

**Pay-to-Play: A Quantitative Analysis of Opportunity, Achievement, and Parental  
Motivation in Youth Club Soccer**

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### **Abstract**

In the last twenty years, the youth sport experience in the United States has been shaped by a family's ability to pay. Under the pay-to-play model in American youth sports, advancing to the highest levels of the game not only requires the standard expenditures, but significant investment which accounts for coaching, equipment, travel, training, and other resources. Previous research on the topic has analyzed the impact of income, educational attainment, and race and ethnicity on access to elite-level sports opportunities. The purpose of this study was to investigate the pay-to-play model and factors associated with athletic outcomes at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey. Additionally, the present research conceptualizes parental motivation at these soccer clubs in relation to a child's participation and advancement in youth soccer. Multiple linear regression models were used to determine whether there was a significant relationship between athletic opportunity, athletic achievement and parental motivation and a parent's race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels. For athletic opportunity, the data showed that there was no statistical significance in relation to race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or educational attainment. Similarly, no statistically significant findings were present for athletic achievement. For parental motivation, findings indicated that Black or African American parents were 57% more likely to have higher levels of motivation for their child's participation in club soccer. Motivation was also shaped by parental income.

*Keywords:* race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, pay-to-play, opportunity, athletic achievement, parental motivation, youth soccer

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**Chapter One  
INTRODUCTION**

Soccer in the United States has long been overshadowed by America's great pastimes - baseball, American football, and basketball. Gaining traction in the mid-to-late 20th century, soccer was popularized by the success of the North American Soccer League and its ability to recruit star names from around the world including Pelé, Carlos Alberto, Franz Beckenbauer, Gerd Muller, Elías Figueroa, Johan Cruyff, George Best and Eusébio among others. The failure to secure a bid to host the 1986 World Cup, the league's financial struggles, and declining fan interest ultimately led to its collapse in 1984, serving as a referendum on the state of soccer in America. In the last 30 years, however, soccer's resurgence in the United States has been facilitated by the development, sustenance, and overwhelming success of its budding professional league, Major League Soccer, which has grown to 27 teams, with plans to expand to 30 by 2023. The rise in popularity of the sport has generated soaring youth participation figures, restructured coach education programs, and an insatiable appetite for the "beautiful game" on American soil. With American players donning the jerseys of the world's most prestigious clubs, many have begun to review the American model for youth player development while posing questions related to opportunity, achievement, and motivation.

The popularity of athletics in the United States is reflected by the thousands of clubs and programs offered to youth participants of all ages and across a wide array of sports and physical activities. A commissioned report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2019) titled *The National Youth Sports Strategy*, indicates that in 2017, 58% of America's roughly 75

million young people, aged 6 to 17, participated in youth sports in some capacity. Despite these figures, research suggests that participation rates amongst youth vary drastically when factoring for the socioeconomic and educational background of families with children. Using the national poverty threshold as an indicator, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2019) further notes that 76% of youth from more affluent households participated in team sports, private sport lessons, or some other physical activity on a weekly basis. Comparatively, those youth from households whose income was nearer to the poverty threshold were far less likely to participate in sports or activities, at a rate of 41% (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). The educational attainment level of parents is a notable factor as well. Youth whose parents had achieved a high school degree or less were nearly 30% less likely to participate in sports. Thus, a major effort of sport research has been to better understand these demographic variables in the United States and their relationship to youth sport participation and advancement.

U.S. Youth Soccer, America's largest youth soccer governing body, recognizes 55 state member associations which host over 10,000 youth clubs and registers roughly three million youth soccer players annually (U.S. Youth Soccer, 2021). The State of New Jersey, which will be the focus of this research, is home to nearly 450 youth soccer clubs and is one of the largest associations for youth club soccer membership in the country (NJ Youth Soccer, 2021). With the rise of soccer's popularity and visibility in the United States, much attention has been devoted to the development of the sport at the youth, grassroots level. With the average cost of participation in private club sports on the rise, and America's pay-to-play model for youth sports in question, the ability of a family to support their child's athletic pursuits in club soccer merits further investigation (Cohen, 2019). The scope of this research seeks to analyze the impact of youth

soccer's pay-to-play model on opportunity, achievement, and parental motivation at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the pay-to-play model at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey and the roles that familial support and motivation play in the development of youth soccer players. Specifically, the aim of this research is to examine athletic outcomes in relation to three major demographic variables. The athletic outcomes are opportunity, achievement, and parental motivation for a child's participation in club soccer. The demographic variables are a parent's race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels. A growing body of research has identified access and opportunity in youth sport as an area of specific priority. Limited research, however, has been conducted to analyze the influence of the pay-to-play system in local youth soccer more precisely. Further, few studies have set forth to evaluate the motivation of parents in relation to their child's youth club soccer experience. An analysis of the pay-to-play system in relation to the aforementioned demographic variables, as well as parental motivation, will serve to inform the wide array of stakeholders involved in grassroots youth soccer and to further direct areas of future study.

### **Motivation for the Study**

As a former youth club soccer player, high school All-American, and eventual Division I athlete, I was provided the opportunities in my youth to develop and eventually compete at elite levels of sport. During my time as a youth club soccer player, I participated in three separate club organizations, received individualized training, traveled to top college showcase tournaments, and was fortunate to attend camps and clinics which maximized my development and exposure to college coaches. In addition, as a member of these youth soccer clubs, I was proximate to

premier coaching on a regular basis and consistently competed against other elite players in a professional environment which prioritized development. As a player for some of the leading and most reputable clubs in the state, I actively trained in a club culture, surrounded by the area's best players and coaches, which further fueled my desire to improve and reach the highest levels of the sport. Ultimately, I was awarded a partial scholarship to a preeminent Division I program and went on to become a 4-year starter, two-year captain, all conference player, and conference champion, in large part due to my experiences and opportunities at the youth level years earlier.

The opportunity to participate in youth athletics was made possible for a variety of reasons. Most notably, however, was the involvement and support of generous parents who reinforced my athletic pursuits. From the time that I began participating in soccer at the age of six through my career as a collegiate athlete, my parents provided significant financial support to pay for club membership fees, equipment, travel and lodging, individual training, camps and clinics, and more. In addition, my parents provided resources which enabled and supported my college recruitment, allowing me to better understand how to navigate the recruitment process. Most substantially, they shouldered the remaining costs of a 4-year private college that were not covered by my athletic and academic scholarships. My parents were eager to support my passions and my dream of playing the game at the collegiate level and actively sought opportunities which put me in the best position to do so. Given the vital contribution made by my parents and those of many other student-athletes across the country, it is impossible to neglect questions of access, equity, and motivation. Further, those without the aforementioned resources may be at a remarkable disadvantage with regards to nearly all facets of development and advancement in youth soccer. Undoubtedly, without the multifarious support system offered by my parents, it is likely that I would not have been able to reach the upper tier of my sport. The

importance of parental contribution in a child's youth club soccer experience therefore calls into question the pay-for-play system at the heart of American youth soccer.

In addition to my experiences as a youth soccer player having risen to the college ranks, I also have the perspective of a club soccer and high school coach who provides guidance to players and families as they navigate this system today. Today's youth soccer system has evolved to include a host of soccer clubs ranging in size and stature. A diverse selection of youth soccer clubs is available to players and parents across the country, yet a vast majority of these clubs require parents and players to pay. While smaller clubs may offer more affordable prices, they are not always able to offer the same quality environment, level of play, or competition. While required costs may be low for families, this often results in a lack of resources for the smaller, often local, clubs, limiting their ability to fully invest in the long-term sustainability of the club and the development of its players. Limited resources can be also challenging in that smaller clubs struggle to compete with the larger, better funded clubs to attract, retain, and develop players thereby putting a better "product" on the field of play. Top players on local club teams are often faced with the decision to move to a larger, more reputable club as they get older in order to challenge themselves and receive the exposure necessary to advance to higher levels of the game. As a youth coach, with experience in multiple club settings, this disparity between clubs is resounding. Having experienced the pay-to-play system in American youth soccer as both a player and coach, its effect on the development of youth players, access to opportunity and the long-term implications for the evolution of American soccer is worth urgent consideration. I am specifically curious about the impact of the pay-to-play model, the motivation of parents, and the role of this dynamic in the development of youth soccer players in southern New Jersey.

### **Significance of Study**

Leaders involved in American youth soccer and researchers alike recognize that soccer is one of the world's most diverse sports, in which the game's global stars often develop their love for the game and hone their skills in their nation's poorest neighborhoods (Carpenter, 2016; Williams & Reilly, 2000). This offers a stark contrast to the state of affairs in American youth soccer, where equity and access are a major concern for those shaping the next generation of soccer players in the United States. As noted by Turner (2016) and Bennett et al. (2020), a significant number of parents identify the steep costs for club sports programs as a serious obstacle for youth players who desire to participate or compete and advance to the highest levels of the game. These costs are part of a much larger pay-to-play system in which youth players are required to pay club membership fees, registration fees, travel expenses, equipment costs, and more. Based on location, club, and league, annual expenses can amount to thousands of dollars (Sagas & Cunningham, 2014). Moreover, when compared to American football and basketball, research suggests that professional soccer players are more likely to come from communities with higher incomes and education levels on average (Carpenter, 2016). In fact, the United States Soccer Federation has identified this concern as one of its foremost priorities, establishing a diversity task force to address these issues from the top down.

As such, this research will investigate the current model of youth club soccer in southern New Jersey to analyze athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation while simultaneously considering the function of a parent's race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment. This research and the findings garnered will provide the basis for future scholarly work. Ultimately, the goal of the present study is to better inform policies and practices of grassroots soccer clubs.

### **Research Objectives**

The research objectives are as follows:

1. To understand the impacts of race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and the educational attainment levels of parents in relation to their child's youth soccer experience at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey.
2. To inspect the relationship between the above demographic variables of parents and a child's athletic development and advancement at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey.
3. To assess the state of equitable access to opportunity at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey.
4. To analyze the motivation of parents with respect to their child's development at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions are as follows:

1. RQ1: Do the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents impact athletic opportunities in youth soccer at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey?
2. RQ2: Are the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents related to their child's athletic achievement in youth soccer at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey?
3. RQ3: Do the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents determine parental motivation for their child's participation in youth soccer at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey?

