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Community sport development events, social capital and social mobility: A case study of Premier League Kicks and young Black and minoritised ethnic males in England.

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This paper examines the effectiveness of 'Premier League Kicks' – a football community outreach initiative - to produce and leverage social capital among young Black and minoritised ethnic males in England. The paper draws upon semi-structured interviews with Kicks participants and community coaches to analyse the social capital created through participation in the programme, in addition to constraints faced by participants in utilising and leveraging their accumulated social capital to obtain a professional football career. Drawing upon Putnam's conceptualisation of bonding and bridging social capital and the associated concepts of linking and sporting capital, the analysis concludes that Premier League Kicks was effective for building bonding social capital, which can lead to greater individual empowerment and self-belief. However, opportunities for leveraging such capital for personal reward was limited to horizontal networks/mobility and subsequently, converting this capital into other forms, such as bridging, linking and sporting capital was highly regulated and exclusionary.

Keywords: Black and minoritised ethnic, community sport development, events, football, Putnam, social capital, social mobility.

Introduction

A career as a professional football player has often been viewed by young Black and minoritised ethnic males from low socio-economic backgrounds as a tangible route to upward social mobility.¹ This belief is further amplified by media rhetoric which regularly features stories about Black and minoritised ethnic men who possess lucrative contracts, huge salaries, but who,

outside of football, appeared to have little going for them; having experienced fragile childhoods, grown up in impoverished community settings, often infested with crime, gang-related violence, unemployment and other indicators of deprivation.² In this context, sport, and football especially, has been identified as a kind of social panacea. Football, particularly in England, offers the 'dream of social mobility', not just for people from a Black and minoritised ethnic background, but for anyone experiencing deprivation because of the opportunities it offers to improve one's economic status and social position.

Despite the rhetoric, football is far from a social panacea, for no greater reason than only a small proportion of Black and minoritised ethnic footballers actually go on to have a professional career and occupy the privileged position to which they aspire. Moreover, even if they do make the grade, Black and minoritised ethnic players are routinely subjected to racial abuse and discrimination from spectators and unequal and unfair recruitment practices in coaching and management.³ In addition, a professional football career is surrounded by the constant risk of contract termination, financial insecurity and injuries.⁴ Literature also highlights that, once their playing careers are over, fewer Black and minoritised ethnic players progress onto senior authoritative positions within the game, such as: head coach, referees, scouts and club owners.⁵ According to the Sport People's Think Tank for example, out of 493, only 20 (4.1%) senior coaching positions at professional football clubs in England are occupied by people from Black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds.⁶ Consequently, a Black and minoritised ethnic player's upward social mobility might be transitory and only last while their physical talent is deemed useful to specific football clubs.⁷ It is not only the length and (in)security of a professional football career that can dampen the dream of social mobility. According to Collins, young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds do not possess sufficient social capital, or the skills to acquire it, to progress through, and compete within, the football 'system'.⁸ Despite these factors, amateur football clubs are awash with young Black and minoritised ethnic males who dream of becoming professional footballers and achieving upward social mobility.

Through adopting Putnam's notion(s) of social capital, this paper examines the experiences of five Black and minoritised ethnic males who were participating in the community outreach initiative, Premier League Kicks (hereafter referred to as 'Kicks').⁹ The paper adopts the view that participating in such an initiative provides opportunities for acquiring different forms of social capital that could potentially be converted into upward social mobility through, for example, a professional football career. We begin by providing an overview of the literature into social mobility and capital, within the context of sport. Next we contextualise our case study by

introducing the Kicks initiative. This is followed by a discussion of our methods. The remainder of the paper presents our findings before offering some concluding remarks.

Social Mobility

In their 2016 State of the Nation Annual Report, the Social Mobility Commission found that social mobility is getting worse, not better.¹⁰ Those faring the worst are young people, for whom upward social mobility is becoming harder.¹¹ Social mobility generally refers to the movement of individuals or groups from one position to another within the social stratification system.¹² More specifically, it is the changes in an individual's social position which can include significant alterations in both their life conditions and social environment.¹³ It has traditionally referred to one's social class, but considerations of the term are becoming increasingly intersectional in nature.

There are two distinct forms of social mobility: horizontal and vertical.¹⁴ Horizontal social mobility is the transition of an individual from one social group to another, but their social position remains on the same level. In contrast, vertical social mobility involves either an improvement or deterioration of an individual's social position – i.e., upward or downward mobility. Upward social mobility appears in two forms: either as an 'infiltration of the individuals of a lower stratum into an existing higher one; and as a creation of a new group by such individuals, and the insertion of such a group into a higher stratum instead of, or side by side with, the existing groups of this stratum'.¹⁵ Furthermore, another important distinction of social mobility is between intergenerational and intragenerational mobility.¹⁶ Intergenerational mobility is the difference between the social position of children at a certain point in their adulthood and that of their parents. Intragenerational or career mobility, involves more short-term mobility of individuals or groups within a single generation.

An individual's social mobility is most frequently assessed in relation to what Breen and Jonsson describe as 'hard' indicators, such as change in occupation, income or educational attainment.¹⁷ These indicators can be referred to as the 'objective' dimensions of social mobility, although these indicators, in isolation, provide inadequate insight into how changes in an individual's life conditions or social environment are experienced. There are also various 'subjective' dimensions, such as perceived changes in freedom, personal development and skills. It is important to note however, that processes and experiences of social mobility are not isolated to individuals. As Spaaij notes, several areas, namely the social environment, geographical conditions, educational arrangements and the regional economy may determine if ambition and

personal development can manifest.¹⁸ A socially disorganised community, for example, can restrict individuals' prospects for the creation and conversion of social capital. In short, social mobility is affected by a range of factors that interchange with one another in mutually reinforcing ways. For example, taking Kicks as a case in point (discussed further below), the initiative is outwardly presented as giving young Black and minoritised ethnic males access to important networks and contributing to their education, which helps their acquisition of social capital and, ultimately, their upward social mobility.

