area of research is within its infancy stages by most accounts and the possibilities are endless.

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