## **Hypotheses**

In response to the research questions, the following hypotheses were provided:

1. Hypothesis 1: The race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment level of a child's parent will be associated with access to opportunity in youth club soccer.
2. Hypothesis 2: A child's athletic achievement in youth club soccer will be correlated to the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents.
3. Hypothesis 3: Parental motivation for their child's participation in youth club soccer will be associated with the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment level of the parent.

To answer and address these research questions and test the hypotheses, a comprehensive survey was designed to collect and analyze quantitative data. The participants in this study were parents of youth club soccer players at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey between the ages of 10 and 18. The three youth soccer clubs were from three separate counties in southern New Jersey.

## **Chapter Summary**

With the growth of private youth soccer clubs in the United States, the implementation of the pay-to-play model warrants detailed evaluation. Given the prevalence of this system in youth soccer today, this study will evaluate the relationship between athletic outcomes in club soccer and three major demographic variables at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey. As noted, the athletic outcomes are athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation. The demographic variables are parental race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment. This research will offer insight and contribute to future studies regarding

parental support in the development of youth soccer players while controlling for key demographic variables.

## **Chapter Two**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

To establish a pretext for the discussion of the pay-to-play model in American youth soccer, it is necessary to briefly outline the history of youth sports in the United States and the emerging shift to privatization. The review of the literature will then provide a comprehensive overview of the scholarship as it relates to athletic outcomes in youth sports, namely athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental support and motivation. This will be followed by a discussion of the three major demographic variables pertinent to the present study, including race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment, in relation to youth sports in the United States. This chapter details previous research relevant to the study topics.

#### **Key Terms**

The state of youth soccer in the United States has evolved within the framework of the pay-to-play model which has been inevitably influenced by several key demographic variables (Baker & Horton, 2004). The purpose of this research is to analyze the impact of a parent's race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels on athletic opportunity, achievement, and parental motivation at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey.

According to Coakley (2017), **race**, a social construct, is defined as a segment of the population who are distinctly different from another. In addition to this definition, race and meaning attributed to race are due, in part, to individual, societal systems of classification.

**Ethnicity** is understood to be a particular group of people defined by their cultural background (Coakley, 2017). **Socioeconomic status (SES)** is the social status of a group or an individual based on income level (Cairney et al., 2015). Necessary for determining an individual's or family's socioeconomic status are educational attainment and household income. It should be

noted that total household income was used in determining socioeconomic status for the purposes of this research. **Income** is the amount of money one makes and is a determinant factor influencing sports participation (Thibaut et al., 2017). Integral to this research is an understanding of high- and low-income households, which is to say that a family generates a high or low level of income. **Financial constraints** are understood to be limitations to sport participation based on income (Morley et al., 2018). **Educational attainment** can be defined as the level of education achieved (Post et al., 2018).

This research will evaluate these parental demographic variables in relation to athletic achievement and opportunity for youth club soccer players at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey. Additionally, the study will examine parental motivation and its role in the development of youth soccer players at these clubs. Scholars have long debated how to properly define the term “athletic achievement”. Research has discussed the implication of innate talent in connection to an individual’s athletic development and advancement. Others have proposed consideration of deliberate practice and resource availability in assessing athletic achievement (Helsen et al., 2000; Hyllegard et al., 2003). Chambliss’s (1989) definition of “excellence” is relevant to this study’s understanding of athletic achievement. Further, Chambliss notes that excellence refers to performances which are “consistently superior” and qualitative in nature, involving changes in routines, habits, training, or environment (p. 3). Moreover, Chambliss points out that athletes commonly progress through developmental stages because of qualitative improvements in mechanics, technical elements of the game, or training behaviors which are influenced by changes to the performance environment. With the absence of these qualitative improvements, it is unlikely that an athlete will achieve “excellence”. This study will therefore

view **athletic achievement** in terms of those players who play on the most elite team for their age group at their given club.

With a specific focus on the club soccer system in the United States, opportunities for youth athletes will be discussed in this context. According to Bennett et al. (2020), the pay-to-play system at the heart of U.S. youth soccer prioritizes opportunity and development for those players, and parents of players, who seek to reach the highest levels of their sport, rather than those who compete at a recreational level. **Opportunity** therefore encompasses the availability and access to resources which help players reach top levels of the sport. In addition, this study is also concerned with a parent's motivation for their child's participation in youth club soccer. For the purposes of this study, **parental motivation** will be defined as the reasons which drive a parent to support or invest in their child's youth soccer experience and development.

The research intends to view the youth club soccer experiences of youth soccer players at three specific clubs in southern New Jersey through a socio-cultural lens, utilizing the terms in reference above. In addition, however, it is imperative to define various terms which relate specifically to soccer and the development of soccer players in the United States. Membership to club, and even high school, soccer programs in the United States is determined by participation fees and dues, known as the **pay-to-play** model (Zdroik & Veliz, 2016). **Club sport teams** are those teams which exist outside of the local, recreational team, and compete in full-year training programs and competitive leagues (Post et al., 2018). These teams are typically necessary for those athletes whose aspirations are to compete at the intercollegiate or professional levels of the game. Additionally, most club teams promote **specialization**, which is defined as year-round training and competition in a particular sport often resulting in an athlete declining to participate in other sports (DiSanti & Erickson, 2019; Hill, 1993).

### **History of Youth Sports & Shift to Privatization**

Prior to the earliest organized youth sports leagues in the United States, children and teens often participated in unstructured free play, recreation, and sports. According to Wiggins (2013), it was not until after the Civil War in the late-1860s that organized youth sport associations and leagues began to form to facilitate the athletic development of young boys in the image of “Muscular Christianity”. Leading this initiative were the evangelical Protestants who sought to provide opportunities for boys to participate in various forms of recreation and sports to teach moral values and to cultivate strong character while also showcasing the benefits of an active lifestyle. At the turn of the 20th century, Progressive Era reformers focused their attention on immigrant youth who resided in city tenements, where overcrowded housing caused them to spend their “play time” in city streets. Organized sports leagues for immigrant boys were soon established in major cities across the United States, with the goal of passing on American values to youth (Friedman, 2013). Many of these leagues faced budget shortfalls amid an economic depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s, paving the way for fee-based alternative sporting organizations to cater to middle- and upper-class children. Soon, competitive youth tournaments and leagues became increasingly popular, such as Pop Warner Football and Little League Baseball.

The trend towards competitive, organized youth sports has only ballooned in the last thirty years, with community-based, nonprofit youth sports organizations replaced by the privatized youth sports market. For many parents in the United States, youth competitive sports have become a way for their children to distance themselves from the pack. As Friedman (2013) notes, driven by an ever-growing desire for their children to remain competitive and to build a resume for admission to colleges or other elite programs, families have become increasingly

ambitious and place their children in activities which are more demanding. As such, the youth sports industry in the United States has become incredibly profitable, with research indicating that youth sports generate more than \$15 billion annually in the United States, having nearly doubled since 2010 (Gregory, 2017). Gregory (2017) summarizes this shift to privatization, noting that community-based leagues have become obsolete in the wake of the demand for private sports organizations. In many ways, this shift has been dictated by a growing desire from parents and athletes to gain the extra “edge” in development and performance to achieve greater heights in their respective sport. Today, the growing demand has led to for-profit, private youth sports, with many parents and athletes intent on achieving the coveted athletic scholarship to ultimately compete at the collegiate level or beyond. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), college students today leave 4-year institutions with more than \$36,000 in student loan debt, on average (Riddle, 2014). The pathway to an athletic scholarship, which help to mitigate the costs of higher education, is most commonly through privatized youth sports programs.

Flanagan (2017) confirms that the burgeoning transition to private club organizations has been expedited by the parental belief that the club sports environment, and its perceived benefits, will land their son or daughter a scholarship from a collegiate institution. However, athletic scholarships are certainly not easy to come by. Riddle (2014) and Wendling et al. (2018) comment that participation in privatized club sports has become a precondition for those athletes and families who seek athletic aid, in the form of Division I scholarships, to compete at the collegiate level in nearly all team sports other than football. Further, to attract the interest of the nation’s biggest college programs, athletes often must seek opportunities to play for the top youth clubs in their state, if not the country. In American youth soccer, Major League Soccer’s

re-branded Elite Youth Development Academy, now called “MLS Next” (formerly the United States Development Academy), is the highest-ranking organization of youth soccer clubs in the country. In this league, youth academy affiliates of the thirty professional MLS teams are the only fully funded clubs in the country, at no cost to players or their families. Another 64, non-affiliated, clubs are added to this group, totaling 94 clubs in the academy league. For clubs who are not affiliated with a major professional organization, costs to participate can be excessive, with families required to spend thousands of dollars each year to participate at the developmental academy level. Pay-to-play fees, however, are certainly not limited to developmental academy clubs. According to United States Youth Soccer, the largest youth soccer organization in the country, the United States contains more than 10,000 clubs for boys and girls, nearly all of which charge fees, which range from hundreds to thousands of dollars each year, to play youth soccer for their club (U.S. Youth Soccer).

The exploding privatization of youth athletics programs in the United States has placed serious demand on both the athlete and their family. According to Smith (2014), this new era of privatized youth sports has widened the gap in terms of youth sport participation and access to opportunity. First, much of the youth sport experience today, outside of school sports, is marked by a family’s ability, willingness, and desire to pay large fees and expenses. Gregory (2017) notes that families may spend more than ten percent of their household income on the many costs associated with their son or daughter’s sport. In addition, the private youth sport organizations of today require that athletes and families commit significant amounts of time to lessons, practices, games, and travel. For many, the cost and time required can become barriers which stand in the way of higher-level coaching, teams, competition, recruitment, and more. Not only this, but the demands placed on the athlete have never been higher. A growing body of research indicates that

youth are spending far more time in organized sports than they were just twenty years ago and that limiting participation to only one sport can prove to have harmful physical, mental, and emotional repercussions (Gregory, 2017). According to Smith (2014), free play has reduced dramatically, replaced instead by competition in structured, organized youth sports.