Capital

There are many forms of capital that might be seen to facilitate participation in sport - their lack correspondingly limit it – and the following are relevant to this paper: human capital, cultural capital, social capital and spin offs, including linking capital and sporting capital. *Human capital* was originally conceived of as the abilities and qualities which allow someone to produce economic value. These attributes are gained through education (including the inculcation of values by parents) and experience.¹⁹ *Cultural capital*, as conceived by Bourdieu refers to non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means.²⁰ Put another way, cultural capital consists of the knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has which give them a higher status in society. *Social capital* recognises that it takes more than just money to produce desired outcomes. Social capital describes the pattern and intensity of networks among people and the shared values which arise from those networks.

On the surface, social capital is a relatively straightforward concept about the social connectedness of individuals within a wider community, and as Nicholson and Hoye contend, 'there is an inherent logic in the idea that the more connections individuals make within their communities the better off they will be emotionally, socially, physically, and economically'.²¹ We adopt Putnam's view of social capital where he speaks at length about the value of social networks: 'social networks have value ... [social capital refers to] connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them'.²² In this view of social capital, there is an important emphasis on civic engagement, association and volunteering as they each improve the efficiency of communities and enable them to be more effective in pursuit of collective interests.

Putnam divided social capital into two forms: bonding and bridging. Bonding capital refers to maintaining already established social ties with people who share similar backgrounds, interests, and values, which tends to correlate with horizontal relationships referred to above.²³ Putnam

advocates bonding social capital as the ‘sociological superglue’ that holds communities together. This form of social capital is frequently associated with positively perceived outcomes, such as increased educational attainment.²⁴ However, Putnam also notes that there is a ‘dark side’ to bonding social capital, as it can lead to inward looking, exclusive, and homogenous identities and groups.²⁵ This not only contributes to the exclusion of ‘outsiders’, but may also hinder the development of individuals within the group and stifle their own upward mobility.²⁶ Bridging capital, on the other hand, has the potential to forge upward social mobility, as the process involves an individual connecting with different people that they are loosely tied with. Bridging capital is usually associated with resources that help individuals acquire broader identities, skills and resources. In terms of social mobility, Putnam valued the potential of bridging capital higher than bonding capital. Bonding capital is good for ‘getting by’, whereas, bridging capital, is essential for ‘getting ahead’. As Putnam posits, bridging networks with loose ties are ‘better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion’.²⁷

The relationship of sport to social capital seems an obvious one – engagement in sport (including participating, spectating and volunteering) mostly takes place in social networks ranging from, for example, traditional voluntary sports clubs, to health and fitness classes to the less formalised social interactions associated with meeting people in local parks, using community sport facilities and attending sporting events.²⁸ Participation in sport has long been identified as a resource for marginalised groups, not just those from a Black and minoritised ethnic background, to gain different forms of social capital. Indeed, Putnam himself recognised the potential of team sport:

to build bridging social capital requires that we transcend our social and political and professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves. This is why team sports provide good venues for social capital creation”.²⁹

A community sport initiative like Kicks undoubtedly has the potential to bond and bridge social capital as it offers opportunities for young people to develop both their peer and professional networks. The extent that this can be transformative (and by transformative, we mean elicit upward social mobility) however, is debatable, with previous studies showing that participation in football does not necessarily lead to positive experiences or outcomes.³⁰

Agergaard and Sørensen’s study of young Danish Black and minoritised ethnic men from deprived areas concluded that upward social mobility through a professional football career is

unlikely for three reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, the players found it difficult to develop peer relationships with White teammates, coaches, and club leaders.³¹ Secondly, the players experienced a constant sense of non-belonging: outsiders in their new surroundings and in their new networks, and outsiders among their original networks (the latter being a reflection of the inward looking nature of bonding capital). Thirdly, many of the players had limited economic capital, which made getting to and from training and matches, buying equipment etc., difficult, if not impossible.

Putnam's original thesis has been critiqued and developed by a number of others. Woolcock for example, extends Putnam's work by introducing the notion of *linking capital*.³² Linking capital refers to individuals reaching out to people in dissimilar social stratifications and accumulating a greater range of resources than the ones available within one's immediate community. This form of capital is concerned with vertical connections; that is, those above and below us in the social stratification. Therefore, linking capital is important to negotiating upward social mobility as it is entwined in the exchange of power, wealth, and status among different social groups.³³

Rowe has suggested that because sport possesses its own unique cultures and conventions, successful participation and progression in sport requires individuals to possess what he refers to as *sporting capital*.³⁴ Rowe defines sporting capital as: 'The stock of physiological, social and psychological attributes and competencies that support and motivate an individual to participate in sport and to sustain that participation over time'.³⁵ Sporting capital is analogous to human capital and, like human capital, it is acquired by education and experience and is influenced by prevailing socio-cultural norms set by the family, peers, teachers, coaches etc. Sporting capital can be seen in things like knowledge of the rules of the game, understanding how to run sports events, and recognising the principles of coaching. Lack of sporting capital amongst disadvantaged and marginalised groups, including some Black and minoritised ethnic groups, will affect desire and ability to engage with sport.