Since the earliest days of youth sport privatization in America, many segments of the youth population were excluded based on race, ethnicity, gender, and disability. Throughout the history of organized youth sport, many of these groups have consistently struggled to obtain equitable access to opportunity and participation. African American boys, for example, were not allowed to play with or against their White peers until the latter half of the 1960s with leagues such as the Dixie Little League in South Carolina, which did not become fully integrated until 1967 (Wiggins, 2013). Historically, youth sport organizations, in many ways, emulated the larger cultural sentiment and practices of the time, which meant that systemic discrimination and racist practices were not absent from such organizations, leagues, or associations.

Scholars who have studied inclusion, access, and participation in private youth sports point out that the 21st century has presented an evolving set of challenges for youth sport organizations, administrators, and participants. Chief among them is equitable access to participation and opportunities for advancement. Wiggins (2013) underscores this concern which has been a feature of recent scholarship, commenting that the privatization of youth sports, driven by upper and middle-class parents, has widened the gap in terms of access to sport opportunities and development pricing out many families from certain racial or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Of course, the ways in which privatization shapes athletic outcomes for youth, including opportunity, achievement, and parental motivation for participation will vary based upon several

variables. As such, it is imperative that the state of youth sport privatization and the pay-to-play model are examined in context. Additionally, access to sport opportunities, achievement, and motivation in youth sports viewed through the lens of certain demographic variables, are deserving of further consideration and research.

### **Athletic Outcomes**

#### ***Athletic Opportunity***

As youth sports in the United States have evolved over time, various levels of sport have been organized to govern and provide opportunities for youth athletes. According to Bennett et al. (2020), sports for youth are commonly organized into four separate groups, which include school physical education programs, recreational community-based sports, school interscholastic sports, and club sports. Since the early 2000s, club sports have become increasingly popular. While some scholars correctly posit that club sports generally provide more opportunities for youth, mass participation does not necessarily result in equitable opportunity. Research conducted by De Bosscher et al. (2013) suggests that participation rates are not a prerequisite for high-level club sport programs.

Despite the theoretical benefit of club sports and their potential to provide opportunities for youth, the pay-to-play system of club soccer in the United States is tailored for the aspiring elite-athlete and their families who seek the best possible playing and learning environment (Bennett et al., 2020). For both players and parents, club sports offer higher-level coaching and development, better competition, both internally and externally, and player exposure for athletic opportunities beyond the club level. Yet, as Smith (2014) comments, the organization of youth club sports programs and leagues across the United States stand to serve under ten percent of the total youth sport participants. The benefits that many attribute to participation in club sports may

not be accessible to all due to a number of limiting factors placed on the families of youth soccer players in the United States today. As noted by Bennett et al. (2020), both scholars and sports administrators alike have pointed to rising costs, tied to the pay-to-play model, as a fundamental challenge associated with club sports. Another study, carried out by researchers at the University of Chicago and cited by Carpenter (2016) compared the backgrounds of elite, U.S. soccer national team players in the United States between the early 1990s and 2013, to NBA all-stars and NFL pro bowlers during that same time span. The research found that, on average, the hometowns of the professional soccer players were less racially diverse, predominantly White, had higher levels of educational attainment, and better employment ratings (Carpenter, 2016). With this being the case, additional research is necessary to examine the ways in which the pay-to-play model, influenced by the demographic variables, may result in limited access to opportunity in club soccer in the United States.

Findings from Mirehie et al. (2019) showed that higher levels of household income, representative of socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents were predictors of participation in organized club sports. These findings align with the research conducted by Bennett et al. (2020) and Dunn et al. (2016). Literature points out that opportunity is often stratified in privatized club sports on the basis of these demographic variables. With regards to race and ethnicity, Felton et al. (2002) and Goldsmith (2003) note disparities in opportunity across racial groups.

### ***Athletic Achievement***

In addition to opportunities for participation in youth club soccer, the present research is also concerned with the development and achievement of youth soccer players within the club soccer environment. More, an evaluation of the factors which drive athletic achievement in youth

club soccer is relevant to the aims of the current study. Scholarship on the topic of athletic achievement in youth sports shows that development of talent is driven by a variety of internal and external factors (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Holt & Morley, 2004). As noted in the literature, high-achieving youth athletes progress through a series of developmental stages (Côté, 1999; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Holt & Morley, 2004). Research points out that those athletes who do advance to elite levels in their respective sport are aided in these stages by family or a close support network which provides psychological support and financial resources (Côté, 1999; Holt & Morley, 2004). In addition, as noted by Holt and Dunn (2004), elite youth athletes often exhibit a range of intrinsic psychological skills, such as perseverance, resilience, competitiveness, confidence, goal-setting, and reflective practice, which allow them to advance in their sport. Moreover, findings from a study conducted by Holt and Dunn (2004) indicated that high-achieving youth soccer players displayed higher levels of discipline, commitment, and resilience in both lifestyle and sport training which aided their advancement. For example, youth soccer players in the study were able to successfully manage the pressures placed on them by supportive parents but benefited from the emotional and tangible support offered by parents. The presence of the personality characteristics in combination with requisite parent support facilitated the development of high-performing youth players.

Previous scholarly work underscores the importance of parental investment in the development of high-achieving youth athletes (Dorsch, 2016; Downward et al., 2014; Dunn et al., 2016; Holt et al., 2011; McGovern, 2018; Mirehie et al., 2019). As noted by Wheeler and Green (2012), parents of high-performing athletes regularly invested in their child's athletic development and activities that would enrich their youth sport experience. It should be noted that these findings from Wheeler and Green (2012) showed that middle-class families were more

likely to invest both resources and time in their child's athletic development and advancement when compared to working-class families. According to scholarship, talent acquisition, development and high achievement in youth sport is connected to an individual's ability to cover the costs associated with the sport and the necessary training. Available research highlights the significant time and resources necessary to advance in a particular sport (Baker et al., 2003; Baker & Horton, 2004; Baker & Young, 2014). Furthermore, specialization in youth sport has been a byproduct of the desire to advance to elite levels of performance (Buckley et al., 2017; DiSanti & Erickson, 2019; Hill, 1993; Williams & Reilly, 2000). As mentioned, athletic achievement in youth sport is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Thus, the present study seeks to better understand the demographics behind achievement in youth club soccer.

Results from research conducted by Holt and Dunn (2004) indicated that high-achieving youth soccer players possess a number of personality traits which facilitate their development. Additionally, familial support proved integral in the developmental process of elite youth athletes (Dorsch, 2016; Downward et al., 2014; Dunn et al., 2016; Holt et al., 2011; McGovern, 2018; Mirehie et al., 2019; Wheeler & Green, 2012).

### ***Parental Support & Motivation***

In the United States, research indicates that more than 90% of youth participate in sports during their childhood, with parental involvement an important part of such participation (Berk & McGovern, 2016; Côté, 1999; Dunn et al., 2016; Dorsch et al., 2016). Parents are a key agent in the youth sports experience providing valuable support in the form of resources and guidance. Parental involvement can be an integral agent in a child's youth sport experience, providing necessary support and resources (Côté, 1999; Andrews & Carrano, 2018). Research indicates

that parental support for youth sport development and participation is required for a variety of reasons, including financial, emotional, and social (Melton et al., 2018).

Côté (1999) interviewed various family members of four junior national athletes on the topics of resources, effort, and motivation. Results indicated that parents commonly identified a child's unique aptitudes for sports and thus afforded children the opportunity to participate in and enjoy sports from a young age. Further, in what the researcher terms the "Specializing Years" between ages 13 and 15, parents of high-performing athletes placed significance on a select few aspects of the child's life. For instance, a child typically narrowed their focus to academic and athletic achievement during this time. The study therefore suggests that parents who support children during this time facilitate the development process (Côté, 1999, p. 406). Findings confirmed the vital role of parental commitment, in the form of time and financial resources, to their child's participation and progression in athletics. Finally, the research established that as a child developed in their respective sport, parents commonly became more involved in and devoted to their advancement, taking greater interest in the sport, and offering necessary guidance which served to increase a child's engagement.

Findings from Morris et al. (2016) highlighted the transition phase from youth to senior level in sport as a challenging process and agreed that athletes must undergo a period of adjustment to maintain pace with the demands of professional sports. This change in level is made easier, according to the findings, if athletes had the necessary social support. Results from this research clearly showed that family and friends were perceived to be important members of an athlete's social support system and were regularly relied on to provide emotional support. These agents, who act as social support for an athlete in transition, are viewed as a valuable and necessary resource as youth players advance to higher levels of their sport.

Scholarship has also been devoted to understanding why parents involve their child in youth sports and provide support for their development within the sport or activity. Chard et al. (2015) posits that parents commonly enroll their child in youth sports due to the positive outcomes associated with their participation in extracurricular athletics or activities. These benefits are often thought to be related to the reinforcement of a healthy and active lifestyle, emotional and social skill development, life-skill acquisition, fun, and competition. Similarly, Melton et al. (2018) found that parents were primarily motivated by enjoyment, competition, and fitness. Yet, these findings were in association with general participation in youth athletics, and not affiliated with youth club soccer.

Research conducted by Dunn et al. (2016) indicated that the children of families who had provided greater financial support reported higher levels of perceived pressure. Considering these findings, the researchers proposed that “transient sports parenting” may be linked to significant financial commitment for a child’s athletic pursuits, with the goal of obtaining a “return on investment” in the form of athletic success and achievement (Dunn et al., 2016). Findings from Wendling et al. (2018) and Livingston et al. (2016) confirmed that a primary influence on participation in elite levels of sport for elite youth athletes was parental aspiration for their child’s advancement to the collegiate or professional ranks.

Keegan et al. (2010) seeking to analyze the factors which drive motivation in parents, coaches, and athletes, found that “Parent Support and Facilitation” was identified as a prevailing theme. Youth athletes identified the role of parents to support their athletic endeavors in the form of time, money, or behaviors as an enabler to their youth sport participation. Interestingly, the researchers posited that parent behaviors were focused on improving their child’s athletic abilities, a theme central to the questions of parental motivation posed by the present study. It

should be noted, however, that this research focused primarily on the motivation of athletes resulting from the influence of social agents such as parents or coaches.

A study conducted by Andrews and Carrano (2018) noted that greater levels of parental involvement produced positive connections to peers, parents, coaches, teachers, and the community, thereby aiding in athletic development (Andrews & Carrano, 2018). The findings were consistent with previous research which suggests that higher levels of parent involvement and support are associated with increased social development and skill acquisition.

Research conducted by Chard et al. (2015) and Mirehie et al. (2019) found that parents typically associate participation in youth sports with the developmental of positive attributes and values. Yet, privatized club sports and the investment they demand seem to persuade a shift in parental motivation, according to previous scholarship. As noted by Wendling et al. (2018) and Livingston et al. (2016), as children advanced in elite club sports, parents became increasingly motivated by the possibility that their child would secure an opportunity to play collegiately or professionally.

Thus, to navigate the club sport experience, youth rely on the support of family, more specifically parents and guardians, to actively participate and find achievement in sport. Further, the development of high-performing athletes is influenced by several key parental demographic variables which, as noted, include socioeconomic status, educational attainment levels, and race and ethnicity. More research is required to analyze the role of these variables in relation to access to opportunity and development of American youth soccer players.

### **Demographic Variables**

#### ***Race and Ethnicity***

For the purposes of the present research, race and ethnicity is a demographic variable which will be evaluated in its relation to the athletic outcomes. Statistical data provided by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (2018) indicates that the number of African American male soccer players competing across Division I, Division II, and Division III equals 8% (n=2,067) of the total student-athlete population in soccer. On the women's side, the total number of African American female soccer players compared to the total population of student-athletes at all levels is 5% (n=1,259). Data analysis on both the men's and women's sides indicate only a 1% increase in total African American student-athlete participation between 2008 and 2018. These findings present a relevant basis to further analyze race and ethnicity in relation to athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation in youth club soccer.

Throughout the history of organized sport in the United States, racial inequities have limited opportunity for athletes from various racial and ethnic minority groups. In fact, as Sagas and Cunningham (2014) reference, organized sport in the United States largely prohibited African Americans from participating until the passage of Civil Rights legislation in the mid-20th century. These long term, systemic inequalities in organized sport have created disparities with regards to access to resources which are necessary for sport participation (Sagas & Cunningham, 2014). Relative to Whites, non-white racial and ethnic groups are more likely to live in lower-income areas and face poverty, while having limited resources to support their child in organized youth sports. The difference in resource availability can then prove to limit access and advancement in youth sport for these communities. Thus, such discrepancies between the youth sport experiences of Caucasian and African American participants have been the focus of various studies.

Research examining race and ethnicity in correspondence to participation rates in sport is well-documented. However, research which examines access to club sports and elite athlete opportunity through the context of race is wholly absent in the field. Yet, analysis has been conducted to investigate the disparities in rates of physical activity amongst African American and Caucasian children (Felton et al., 2002). Findings showed that Black females had lower rates of physical activity than White girls. Additionally, White girls noted having greater access to sports equipment in their homes or immediate community than Black girls (Felton et al., 2002). Goldsmith (2003) evaluated sport participation rates, accounting for race and ethnicity, finding the gap in participation rates in “high status” sports like soccer between White and Black student-athletes, was influenced by racial attitudes and socioeconomic disparities between races.

McGovern (2018) analyzed opportunity, development, and achievement of Latina women in organized sport finding that athletes from working class Latino families detailed experiences which were defined by financial constraints and limited access to opportunity for advancement in sport, which is congruent with the findings of previously mentioned research.

### *Socioeconomic Status*

In addition to race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status presents families and athletes with financial barriers to athletic opportunity and athletic achievement. Coakley (2017) notes that sociologists, through extensive research, have indicated the preeminent role of socioeconomic status in access to sport participation and development. In a national poll of school sports conducted by the C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital, data suggested that one in three children from low-income families participated, compared to one in two children from higher income families. Additionally, lower income youth athletes ended their sports participation at much greater rates when compared to their higher income peers (C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital, 2012). Moreover,

socioeconomic status plays an influential role in determining which youth athletes are likely to gain the perceived positive outcomes associated with participation in youth sports (Cairney et al., 2015; Chard et al., 2015). With regards to resources necessary for advancement, studies have conclusively shown that children from high-income families have greater resources available to participate and advance in sports (Holt et al., 2018; Mirehie et al., 2019).

As previously highlighted, research suggests that club sports can be even more unequal. Further, privatized, fee-based youth sports programs often serve to stratify opportunity and achievement in youth club sports. Sagas and Cunningham (2014) provide that the cost of elite sports programs in the United States are, on average, between \$3,000 to nearly \$20,000 per year depending on the sport. For many low-income families, community-based recreational programs are the more cost-effective alternative. Even these programs, though, are predicated upon a family's ability to pay. Socioeconomic status in many communities, therefore, can limit participation due to the lack of available equipment or facilities, limited resources to pay coaches or officials, and more (Sagas & Cunningham, 2014). Data from the Aspen Institute's Sports and Society program indicated that household income is often the greatest indicator of involvement in private sport in the United States, especially at elite levels. In fact, as Gregory (2017) notes, those children from households with income levels greater than \$100,000 annually are over 20% more likely to compete in private club sports when compared to families earning less than \$25,000. Williams and Reilly (2000) contend that in sports such as youth soccer in the United States, which many would classify as a working-class sport, athletes from middle-class families and above tend to have greater access to financial resources, are provided additional opportunities due to mobility and travel, and are generally more supported by parents.

Youth athletes from higher income families also begin playing organized sports at younger ages. Results from Post et al. (2018) showed that club players from families with a higher household income started competing in their sport at younger ages, spent more time overall playing their sport, and were likely to allocate more resources towards development in their sport. Kelley (2013) emphasizes this point, with research that shows families with an annual household income greater than \$100,000 start their children in sports at a younger age, on average.

As mentioned by Bennett et al. (2020), most scholars would note that club sports, while advertising expanded opportunities for youth, often restrict opportunities due to financial demands. The findings of Williams and Reilly (2000) are consistent with the research of Holt et al. (2011) and Mirehie et al. (2019) who found that lower-SES families reported experiencing financial limitations in attempting to support their child's participation in sports. Further, participants indicated that their limited resources made it difficult to account for the increase in costs as a child advanced in their sport (Holt et al., 2011). Flanagan (2017) summarizes these trends and further spells out the challenges associated for low-income families who attempt to keep pace with privatized club sports, noting that wealthier parents have the means to afford camps, leagues, equipment, travel, team costs and more, while those who cannot are often found signing on to participate in lower-level, town leagues. This shift has meant that nearly 70% of children leave sports entirely by the age of 13.

Financial constraints and the associated obstacles resulted in many children missing opportunities, not only to participate, but for development and achievement. Despite the findings presented in the literature review, limited research exists evaluating the impact of socioeconomic

status on opportunity, achievement, and motivation for club soccer players and their parents in the United States specifically.

### ***Educational Attainment***

Educational attainment is the third major demographic variable of concern to the present research. Previous work has found that sport participation in children can be correlated to higher levels of education in parents, concluding that higher levels of physical activity can be found in children whose parents have higher levels of education (Cvetković et al., 2014; Mirehie et al., 2019). Research has indicated that youth soccer players competing on high-level club teams most commonly have parents who have completed a bachelor's degree or higher and that those parents with higher levels of education are more likely to have children, in turn, who participate in elite-level, specialized development (Post et al., 2018). Further research is needed, however, to examine educational attainment in relation to athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation in youth club soccer in the United States.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter highlights literature related to athletic outcomes and the three major demographic variables relevant to the present research study. Race and ethnicity were factors examined in relation to rates of both physical activity and organized sports, with more research necessary to be applied specifically to club soccer and elite-level soccer players (Felton et al., 2002; Goldsmith, 2003; McGovern, 2018). Research has emphasized the importance of socioeconomic status in sport participation and opportunities for advancement in sport (Cairney et al., 2015; Cvetković et al., 2014; Downward, 2007; Downward et al., 2014; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Holt et al., 2011; Marcen et al., 2013; Post et al., 2018; Thibaut et al., 2017; Vandermeerschen et al., 2016). Levels of educational attainment have been assessed and found

to be correlated to levels of sport participation in children and specialized development in club soccer players (Cvetković et al., 2014; Mirehie et al., 2019; Post et al., 2018). Research exists examining these variables in relation to sports performance, however, extensive research is still needed to guide a discussion around the influence of these factors in relation to athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation for American youth club soccer players and their parents.

**Chapter Three**  
**RESEARCH METHODS**  
**Introduction**

The present research study was designed to assess athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation for participation of youth soccer players in relation to parent demographics, including race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels. Moreover, this research sought to understand the motivation and support exhibited by the parents of youth club soccer players and the ways in which these factors shape a child's athletic development. First, approval was received from the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. A cross-sectional research study was designed and employed to collect quantitative data, test the hypotheses, inform conclusions, and answer research questions.

For this study, 286 participants were recruited and enrolled from three different youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey. The three clubs involved in this study were all from the southern New Jersey, located within the greater-Philadelphia region. Eligible participants acknowledged a detailed consent form which outlined the terms of the study, including research purpose, procedures, anonymity and confidentiality, and data security methods. Upon enrollment in the study, participants completed a 24-item web-based survey on Qualtrics. At the end of the survey window, the survey was closed, and all data was cleaned for further analysis. A multiple linear regression was then conducted to deduce the significance of the relationships between each dependent variable, represented by a composite score, and the independent variables of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment. These models will be used to draw conclusions and inform a discussion related to the development of youth soccer players in America's current youth soccer pay-to-play system.