Possession or absence of different forms of capital therefore, affect the abilities of groups and individuals to participate in different social networks and activities, including football. However, the concept of capital has been used by some to fuel a deficit model of individuals: *if only they made themselves better everything would be alright*. Yet, as has been identified above and as we go on to evidence below, it is much easier for some people to develop capital than it is for others and some social connections are just worth more than others.³⁶ Capital is a resource to be exploited and it is its exclusivity in the battle for distinction that gives it value. Consequently,

'[p]eople who realize capital through their networks of social capital do so precisely because others are excluded'.³⁷

Crucially, therefore, not all groups and individuals have equal access to different forms of capital in different contexts. For this study in particular, it is worth stressing that we find that capital is not easily transferred from one context to another; meaning that capital acquired through participation in the initiative is not necessarily recognised or appreciated outside of it. In order to understand the extent and power of the transferability of capital, it is important to consider the ability of the Black and minoritised ethnic participants in the study to access, accumulate and deploy different forms of capital necessary for successful participation and progression in football. This is extrapolated in our analysis of data.

Premier League Kicks: Helping 'hard-to-reach youngsters in some of the most high-need areas'

Professional football clubs across the Premier League, the Football League, and the National Football League in England and Wales have had a long history of working with hard-to-reach young people within their local communities.³⁸ The first national Football in the Community (FITC) scheme was launched in 1986 to forge greater links between football clubs and their communities.³⁹ Initially, the primary focus was to deliver school based coaching programmes to attract new supporters and to expand access to football.⁴⁰ However, in 1997 the Labour Government, as part of its strategy for addressing social exclusion, began to recognise the potential of sport to address non-sport related 'problems', including anti-social behaviour, crime, health, and unemployment.⁴¹ As the Labour government committed itself to its social inclusion agenda, FITC schemes began to grow rapidly across England and Wales. These schemes directly targeted traditionally disadvantaged youth groups, such as those from Black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds, girls, those with a disability, and those living within deprived areas.⁴²

The specific FITC scheme which is the focus of this paper is Premier League Kicks, a nationwide community football programme launched in 2006 by the Premier League. It is joint funded by the Premier League and Sport England. The initiative is described as using the power of football and the value of sport volunteering to support hard-to-reach young people aged 12 to 19 in the most deprived local authorities.⁴³ The initiative's remit is much broader than football, encompassing education, employability training and personal development opportunities, but uses football as a metaphorical 'hook'. The first clubs to pilot the initiative were, Tottenham Hotspur, Manchester City, Fulham and Brentford. Since 2006, engagement with the initiative

has expanded. Currently, 68 professional football clubs run Kicks sessions: 20 Premier League, 47 English Football League and one National League. To date over 180,000 young people have taken part in the initiative.

This paper focuses on the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation specifically. The Foundation's overarching goal is to empower young people in their local community by providing opportunities to access education, employment, and qualifications (Tottenham Hotspur Foundation, no date). The Foundation provides a range of non-sporting activities such as: CV writing, emergency first aid courses, mentoring, job interview training, among others, which are viewed as important to supporting personal development and the other subjective dimensions of individual social mobility.

Methods

The study presents an in-depth case study of Premier League Kicks, with an explicit focus on its delivery by the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation. The Foundation currently delivers Kicks within four North London boroughs: Barnet, Enfield, Haringey, and Waltham Forest. This study specifically looked at Haringey which, according to the Department for Communities and Local Government is ranked as one of the most deprived authorities in England and ranks as the most deprived in terms of crime.⁴⁴

The investigation took the form of semi-structured interviews with participants and Community Development Coaches of Kicks at the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation. Interviews were selected as they would allow the research participants to reveal in-depth information of the processes and relationships that led to acquiring social capital, and where these forms of capital were mobilised (or not). Semi-structured interviews were selected, first and foremost because they allowed us to ask open-ended questions and gain complex and rich descriptions of young people's engagement with the initiative. Further, the flexibility of a semi-structured approach allowed us to adapt the interview guide in situ, to reflect the young peoples' different experiences of the initiative.

Finding young people who were available and willing to engage in interviews, and also who could competently articulate their experiences and thoughts in a clear, expressive, and reflective way was challenging. Given these challenges, combined with Author A's knowledge of the local area and of the initiative itself, purposive sampling was adopted, which involved a system of repeated referrals, starting with an initial network of personal contacts, to identify two groups of people:

participants and of the initiative. In the first instance, Author A approached the Community Development Manager of the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation via email. This email summarised the aims and objectives of the project and asked the Community Development Manager to identify potential participants. Author A was also keen to interview the Community Development Manager, but unfortunately, he did not make himself available. He was helpful in other ways however, not least by recommending specific Kicks sessions where participants might be recruited. Author A attended and observed development events; informally speaking with coaches, who would eventually provide consent for Author A to approach the young people.

Author A was well-placed to connect and build relationships with the young people for a number of reasons. He is Black Caribbean and had lived in Tottenham for nineteen years, which meant he was able to relate to and empathise with the barriers and issues that some of the interviewees had experienced in relation to employment, deprivation and general knowledge of the surrounding communities. Further, he is a skilled footballer, having represented his county at both junior and adult levels and, held aspirations of a professional career. Finally, at the time of the research, he was working as a casual coach in the Equalities and Inclusion Department at the Foundation. Taking all these things into account, Author A could legitimately be described as an 'insider' in this social setting.⁴⁵

The initial response rate was incredibly disappointing with only eight participants agreeing to be interviewed. Despite numerous follow ups and prompts, this number was reduced further to five. Three of these were engaged with Kicks as participants and the other two had been participants and now worked as coaches for it. Despite its size, this sample was able to satisfy the needs of this research project as participants were able to reflect on the initiative from both a participant and practitioner point of view.