## **Overview**

This chapter discusses the design of the present research study, detailing the selection of the cross-sectional research design and the implementation of a web-based survey. The chapter then defines and describes the sample population and outlines the study procedures, data collection and instruments, data analysis, reliability and validity, and all ethical considerations related to the study.

### **Cross-Sectional Research Design**

To conduct an in-depth analysis of athletic outcomes in relation to three major demographic variables, a quantitative research design was employed. More specifically, the study utilized a nonexperimental cross-sectional research design to gather and analyze quantitative data to address the research questions and test the hypotheses. In a cross-sectional research design, data is collected, often by way of interviews or questionnaire responses, while sampling participants from a broad segment of the population to determine causal relationships (Jones, 2015).

In this study, the sample of participants consisted of the parents of youth soccer players at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey who reported on their child's athletic opportunity and achievement, as well as their own involvement, support, and motivation. A comprehensive, web-based survey, which examined the experiences of parents and players at these clubs, was distributed. Data was collected to test three main hypotheses. A cross-sectional research design was thus used to analyze possible significant relationships between athletic outcomes alongside key demographic variables relevant to the research questions and hypotheses, including parental race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels.

### Research Questions

1. RQ1: Do the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents impact opportunities for their child's success in youth soccer at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey?
2. RQ2: Are the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents related to their child's athletic achievement in youth soccer at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey?
3. RQ3: Do the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents determine parental motivation for their child's participation in youth soccer at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey?

### Hypotheses

$$AO = \beta_0 + \beta_1RACE + \beta_2THI + \beta_3EDUC + e_1$$

Hypothesis 1: The race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment level of a child's parent will be associated with access to opportunity in youth club soccer.

$$AA = \beta_0 + \beta_1RACE + \beta_2THI + \beta_3EDUC + e_1$$

Hypothesis 2: A child's athletic achievement in youth club soccer will be correlated to the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents.

$$PM = \beta_0 + \beta_1RACE + \beta_2THI + \beta_3EDUC + e_1$$

Hypothesis 3: Parental motivation for their child's participation in youth club soccer will be associated with the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment level of the parent.

### Sample

To conduct this research study, convenience sampling was utilized to recruit parents of players at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey. Five youth soccer clubs were contacted to request participation in the study (see Appendix A). The three clubs that responded and were willing to facilitate the research study were used for the purposes of this research. Each soccer club represented in this study offered both boys and girls teams ranging in age from Under-8 to Under-19, in some cases hosting multiple teams in the same age group. Each of the three clubs featured in this study were reputable club soccer programs, all of which require team membership fees, offer paid coaches and trainers, enter cost-associated tournaments, travel both in and out of state, and generally exhibit higher levels of competition than the average “town” or recreational team. In total, club information indicates that the three clubs combined have a membership of roughly 1,500 youth club players.

Participants in this study were a convenience sample of parents from all players at all clubs enrolled. The eligibility of participants was determined by certain requirements. First, participants must have had a son or daughter, between the ages of 10 and 18, who was a current member of a club soccer team at one of the youth clubs participating in this research. To maintain anonymity, club directors distributed the recruitment letter to all parents of players in their club. In their email to parents, club directors asked that only one parent complete the survey. Parents who had multiple children in the club were able to submit multiple responses. All potential participants were invited to read the recruitment letter, determine eligibility, and proceed to the online survey using a link provided. In this study, 360 participants initially enrolled, a response rate of 24%. Participants acknowledged the consent form and responded to the survey. However, 74 participants did not meet eligibility requirements or otherwise did not

properly complete the web-based survey and were therefore excluded from data. After cleaning the data, a total of 286 participants were represented in the study results.

The three clubs involved in this study were from three separate counties in southern New Jersey and part of the greater-Philadelphia metropolitan region. For the context of this research, the most current demographic data from the three counties in southern New Jersey where participating clubs are located (see Table 1) is compared to the demographic data for participants in the study (see Table 2).

*Table 1*  
*Demographic Data for All Counties*

Total Population	
<b>County 1, Burlington</b>	~446,000
<b>County 2, Gloucester</b>	~291,000
<b>County 3, Atlantic</b>	~266,000
Race/Ethnicity	% of Population
<b>County 1, Burlington</b>	
White or Caucasian	75.0%
Black or African American	16.9%
Asian or Pacific Islander	6.3%
Hispanic or Latinx	8.0%
<b>County 2, Gloucester</b>	
White or Caucasian	81.4%
Black or African American	10.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.1%
Hispanic or Latinx	6.2%
<b>County 3, Atlantic</b>	
White or Caucasian	65.8%
Black or African American	14.6%
Asian or Pacific Islander	7.9%
Hispanic or Latinx	18.8%
Household Income	% of Population
<b>County 1, Burlington</b>	
\$0-50k	26.2%
\$50k-100k	30.7%
\$100k-200k	30.8%
\$200k or Greater	12.2%
<b>County 2, Gloucester</b>	
\$0-50k	28.5%
\$50k-100k	28.5%
\$100k-200k	32.2%
\$200k or Greater	10.9%
<b>County 3, Atlantic</b>	
\$0-50k	41.4%
\$50k-100k	28.3%
\$100k-200k	23.7%
\$200k or Greater	12.2%
Educational Attainment	% of Population
<b>County 1, Burlington</b>	
HS GED or Less	28.1%
Associate's	8.5%
Bachelor's	24.3%
Graduate /Professional	13.7%
<b>County 2, Gloucester</b>	
HS GED or Less	32.0%
Associate's	9.1%
Bachelor's	21.5%
Graduate /Professional	11.5%
<b>County 3, Atlantic</b>	
HS GED or Less	32.0%
Associate's	7.0%
Bachelor's	18.6%
Graduate /Professional	9.6%

*Table 2*  
*Demographic Data for the Sample (n=286)*

Variables	N	% of Sample
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White or Caucasian	248	86.7%
Black or African American	15	5.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	9	3.1%
Hispanic or Latinx	12	4.2%
Native American or Alaskan Native	0	0.0%
Other: Please Specify	2	0.7%
<b>Total Household Income (THI)</b>		
\$0-50k	9	3.1%
\$50k-100k	51	17.8%
\$100k-200k	152	53.1%
\$200k or Greater	74	25.8%
<b>Educational Attainment</b>		
High School GED or less	22	7.7%
Associate's Degree	36	12.6%
Bachelor's Degree	140	49.0%
Graduate or Professional Degree	88	30.8%

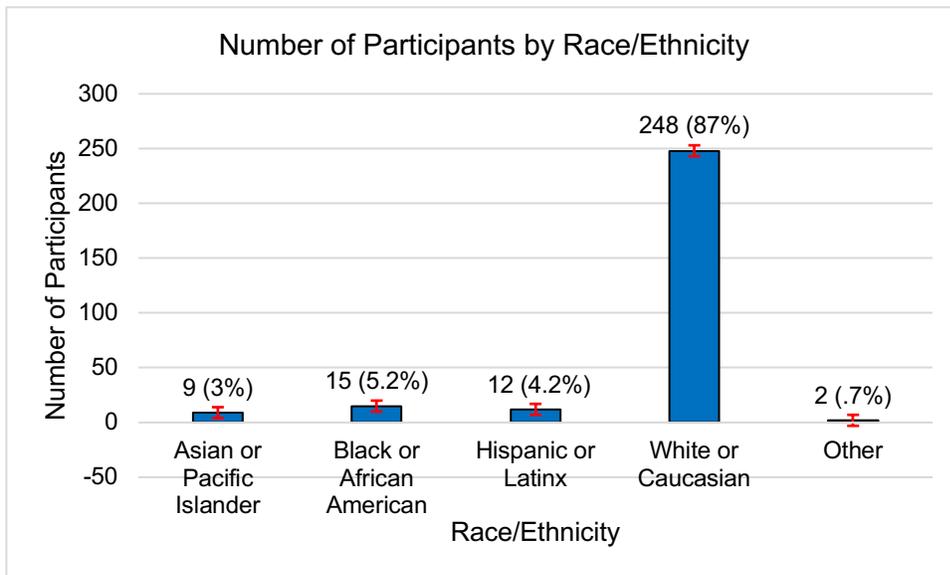
*Note.* Table 1 shows all relevant demographic data for County 1, 2, and 3 is shown. Table 2 contains demographic data for all participants in the study (n=286).

Figure 1 through Figure 6 further compare the demographics of the sample with data from the three countries represented in this study.

Figure 1 shows all participants in the study organized by race/ethnicity.

**Figure 1**

*Number of Participants by Race/Ethnicity*

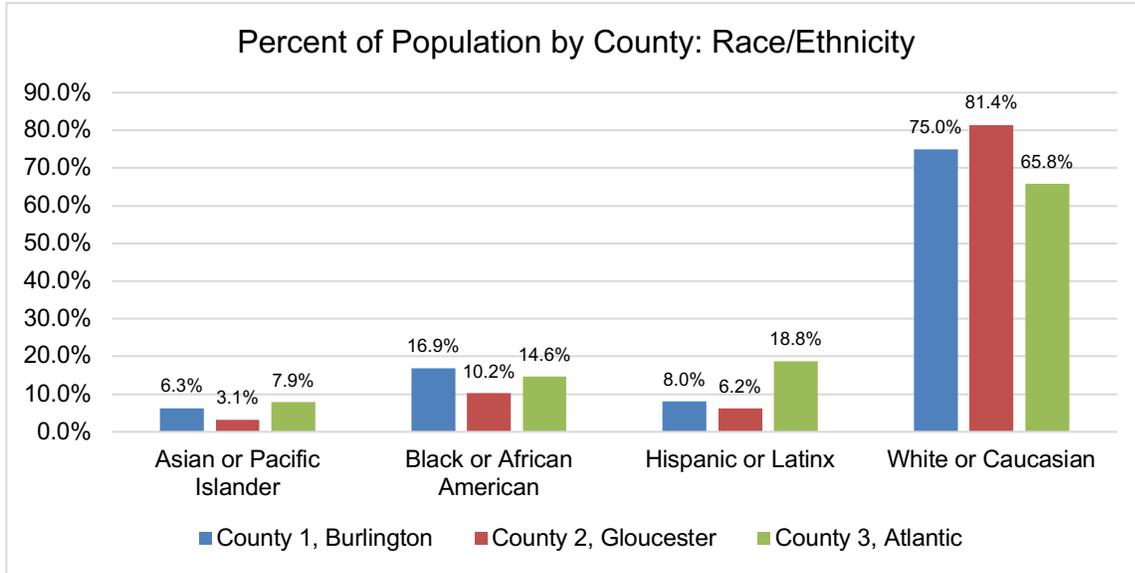


*Note.* Total number of participants are shown organized by race/ethnicity.

Figure 2 shows the percent of population by county represented in the study organized by race/ethnicity.

**Figure 2**

*Percent of Population by County: Race/Ethnicity*

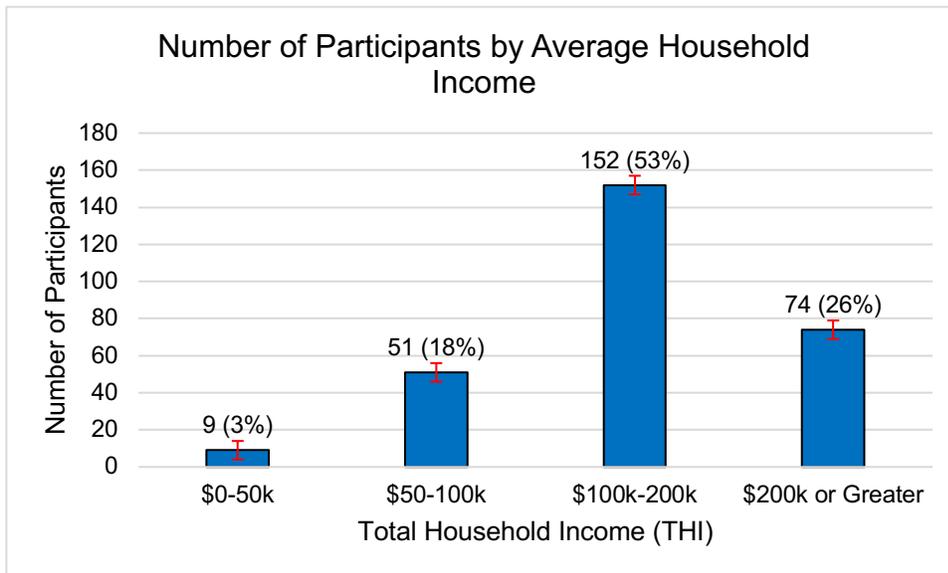


*Note.* County population is shown organized by race/ethnicity.

Figure 3 shows all participants in the study organized by total household income.

**Figure 3**

*Number of Participants by Total Household Income*

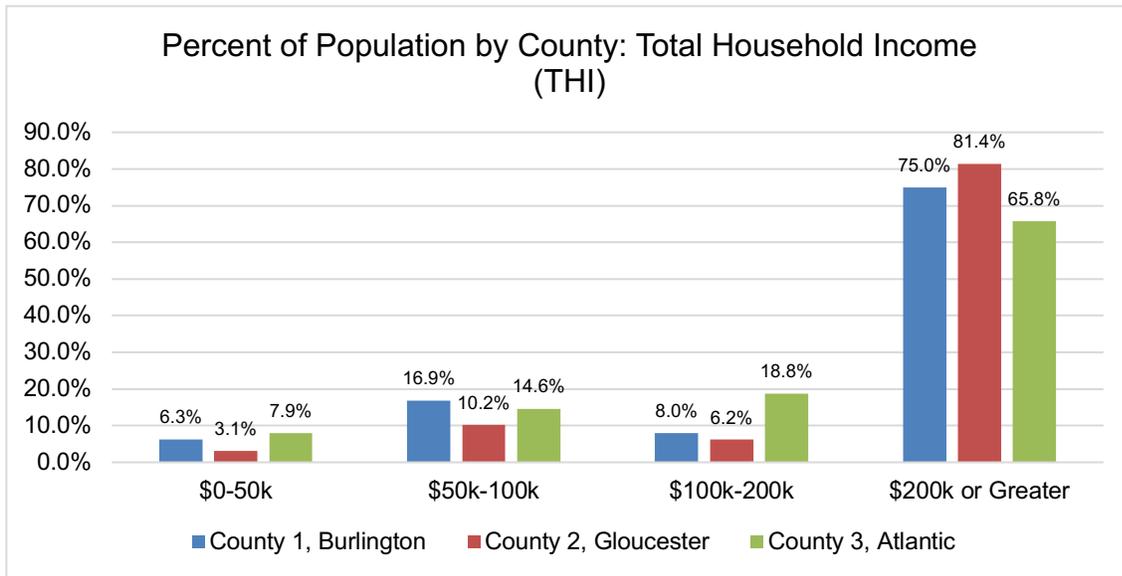


*Note.* Total number of participants are shown organized by total household income.

Figure 4 shows the percent of population by county represented in the study organized by total household income.

**Figure 4**

*Percent of Population by County: Total Household Income (THI)*

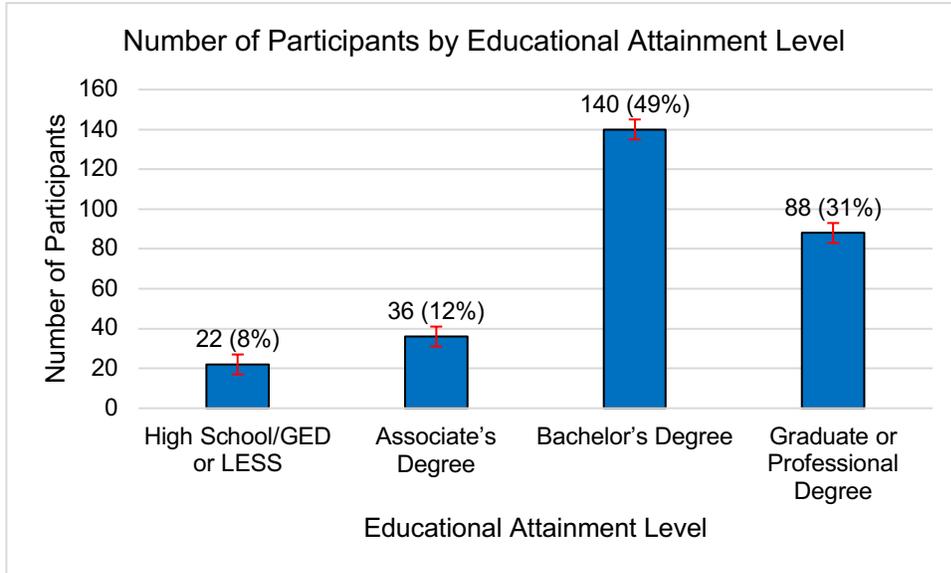


*Note.* County population is shown organized by total household income.

Figure 5 shows all participants in the study organized by educational attainment level.

**Figure 5**

*Number of Participants by Educational Attainment Level*

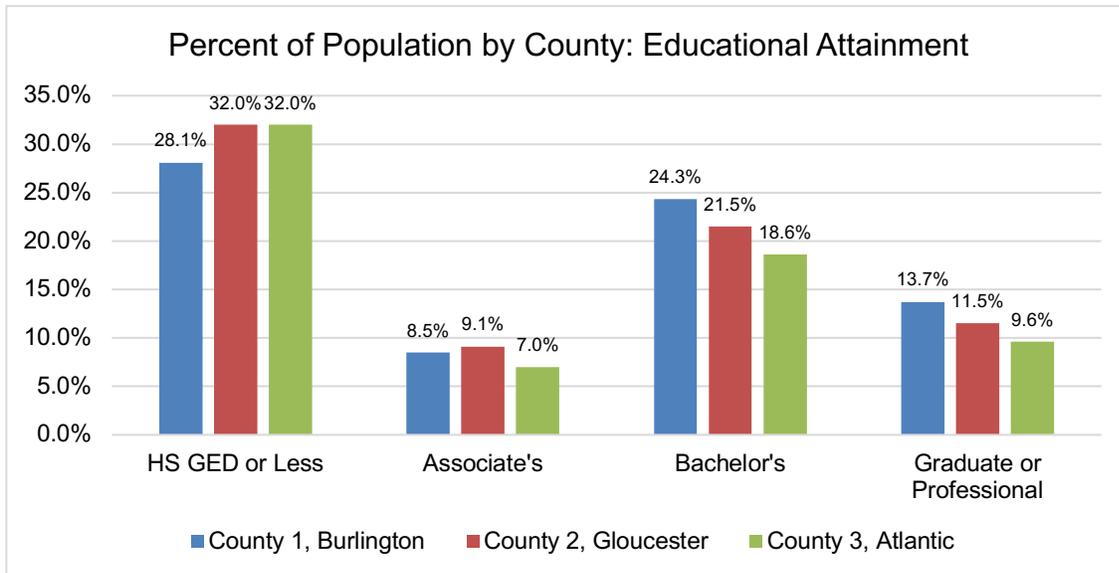


Note. Total number of participants are shown organized by educational attainment level.

Figure 6 shows the percent of population by county represented in the study organized by educational attainment.

**Figure 6**

*Percent of Population by County: Educational Attainment*



Note. County population is shown organized by educational attainment.

As previously noted, all participants included in the sample were parents from one of three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey. As such, data from the three counties where these clubs are located was utilized to evaluate the sample of participants involved in this study. In comparison with demographic data from the state of New Jersey, it is important to note that the sample of participants is not representative of the population in these counties. Instead, the sample of youth soccer parents in this research study were overrepresented by “White or Caucasian” participants, were representative of a higher socioeconomic status, and had a higher level of education when compared to the average resident from the three counties. The sample therefore lacked significant variation when compared with the population of the three counties at large.