Each participant was interviewed once. Interviews lasted between twenty-eight and fifty-eight minutes. Interviews revolved around two distinct guides depending on who was being interviewed. Topics within the guides were informed by the key concepts highlighted in the review of literature. For example, the interview guide designed for coaches focused on the role of the Foundation and initiative, their views on the young people in the programme, areas of success and areas for future development. The guide aimed at young people focused on understanding their lived reality and explaining how they became involved in the initiative and

how it had impacted their lives. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder, transcribed and thematically analysed. Our analysis is considered below.

Premier League Kicks: Engaging the 'hard-to-reach' population

Participant narratives revealed that the young people developed strong social relationships with the Community Development Coaches to obtain information about apprenticeships, employment, further education and higher education courses, and other opportunities at the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation. All the young people in this study entered Kicks voluntarily through several channels, ranging from care providers, friends, teachers and word of mouth.

The Mayor's Office for Police and Crime and the Premier League invested £1 million into the programme specifically for the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation and eleven other London Community Trusts to implement Kicks within twenty police priority boroughs. Development events are situated within neighbourhoods that are identified as 'deprived'.⁴⁶ Despite the pervasive threat of social disorganisation indicators in the areas the young people were recruited from, none of the young people who participated in this research had affiliations with gangs, had been in trouble with the police, or were currently at risk of falling into a life of crime or anti-social behaviour. Nevertheless, they all acknowledged their vulnerability to such indicators and they generally agreed that participation in Kicks events provided both themselves and other young people with alternative leisure opportunities which ensured they avoided situations where they could fall into deviant behaviour. For example, Rodney (Black Caribbean, aged 17) joined Kicks when he was 13 and described its social value:

Kicks is a way to get young people off the streets and give them something to do in their spare time so that they're not causing trouble. They [the coaches] would always help us and try [and] guide us down the right paths, instead of making us do silly things.

Emmanuel (Black African, aged 16) has been coming to Kicks since he was 10 years old. He shared Rodney's view that the initiative is important for providing vulnerable young people with productive leisure activities:

I've been to Kicks for how many years now and they've helped me. They [the coaches] don't just only talk about football, they talk about the community and how to look out for yourself, and what you should do from danger. I've took that on

board, because nowadays the youth are moving a bit mad. As in, young Black boys dying nowadays and they're trying to keep us off the street by doing the right thing.

The length of time Hassan (Arab, aged 15) had been involved with kicks was much less; having only recently engaged with the programme, but he nevertheless recognised the value of Kicks for ensuring young people stay out of trouble:

They [the coaches] are good. They tell you more to learn about football and they're funny. They tell you not to get involved in problems and to go straight home.

Each of these testimonies specifically cite the contribution and impact of the Kicks coaching staff in contributing to their personal development and educating the young people about making good life choices. One of these coaches, Jermaine (Black African, aged 26), a former Kicks participant himself, described the purpose of Kicks:

We try and get people to the right path. There's a lot of kids that haven't got anything to do after school; and rather than them being at home playing games, or being out on the roads getting up to no good, it will be better for them to come to a place where they can engage with other young people.

Many young people in disadvantaged areas do not get the positive socialisation process that builds social and cultural capital in their early formative years.⁴⁷ They may come to Kicks events with what might be considered a 'deficit'. The training and quality of sports leaders, mentors and coaches is therefore, vital to the success of initiatives to help overcome this deficit. Kicks events seek to endow young people with cultural capital, which it does through, among other things, offering one-to-one mentoring and individual guidance on education and career choices. Although much of the research cited earlier advocates the benefits of participating in football as an effective route to obtaining different forms of capital to negotiate improvements in social mobility, this study argues that it is not merely direct participation in football that leads to capital accumulation, but rather the socialisation experiences provided via participation that leads to the creation and conversion of social capital into social mobility.

The starting point for our analysis is on how participation in the initiative can lead to the accumulation of bonding social capital and from there, conceptualising the potential of that capital towards obtaining other forms of capital, which may contribute to upward social

mobility. We will draw upon Putnam's notions of bonding and bridging capital, Woolcock's notion of linking capital and Rowe's notion of sporting capital to evaluate the transformative potential of Kicks events.

Bonding capital: Playing football with young people 'like me':

Findings suggest that Kicks is a site for purposeful socialisation experiences that serve as a foundation for the development of bonding social capital. Putnam describes bonding social capital as activities and processes which maintain already established horizontal relationships with people who are similar to oneself.⁴⁸ However, given the nature of the communities where Kicks is implemented, it can be dangerous to be outside after school hours and young people are often confined and isolated to their household, thus limiting the opportunities to create and establish friendships. In such conditions, creating supportive peer relationships requires a facilitating institutional context which enables young people to get to know others and learn to trust each other.⁴⁹ Our data suggest that Kicks creates a safe environment where young people can develop strong bonding relationships with other young people and the coaches (many of whom had been participants in the initiative themselves). Indeed, each of the young people participating in the study stressed the collaborative and inclusive nature of Kicks events and highlighted the importance of bonding with participants and coaches 'like me'. Jermaine (Black African, aged 26) is a Community Development Coach and former Kicks participant and stressed the importance of its bonding opportunities:

I came to Kicks to meet new people and make new friends. They [other participants] were from the same area and we just met through Kicks. I didn't really meet anybody outside of Kicks, but when I came to Kicks the bond was there ... I wasn't too interested in the opportunities. I was more interested in playing football and meeting the same group every week.

Emmanuel (Black African, aged 16) reflected on how participating in Kicks had made him more confident and outgoing; qualities which he has transferred beyond Kicks events and into his everyday life:

Ever since I started I only had one friend, and then as the years went by everyone knows me. I've told my friends about Kicks too. I know most of the coaches here and they help you to progress in life. I was a shy person at the time, but they [the coaches] have built my confidence to stand up for myself.

When Hassan (Arab, aged 15) joined Kicks his family had recently migrated to the area from Spain. He did not speak English well and he initially felt isolated, but his continued engagement with Kicks events helped him improve his English and make new friends:

The first time I came here, it was different. I came from Spain and couldn't talk much English. I had no friends and I only played with my brother on the first day. After that I made friends.

These comments are indicative of bonding social capital; that is, the creation of strong social ties and peer networks among participants who share very similar cultural, economic, and social backgrounds.⁵⁰ This is reinforced by the fact that the Community Development Coaches employed by the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation were former participants themselves, reside in the local area, and appear to possess a deep sense of ownership of and responsibility for the initiative and its events, and who consider themselves to be role models for future cohorts of young people. As a result, former participants, such as Jermaine, serve not only as peer leaders in their local community, but also act as important symbols of social mobility for future participants.⁵¹ Jermaine acknowledged the importance of this role:

When they look at this kit, they look to you as an icon because you are representing the football club ... We're not far different from them; we've been through what they've been through. Some of us anyway ... You can be that bit of proof to show that, look, it's possible. You don't need to be the stereotype or whatever. You can make something of yourself.

Reflecting again on the role and impact of coaches, most of the young people described the coaches as 'older brothers' or 'older sisters', who bring different (sometimes conflicting) groups together. Rodney (Black Caribbean, aged 17) for instance, spoke of how the area of London where he lives experiences quite significant ethnic and cultural divisions. For Rodney, participation in Kicks events had gone some way towards breaking down these cultural barriers and encouraged bonding capital:

Kicks is popular so a lot of people that come here live in the area. That's helped as a lot of people are in the same area and know each other. The coaches are trying to give everyone good advice so everyone knowing each other in the same area and

being around each other has helped the community create a positive vibe. It's a lot of people in the right area all getting a positive vibe and *no negativity*.

Some previous literature has indicated the problematic nature of bonding capital, in that it is thought to encourage exclusive identities and homogenous communities.⁵² The data presented here would challenge this supposition to a degree and highlight how the accumulation of bonding social capital serves a more beneficial purpose, in offering a supportive social network for individuals who are currently isolated and who may lack reassuring or positive networks in other areas of their lives.

In addition to football training sessions, coaches also facilitate the acquisition of bonding social capital through informing them about educational and employment opportunities, and subsequently, supporting young people to make good decisions about their futures. Nikita (Black African female, aged 18) is a former Kicks participant and is currently completing an apprenticeship at the Foundation to become a Community Development Coach. Nikita's story reinforces the positive role of coaches as she found out about the apprenticeship through some one-to-one mentoring support she received from one of the Community Development Coaches during her engagement with Kicks events. She describes how Kicks has transformed her outlook:

In secondary school I was a troublemaker. I was so bad at school. I had coaches like [Name] who came into my school to run a Kicks programme like this with multisport and stuff. They asked me what am I doing after I finish school. I was like, "nothing", because I used to hate school, hate studying, everything. And they were like, "Why don't you do an apprenticeship at Tottenham Hotspur? You get paid for it, you teach PE in schools and do some coursework". It sounded like something I would do. I prefer all the practical stuff.

The bonding relationships developed through Kicks have had a positive impact on Nikita; particularly in how she has developed horizontal relationships with the coaches who have subsequently encouraged her to undertake further study and gain educational and coaching qualifications. Since completing the first year of her apprenticeship, she has developed further horizontal relationships with other staff members at the Foundation and been provided with further opportunities for enhancing her cultural capital, such as going on a cross-cultural coaching exchange trip to France; completing the Duke of Edinburgh Award; attaining coaching qualifications in several sports; and working as part of the Match Day team at Tottenham

Hotspur's home matches. All of these have contributed to Nikita's enhanced sense of self and have made her more optimistic about her future:

I teach PE classes with another coach and we would generally do something that is to do with football. Sometimes I'm like, "What are we doing, I don't understand?" But now I've completed my football coaching qualification it's a lot easier and I understand steps of teaching and different kinds of stages. Hopefully, I want to become a PE teacher or do something that has got to do with coaching. But right now, I want to get my coursework done and see where that gets me. Maybe it'll get me on the university degree run by Spurs Foundation.

Bonding social capital is frequently criticised in the literature for being inward facing and discouraging individuals from pursuing relationships with people from outside of their immediate community. However, for the young people in this research, accumulating this form of social capital was a valuable resource for introducing them to alike people who experience similar and linked challenges, and subsequently, building their confidence to pursue relationships and opportunities beyond this group. For example, through her bonding relationships with Community Development Coaches and other staff members, Nikita has acquired forms of capital which she hopes can be leveraged for future educational and job opportunities. While Nikita only had positive things to say about Kicks events, we offer a cautionary critique. For example, Nikita only has experience of mobilising and deploying her cultural capital within the context of the Kicks initiative and the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation more broadly and thus, it is not clear whether capital acquired in this context is transferrable beyond it.