### **Procedure**

Club representatives signed and returned a formal letter acknowledging the terms of the study and granted permission (see Appendix B). The research study was designed in consideration of relevant ethical considerations. An application, which detailed the research, was submitted to, and approved by Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix C). Upon receiving IRB approval, a recruitment letter was distributed to the previously established youth soccer club contacts. These club contacts were directed to send an email to all potential participants within their soccer club who met the criteria for the research, asking them to participate. With this email, the club contacts included the formal recruitment letter (see Appendix D) which provided a brief introduction, purpose of the research, eligibility requirements, a timeframe for participation, and an anonymous link to access the web-based survey. A follow-up letter (see Appendix E), inviting participants to enter the research study, was

sent one week prior to the survey deadline. Willing participants navigated to the web-based survey using an anonymous link, where they were first prompted to read and acknowledge a consent form (see Appendix F). The survey (see Appendix G) consisted of 24 total questions, including the collection of demographic information. Once the survey deadline had been met, the survey was closed, and the data was cleaned for analysis.

### **Data Collection**

The research design called for a respondent completion survey to collect quantitative data for analysis. According to Jones (2015), surveys can be utilized to gather quantitative data from a large sample group which can then be summarized using the necessary tables and figures. For this study, an online survey was designed using Qualtrics, a web-based research software. While a few disadvantages exist with this type of survey, including lack of control of participants, a possibility of limited responses, and the inability to ask detailed, follow-up questions, there are many benefits to using a questionnaire to collect quantitative data. Chief among them are accessibility, potential reduction in bias, anonymity, structured data, and increased time for respondents (Jones, 2015). Given the aims of this research, the use of a comprehensive, web-based survey was selected because it allowed for a collection of a wide array of valuable data points which would facilitate the testing of the study's hypotheses. In addition to demographic information, the survey collected detailed information related to their child's club soccer experience, levels of achievement, costs and time associated with membership, motivations, and future aspirations. This data could then be used to create a clean, composite score for each individual respondent based on athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation. Additionally, it should be noted that given the nature of the questions, it was determined that the use of an online survey would promote a higher response rate. Lastly, a web-

based survey allowed for the collection of data from a larger, more diverse sample in an efficient, cost-effective manner while ensuring confidentiality.

### **Data Analysis**

To prepare data for the regression model demographic information and survey responses were coded to a numerical format using “dummy variables”. In addition, to facilitate analysis, composite variables were created for each dependent variable. To do this, responses were re-coded for questions that applied to each dependent variable. For example, data from survey questions which pertained to “athletic opportunity” were re-coded to create a single score for each individual participant. At the completion of this process to create composite scores, each participant received a composite score for each of the dependent variables with higher scores indicating higher levels of athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation.

A multiple linear regression was used for data analysis because the research is examining three dependent variables - athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation - in relation to three independent variables - race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels. Three models were run to analyze the relationship between each dependent variable and the three independent variables in this study.

The first model was designed to analyze dependent variable one, athletic opportunity, alongside parents’ race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels.

$$AO = \beta_0 + \beta_1RACE + \beta_2THI + \beta_3EDUC + e_1$$

In this model, a child’s perceived level of athletic opportunity will be predicted by parental “RACE”, Total Household Income or “THI”, and Educational Attainment or “EDUC”.

The second model was designed to analyze dependent variable two, athletic achievement, alongside parents’ race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels.

$$AA = \beta_0 + \beta_1RACE + \beta_2THI + \beta_3EDUC + e_1$$

In this model, a child's perceived level of athletic achievement will be predicted by parental "RACE", Total Household Income or "THI", and Educational Attainment or "EDUC".

The third model was designed to analyze dependent variable three, parental motivation, alongside parents' race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels.

$$PM = \beta_0 + \beta_1RACE + \beta_2THI + \beta_3EDUC + e_1$$

In this model, parental motivation will be predicted by parental "RACE", Total Household Income or "THI", and Educational Attainment or "EDUC".

### **Research Reliability and Validity**

When conducting the study, necessary measures were taken to ensure both reliability and validity to properly address the questions at the center of the research. A distinct process was followed to recruit participants for the study, design and distribute a structured web-based consent form and survey, and to analyze the data. It should be noted that anonymity was stressed prior to and during participation in the study, in both the recruitment letter and consent form, in order to limit potential subject bias (Jones, 2015).

In addition to reliability, a key tenet of quality research is validity. To verify the validity of the study and the data collected, all data was carefully inspected. Further, any data from the study which was deemed to have been submitted by a participant who did not meet eligibility requirements or to have properly completed the survey was eliminated. Qualtrics, a web-based survey software, was utilized in tandem with Microsoft Excel and the data analysis software package provided to collect, clean, code, and analyze all data. Despite these steps, the validity of the research was constrained due to the sample of the population that participated. The sample of participants lacked the variation necessary to properly address the research questions.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discusses the design of the present research study, detailing the selection of the cross-sectional research design and the implementation of a web-based survey. The research questions and hypotheses are outlined. The chapter then defines and describes the sample population while outlining the study procedures and ethical considerations, data collection and instruments, data analysis, and reliability and validity.

## **Chapter Four**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Overview**

This research study utilized quantitative methods to collect data from parents of youth soccer players at three soccer clubs in southern New Jersey. In this chapter, the demographic data from participants enrolled in the study is discussed in comparison to data from the state of New Jersey. Additionally, the chapter outlines the results of survey items organized by each dependent variable. The chapter then presents the results of the multiple linear regression models which aim to answer the research questions at the foundation of the study.

#### **Analysis of Survey Items**

This section will outline the results from independent survey items, categorized by the dependent variables.

##### ***Athletic Opportunity***

When responding to the survey, participants were asked questions related to their son or daughter's athletic opportunity in youth club soccer. Participants were asked to report the cost of club membership, additional expenses required, the costs associated with those expenses, and average hours per week committed to club soccer. Additionally, participants were asked to report whether their child participated in individual/small group training and/or camps/clinics along with the costs associated with those extra activities. Figure 4 through Figure 11 (see Appendix) show the results from these survey items.

##### ***Athletic Achievement***

In addition to athletic opportunity, participants were asked questions regarding their son or daughter's athletic achievement or level of play. This dependent variable was represented by two survey items. Participants were asked to describe the level of importance of their son or

daughter's current club team in relation to their future success in soccer and if their child was on the top-level team in their respective age group at their club. Figure 12 and Figure 13 (see Appendix) are representative of participant responses for athletic achievement.

### *Parental Motivation*

Lastly, participants responded to a series of survey items aimed at gathering data related to parental motivation. Parents were asked to report on the motivating factors for their child's participation in youth club soccer, individual or small group training, camps or clinics, and future athletic and academic aspirations. Figure 14 through Figure 18 (see Appendix) show data from survey items related to parental motivation.

### **Analysis by Regression Model**

This section will outline the results of the regression models run, categorized by the dependent variables. In this section, results of the multiple linear regression models for each dependent variable are presented.

#### ***Model 1: Athletic Opportunity***

The first model analyzed a child's athletic opportunities based on parental demographics. It was hypothesized that the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment level of a child's parent would be associated with access to opportunity in youth club soccer. Results from the multiple linear regression indicated that race/ethnicity, household income, nor educational attainment significantly predicted athletic opportunity in youth club soccer players in the study and therefore the null hypothesis could not be rejected (see Table 3). Overall model significance for the first model showed that race, income, and education explained .4% of the variance in athletic opportunity ( $R^2=.004$ ,  $R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = -0.006$ ,  $F(3,282)=.423$ ) (see Table 4).

#### ***Model 2: Athletic Achievement***

The second model sought to analyze a possible relationship between the demographic variables and a child's athletic achievement. It was hypothesized that a child's athletic achievement in youth club soccer would be correlated to the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents. Results from the multiple linear regression indicated that race/ethnicity, household income, nor educational attainment significantly predicted athletic achievement in youth club soccer players in the study and therefore the null hypothesis could not be rejected (see Table 3). Overall model significance for the second model showed that race, income, and education explained .2% of the variance in athletic achievement ( $R^2=.002$ ,  $R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = -0.007$ ,  $F(3,282)=.266$ ) (see Table 4).

### ***Model 3: Parental Motivation***

The third model assessed parental motivation for their son or daughter's participation in youth club soccer to determine whether the demographic variables may significantly predict levels of motivation. It was hypothesized that parental motivation for their child's participation in youth club soccer would be associated with the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment level of the parent. Results from the multiple linear regression found that the race/ethnicity "Black or African American" significantly predicted parental motivation ( $\beta = .57$ ,  $p<.005$ ). For household income, the income "50,001-100,000 USD (\$)" had a level of significance of  $p=.08$ . No category of educational attainment was found to significantly predict parental motivation for parents of youth club soccer players in the study. Therefore, results from the third model indicated that the null hypothesis could be rejected for the race/ethnicity "Black or African American" and the THI "50,001-100,000 USD (\$)". All results related to parental motivation are provided (see Table 3). Further, overall model significance for the third model

showed that race, income, and education explained 2.6% of the variance in parental motivation ( $R^2=.026$ ,  $R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = 0.016$ ,  $F(3,282)=2.575$ ) (see Table 4).