If community sport development events, like Kicks, are to facilitate upward social mobility, their remit must extend to encouraging participants to engage and develop ties with external organisations and institutions.⁵³ Whereas bonding social capital may provide collective support and a local network, for upward social mobility to become a realistic possibility, any connections and relationships need to be weak enough to allow young people to gain access to wider and more formal institutions, and a more diverse stock of bridging and perhaps linking social capital. This view is captured well by Portes and Landolt, where they argue that, 'local-level cooperation alone cannot overcome macro-structural obstacles to economic stability, autonomous growth, and accumulation'.⁵⁴ In short, it is clearly vitally important that isolated young people are provided with the opportunities and resources to acquire bonding social capital like that

provided by Kicks, but equally, these individuals must not be straightjacketed and confined to these networks. Any ties acquired through bonding social capital ought to be loose enough to encourage individuals to pursue alternative relationships and possibilities; that is, through bridging social capital.

Bridging capital and the art of 'getting ahead'

According to Putnam, bridging social capital refers to the process where an individual gets to know people who might be different to oneself (people belonging to another ethnic group or social class, for example), with whom we share loose ties (an interest in sport for example). For Putnam, bridging social capital is vital for upward social mobility and therefore, strengthening their existing loose ties and networks should help the young people involved in this project to 'get ahead'. 'Getting ahead' is often associated with upward social mobility where one's social network can assist with accessing better jobs, as epitomised in the statement, 'it is not what you know, but who you know'. As the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation is the community arm of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club, some participants used their participation in Kicks events to leverage playing opportunities at the Club. Whilst most young people who participate in Kicks events do so purely to play football and meet new people, others see it as an opportunity to get scouted. Emmanuel (Black African, aged 16) and Rodney (Black Caribbean, aged 17) are both very keen footballers and spoke of their appreciation of Kicks, but they both confessed to viewing Kicks as a route to develop positive relationships with coaches and get noticed, in the hope of obtaining an academy scholarship and moving their professional football career forward. According to Rodney:

I want to become a professional footballer and my friend told me about this thing called Kicks ... He told me to go to Kicks to see if I can push myself to academy level, and that was when I was hearing about Tottenham Hotspur academy.

Through regular participation in football, young aspiring footballers such as Emmanuel and Rodney can also develop their sporting capital.⁵⁵ Sporting capital refers to the multifarious psychological, social and physiological competencies required to access and sustain involvement in sport. Rodney and Emmanuel already possessed high levels of psychological and physiological capital prior to engaging with Kicks events, but they lacked elements contained in Rowe's conceptualising of the social domain, namely, they were not well connected in the 'social locations' needed to get ahead in professional football. As has been identified elsewhere, accessing the higher levels of sport, whether as a player or coach requires knowledge of the

'system' that oversees and governs that sport.⁵⁶ Many deprived young people, like those involved in this study, have neither knowledge of this system, nor possess the skills or have access to the networks necessary to gain entry. Indeed, while developing bonding social capital discussed above was vitally important to the young people in this study, it does not necessarily facilitate their progression outside of this group. Therefore, aspiring professional footballers need to develop networks with people who are located outside of their community and who are often different to themselves. Our analysis showed that the Community Development Coaches play a significant role in the bridging process; especially as they have access to wider networks of influence, including with Academy coaches, who are responsible for scouting young talent.

During the course of this research project, Emmanuel and Rodney were identified by the Community Development Coaches to attend an Academy trial event run by Tottenham Hotspur Football Club. Neither Emmanuel nor Rodney were scouted at the trial, however they did develop valuable cultural capital (i.e., experience), which led to greater future linkage opportunities. Rodney was certain that he would not have been invited to the trial had he not participated in Kicks events and made a good impression on the coaches:

It was more to do with me attending Kicks regularly and the coaches thought that I was good enough to go to the training ground. Not everyone got selected. So, I guess it was due to my ability, my attitude, my behaviour towards the coaches.

Sport is selective at pretty much every level of participation and competition, but nevertheless, Rodney's acknowledgement that 'not everyone got selected' reinforces the argument that social capital is acquired and deployed unequally. In the cases of Emmanuel and Rodney, they are able to acquire capital through their embodied state; they are good footballers; and are then able to exchange these performances into bridging social capital to access greater resources (in this case a trial for an academy football scholarship) and indeed, 'get ahead' of other participants who are less skilful than them.

More importantly though is the observation that, in the context of Kicks events, acquiring bridging social capital is almost entirely dependent on institutional agents (e.g., Community Development Coaches) and their willingness to introduce (bridge) the young people to influential people; namely Academy coaches, from elsewhere in their networks. However, the strength of these bridges vary significantly and there are no guarantees that once the young people are introduced to wider networks that further opportunities will materialise. One of the

Kicks coaches, Jermaine (Black African, aged 26) described the process for referring Kicks participants on to the Academy coaches:

It's us really and truly - the coaches. We suggest it to them. The people that know him, we are the people that push them forward. Maybe we will tell someone, and we will leave it in their hands ... we provide them [the young people] with the opportunities.

And herein lies a significant paradox in that, while the Kicks coaches were attempting to enhance the opportunities of the young people by moving them on and into the Academy structures, the young peoples' experiences actually suffered as a result. In order for the young people to accumulate bridging social capital, they firstly had to build strong relationships with the Kicks coaches, which we have shown they did. However, there was very little evidence to suggest that the young people were able to create the same kind of relationships with the Academy coaches. In the case of this project, the young people's relationships with the Academy coaches appeared to be largely confined to Kicks events and training days and became non-existent once it became apparent that they would not be offered an academy scholarship. This finding brings us on to consider the related ideas of linking social capital and sporting capital.

Linking and sporting capital: Emmanuel's story

The notion of linking capital is a process which involves an individual reaching out to people in dissimilar social stratifications and accumulating a greater range of resources than those available within one's immediate community.⁵⁷ As such, the key function of this specific form of capital is the ability to leverage resources, information, and ideas from formal institutions and apply them in other contexts. Emmanuel has aspirations of playing football professionally. We have previously discussed how he used Kicks events to leverage a trial at Tottenham Hotspur; an excellent example of linking capital, according to Woolcock. However, Emmanuel's experience is more complex than this description would have us believe, primarily because his ability to leverage a trial was almost entirely dependent on the Community Development Coaches and their willingness to recommend him to others in their network. Here, the Community Development Coaches act as powerful gatekeepers to a young person's social mobility, thus questioning the degree to which sport-based interventions do empower young people to be autonomous and take control of their lives.⁵⁸ For example, Emmanuel describes how he thought one particular Community Development Coach was perhaps less interested in

his personal development and more concerned that he remained connected to Tottenham Hotspur:

I told him that I wanted to play football. But obviously because he works for Tottenham Hotspur Foundation and the college I go to is partnered with the Foundation, he was persuading me to go there. I thought he was only trying to persuade me because he works for Tottenham.

This description highlights a view that while coaches may endeavour to support young people through providing opportunities to develop cultural capital, these opportunities are nevertheless highly regulated, and are largely confined to the Foundation. In the case of Kicks, such regulation can limit young people's chances of connecting with people in unfamiliar social stratifications (i.e., linking capital) and thus, converting capital into upward social mobility.

In recognising that Kicks events were not necessarily going to help him realise his dream, Emmanuel decided to create his own linkage opportunities and, in the process, demonstrated an acute level of sporting capital. Showing a clear knowledge of the system, Emmanuel searched online for professional football trials and came across an event in Nottingham. Having previously trialled with Tottenham Hotspur and possessing a heightened sense of personal confidence through participating in Kicks events, Emmanuel was invited to attend the event and was actually signed by Nottingham Forest's under 16s.

Crucially, Emmanuel's linking and sporting capital are not necessarily made possible, but certainly facilitated by economic backing from his family, which other participants in the study, and in the Kicks initiative generally, certainly do not possess. In discussing the commute from London to Nottingham for training and matches, Emmanuel largely explained away the challenges:

I either take the forty-five-minute Virgin fast train from King's Cross straight to Nottingham Forest Academy ground, or I would take an Uber. My Dad just books the Uber and I just go. It's quite a lot of money but my dad doesn't mind because it's football and he wants me to do well.

It would be inaccurate for us to suggest that Emmanuel's circumstances are typical of other Kicks participants because evidently they are not. Emmanuel clearly has the backing of his family –

both emotionally and economically – to pursue a football career, and this support is essential. Indeed, Spaaij goes as far as to say that: ‘the meritocratic ideal of a “level playing field” is illusory and conceals the fact that a person’s origins (family circumstances, social class, etc.) continue to have a major impact on his/her ability to become socially mobile’.⁵⁹ From our previous work, we find it hard to disagree with this. But equally, we must not forget the value of Emmanuel’s personal endeavour to utilise that support, along with his existing sporting capital and newly acquired social capital to his own benefit. As Bourdieu argues, it is the composition and the sum of an individual’s capital which underpins social mobility.⁶⁰

It would also be remiss of us not to offer some words of caution here for it is too early to predict whether Emmanuel’s current successes will contribute to his upward social mobility. For example, even if Emmanuel goes on to attain a professional football contract at Nottingham Forest, his career will remain highly contingent on his physical capital and its value to the club, which will inevitably decrease with age and injuries.⁶¹ Furthermore, as outlined in the literature review, the capital he possesses, especially as a Black and minoritised ethnic player, is not necessarily transferrable to other clubs and contexts, for example, accessing future coaching and managerial opportunities.⁶²

Conclusion

This paper has examined the supposition that participating in the Premier League Kicks initiative provides young Black and minoritised ethnic males with opportunities for acquiring different forms of social capital that could potentially be converted into upward social mobility through a professional football career. The narratives presented in this paper suggest that if community sport development events, such as Kicks, are designed upon a youth-centred approach, they are well placed to promote the accumulation of social capital, predominantly bonding social capital, which can lead to greater individual empowerment and self-belief. However, the narratives also illustrate that leveraging such capital for personal reward is limited to horizontal networks/mobility and opportunities for converting this capital into other forms, such as bridging, linking and sporting capital opportunities which may be highly regulated and often, exclusionary.

In the context of this study and to Kicks, the ‘power’ of football is used for two purposes. Firstly, it hooks in hard-to-reach young people and secondly, provides them with a personal development pathway. Both of these examples help with the accumulation of bonding social

capital and help to strengthen ties with Foundation coaches, who have access to bridging and linking capital opportunities. The generation of bonding social capital appears to have been the most immediately apparent and most impactful for the young people interviewed. The initiative also provided access to sport coaching qualifications, further education courses, and apprenticeships; all of which provide more long-term opportunities, which we cannot evaluate at this stage.

It is also clear that while community sport development events, like Kicks, and organisations like the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation, have the potential to distribute other, arguably more influential forms of capital, such as bridging, linking and sporting capital, opportunities for developing these through the events may be relatively weak as they are largely isolated to local contexts. Furthermore, these forms of social capital are often highly regulated by the organisation and are often unequally distributed. The findings therefore, support Bourdieu's suggestion that 'those who talk of equality of opportunity forget that social games ... are not "fair games". Without being, strictly speaking, rigged, the competition resembles a handicap race that has lasted for generations'.⁶³ Consequently, for community sport development events to be effective, those designing and implementing them need greater empathy and understanding of what it is like to have low levels of capital, the processes by which it is acquired and the social and economic contexts in which it is formed, leveraged and deployed.

Notes

- ¹ Campbell, *Football, ethnicity and community*; Campbell and Williams, 'Can "the ghetto" take over the county?'
- ² Spaaij, 'Building social and cultural capital among young people in disadvantaged communities'; 'Changing people's lives for the better? Social mobility through sport-based intervention programmes'.
- ³ Fletcher et al., 'Problems at the boundary?'; Burdsey, *British Asians and football*; Kilvington, 'Two decades and little change'; Kilvington and Price, 'Tackling Social Media Abuse?'; Ratna et al., 'Getting inside the wicket'.
- ⁴ Roderick et al., 'The sociology of sports work, emotions and mental health'; Roderick and Schumacker, 'The whole week comes down to the team sheet'.
- ⁵ Cashmore and Cleland, 'Why aren't there more black football managers?'; Kilvington, 'Two decades and little change'.
- ⁶ Sports People's Think Tank, 'Ethnic minorities and coaching in elite level football in England'.
- ⁷ Bandyopadhyay, *Why minorities play or don't play soccer*.
- ⁸ Collins, 'From 'sport for good' to 'sport for sport's sake''.
- ⁹ Putnam, 'Bowling alone: America's declining social capital'; *Bowling Alone*.
- ¹⁰ Social Mobility Commission, 'State of the nation, 2016'.
- ¹¹ Stevenson et al., *The social mobility challenges faced by young Muslims*; Hoskins and Barker, 'Aspirations and young people's constructions of their futures'.
- ¹² Sorokin, *Social mobility*; Aldridge, 'The facts about social mobility'.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Sorokin, *Social mobility*.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 133-134.
- ¹⁶ Bell, *Middle class families*.
- ¹⁷ Breen and Jonsson, 'Inequality of opportunity in comparative perspective'.
- ¹⁸ Spaaij, 'Changing people's lives for the better?'
- ¹⁹ See for example, Becker, *Human capital*.
- ²⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*.
- ²¹ Nicholson and Hoye, *Social capital and sport*, 3.
- ²² Putnam, *Bowling alone*, 19
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Hoskins and Barker, 'Aspirations and young people's constructions of their futures''.
- ²⁵ Putnam, *Bowling alone*.
- ²⁶ Rowe, 'Sporting capital'.
- ²⁷ Putnam, *Bowling alone*, 22.
- ²⁸ Rowe, 'Sporting capital'.
- ²⁹ Putnam, *Bowling alone*, 411.
- ³⁰ Kilvington, 'Two decades and little change'.
- ³¹ Agergaard and Sørensen, 'The dream of social mobility'.
- ³² Woolcock, 'The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes'.
- ³³ Portes and Landolt, 'Social capital: promise and pitfalls of its role in development'.
- ³⁴ Rowe, 'Sporting capital'.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 45.
- ³⁶ Long et al., *Understanding participation and non-participation among BME communities in Wales*.
- ³⁷ DeFilippis, 'The myth of social capital in community development', 801.
- ³⁸ Paramio-Salcines et al., 'Football and its communities'.
- ³⁹ Taylor, 'Giving something back'.

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- ⁴⁰ Parnell et al., 'The pursuit of lifelong participation'.
- ⁴¹ Carrington et al., 'The politics of 'race' and sports policy in the United Kingdom'.
- ⁴² Ibid; Bingham et al., 'Fit fans'.
- ⁴³ Premier League Kicks, 'Premier League Kicks'.
- ⁴⁴ Department for Communities and Local Government, 'The English Indices of Deprivation 2015'.
- ⁴⁵ See Fletcher, 'Does he look like a Paki?'
- ⁴⁶ Department for Communities and Local Government, 'The English Indices of Deprivation 2015'.
- ⁴⁷ Rowe, 'Sporting Capital'.
- ⁴⁸ Putnam, *Bowling alone; Bowling alone*.
- ⁴⁹ Rowe, 'Sporting capital'.
- ⁵⁰ Putnam, *Bowling alone*; Rowe, 'Sporting capital'.
- ⁵¹ Spaaij, 'Building social and cultural capital among young people in disadvantaged communities'; 'Changing people's lives for the better?'
- ⁵² Nicholson and Hoye, *Sport and social capital*; Collins, 'From 'sport for good' to 'sport for sport's sake''; Rowe, 'Sporting capital'.
- ⁵³ Morgan, 'Enhancing social mobility within marginalized youth'.
- ⁵⁴ Portes and Landolt, 'Social capital', 542.
- ⁵⁵ Rowe, 'Sporting capital'.
- ⁵⁶ Fletcher et al., 'Problems at the boundary?'; Bradbury, 'The under-representation and racialised experiences of minority coaches in high level coach education in professional football in England'; Bradbury et al., 'The under-representation and experiences of elite level minority coaches in professional football in England, France and the Netherlands'.
- ⁵⁷ Woolcock, 'The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes'.
- ⁵⁸ Meir and Fletcher, 'The transformative potential of using participatory community sport initiatives to promote social cohesion in divided community contexts'.
- ⁵⁹ Spaaij, 'Sport as a vehicle for social mobility and regulation of disadvantaged urban youth', 262.
- ⁶⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*.
- ⁶¹ Roderick and Schumacker, 'The whole week comes down to the team sheet'.
- ⁶² Fletcher et al., *Exploring the barriers to South Asian cricket players' entry and progression in coaching*; Fletcher et al. 'Problems at the boundary?'; Bradbury, 'The under-representation and racialised experiences of minority coaches in high level coach education in professional football in England'; Bradbury et al., 'The under-representation and experiences of elite level minority coaches in professional football in England, France and the Netherlands'.
- ⁶³ Bourdieu, *Pascalian meditations*, 214-215.

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