Table 3

*Regression Results, All Models*

<b>Model 1: Athletic Opportunity</b>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
White or Caucasian	-0.165	0.148	-1.113	0.267
Black or African American	-0.104	0.189	-0.549	0.583
Asian or Pacific Islander	-0.348	0.221	-1.573	0.117
50,001-100,000 USD (\$)	0.017	0.182	0.093	0.926
100,001-200,000 USD (\$)	0.040	0.173	0.231	0.818
Greater than 200,000 USD (\$)	0.028	0.178	0.160	0.873
Associate's Degree	-0.123	0.136	-0.901	0.368
Bachelor's Degree	-0.100	0.115	-0.869	0.386
Graduate or Professional Degree	-0.078	0.120	-0.648	0.518
<b>Model 2: Athletic Achievement</b>				
White or Caucasian	0.015	0.098	0.151	0.880
Black or African American	-0.029	0.125	-0.236	0.814
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.093	0.146	0.634	0.526
50,001-100,000 USD (\$)	-0.126	0.120	-1.056	0.292
100,001-200,000 USD (\$)	-0.116	0.114	-1.026	0.306
Greater than 200,000 USD (\$)	-0.121	0.117	-1.033	0.303
Associate's Degree	-0.003	0.090	-0.028	0.978
Bachelor's Degree	-0.011	0.076	-0.148	0.882
Graduate or Professional Degree	-0.034	0.079	-0.432	0.666
<b>Model 3: Parental Motivation</b>				
White or Caucasian	0.096	0.158	0.610	0.542
Black or African American	0.569	0.201	2.826	0.005***
Asian or Pacific Islander	-0.025	0.236	-0.104	0.917
50,001-100,000 USD (\$)	0.334	0.195	1.709	0.088*
100,001-200,000 USD (\$)	0.259	0.185	1.399	0.163
Greater than 200,000 USD (\$)	0.126	0.191	0.658	0.511
Associate's Degree	0.233	0.147	1.584	0.114
Bachelor's Degree	0.130	0.125	1.039	0.300
Graduate or Professional Degree	0.107	0.130	0.823	0.411

\*\*\*<.01, \*\*p<.05, \*p<.1

*Note.* Results from the multiple linear regression models for Athletic Opportunity, Athletic Achievement, and Parental Motivation are shown.

### **Chapter Summary**

Results for individual survey items were analyzed as they related to athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation. Multiple linear regression models were then employed to test the hypotheses for each dependent variable and determine significance. A detailed discussion of the results and findings will be provided in the chapter that follows.

## **Chapter Five**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Overview**

This chapter discusses the results of the research, while exploring implications, limitations, and recommendations for future study. The study will therefore provide guidance for future research of athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation in relation to youth club soccer in the United States.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The paradigm of youth sports in the United States has shifted, moving away from the traditional intramural or interscholastic model to one that is dominated by the prevalence of club sports. Over the course of the last 20 years, research indicates that participation rates in club sports have risen dramatically (Gregory, 2017). As noted by Moore (2017), club sports offer year-round training programs attracting players and parents who seek high level training, facilities, and exposure to college programs. At the heart of this increased focus on club sports programs is the “pay-to-play” model in which families are required to make significant financial investment in support of their child’s participation in youth athletics. As such, questions have been raised related to opportunity, achievement, and motivation. Thus, a cross-sectional research study was conducted to analyze possible significant relationships between athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation in relation to a parent’s race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels.

The results of the multiple linear regression models indicate that there was not enough variation in the sample to reject the null hypotheses, with the exception of two demographic variables in relation to parental motivation. An analysis of the dependent variable “parental motivation” showed statistical significance ( $p=.005$ ) at a confidence level of 95% for the

race/ethnicity “Black or African American”. Additionally, results from the multiple linear regression for parental motivation found statistical significance ( $p=.088$ ), at a confidence level of 90%, for the household income range “50,001-100,000 USD (\$)”.

It is necessary to note the overall model significance as well. For Model 1, the predictor variables of race, income, and education explained .4% of the variance in athletic opportunity (see Table 4). In Model 2, the same variables explained .2% of the variance in athletic achievement (see Table 4). In Model 3, the variables explained 2.6% of the variance in parental motivation (see Table 4). Therefore, it should be referenced that the each of the models did not fit the observed data values.

Despite limited variation within the sample population, this research underscores avenues for future exploration and investigation. The results provide guidance for future research surrounding race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment of parents in relation to youth club sports and questions of opportunity, achievement, and motivation. This chapter will highlight and analyze these important findings, limitations, and recommendations for future study.

## **Discussion**

This research study endeavored to analyze the influence of parental demographics on a child’s athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and a parent’s motivation for their child’s participation in club soccer at three youth clubs in southern New Jersey. Review of the literature presented a number of directions for analysis. Three research questions were identified and guided this inquiry.

### ***RQ1: Athletic Opportunity***

RQ1 asked “Do the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents impact opportunities for their child’s success in youth soccer at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey?” When controlling for a parent’s race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels, the findings of the multiple linear regression model indicated that no demographic variable significantly predicted athletic opportunity in youth club soccer players at the three clubs involved in this study.

In reviewing the composition of the sample in comparison to county demographics, it became evident that a lack of variation may be responsible for this finding. Most study participants (n=248, 87%) identified as “White or Caucasian”, reported a total household income of \$100,000 or greater (n=226, 79%), and had achieved a Bachelor’s Degree or higher (n=228, 80%) while other races/ethnicities, socioeconomic groups, and levels of education were significantly underrepresented in the data (see Tables 1 and 2).

Despite a lack of variation in the sample population, the composition of the sample may point to existing disparities at the three youth soccer clubs involved in this study, which merit future research. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau provides the median household income, categorized by race, for the three New Jersey counties relevant to this study. Research indicated that the average median household income across the three counties was \$80,544. For White/Caucasian residents in these three counties, the average median income was \$86,008, compared to \$57,533 for Black or African American residents and \$61,492 for Hispanic or Latinx residents. Across the three counties, Black or African American residents had a median household income that was an average of \$23,011 less than the median household income. Hispanic or Latinx residents had a median household income that was an average of \$19,052 less than the median household income. As shown in Figure 6, a significant majority of participants

(65.5%) reported spending greater than \$1,000 annually for their child's membership to one of the three youth soccer clubs. Additionally, parents noted that financial investment was also required to pay for travel, uniform, equipment fees, and more (see Figure 7). These additional expenses ranged from hundreds to thousands of dollars (see Figure 8). Thus, sample demographics, compared to median household income data from the three New Jersey counties, may suggest that youth club soccer in this part of southern New Jersey requires significant financial investment which can be a barrier to participation for Black or African American and Hispanic or Latinx children. Literature surrounding the racial demographics of youth sport participation in the United States calls attention to the underrepresentation of minority groups and lower-SES children in sports programs (Carpenter, 2016; Felton, 2002; Goldsmith, 2003; Sagas & Cunningham, 2014; Wheeler & Green, 2014). The makeup of the sample in the present study may therefore point to a larger trend in youth club soccer in southern New Jersey as it pertains to athletic opportunity.

### ***RQ2: Athletic Achievement***

RQ2 asked “Are the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents related to their child's athletic achievement in youth soccer at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey?” When controlling for a parent's race/ethnicity, household income, and educational attainment levels, the findings indicated that no demographic variable significantly predicted athletic achievement in youth soccer players at the three clubs involved in this study.

As previously noted, the parents at the three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey, representing the sample population, were mostly White/Caucasian, of a higher socioeconomic status, and had achieved higher levels of education (see Tables 1 and 2). White children in the

three southern New Jersey soccer clubs are more likely to come from families who have a greater level of household income, as previously referenced with data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Therefore, it is possible that these children can begin playing organized, club soccer at a younger age, have additional resources to develop, experience, and advance in the sport, and are able to gain access to better coaching, recruiting, and equipment (Bennett et al., 2020; Holt et al., 2011).

Moreover, the lack of variation in the sample may suggest that barriers to athletic achievement also exist for non-white, youth club soccer players at the three clubs involved in this study.

### ***RQ3: Parental Motivation***

RQ3 asked “Do the race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment levels of parents determine parental motivation for their child’s participation in youth soccer at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey?” When controlling for race/ethnicity, the researcher found that the race/ethnicity of “Black or African American” significantly predicted parental motivation for their child’s participation in youth club soccer at the clubs involved in this study. The results of the multiple linear regression showed that Black or African American parents were 57% more likely to have higher levels of parental motivation compared to the other categories of race/ethnicity. Parents were asked to report their primary motivation for their child’s participation in club soccer. After analyzing the results of this item, it was found that Black or African American parents were more likely to be motivated by the prospect of their child playing at the collegiate level or beyond. In fact, of the 15 participants who identified as “Black or African American”, 11 (73%) were primarily motivated by the possibility of their child obtaining an athletic scholarship to play soccer in college or for their son or daughter to play professionally. On the contrary, 21% of White or Caucasian participants reported that their primary motivation was for their child to obtain a college scholarship or play professional soccer.

Additionally, 87% of Black or African American participants responded that they expected their son or daughter to play soccer after high school compared to 67% of White or Caucasian participants.

As scholarship has consistently shown, rates of participation in youth sports for Black or African American children is markedly less than White or Caucasian children (Felton et al., 2002; Goldsmith, 2003; Sagas & Cunningham, 2014). When looking at the sport of soccer in particular, research confirms that high-level soccer players in the United States commonly come from communities that are predominantly White (Carpenter, 2016). With this being the case, an explanation for this finding could be that Black or African American parents are more motivated to use club soccer to pursue higher levels of opportunity in the sport and beyond. It is possible that Black or African American parents see high-level club soccer as an experience which can open doors for higher education or financial security.

In terms of socioeconomic status, the findings showed that the income level of “50,000-100,000 USD (\$)” exhibited statistical significance, at a confidence level of 90%, indicating that this range of household income predicted parental motivation levels for the parents of youth club soccer players in southern New Jersey. Similar to race/ethnicity, this may be a result of the fact that participants who reported this level of income were motivated for their son or daughter to use soccer as a mechanism to gain admittance to college and to alleviate some of the financial barriers to college education as well as their impact on financial security later in life. Of the participants (n=60) who reported a THI less than \$100,000, 46 (77%) responded that they expected their child to play soccer after high school. By comparison, participants who reported a THI greater than \$200,000 were 17% less likely to expect their son or daughter to play soccer after high school.

When evaluating educational attainment levels of parents, findings of the multiple linear regression showed that no level of parental educational attainment significantly predicted parental motivation.

### **Limitations**

An important limitation was identified which may have influenced the outcomes of the research study. As referenced in the discussion section, a major limitation was the lack of variation in the sample. An analysis of sample demographics clearly showed that a significant majority of participants in this study were White (87%), had a total household income (THI) greater than \$100,000 (79%), and had a Bachelor's Degree or higher (80%) (see Tables 1 and 2). This absence of variation in the sample of participants is not an accurate representation of the population in the three counties sampled.

Moreover, despite a convenience sample of participants selected based on membership to one of the three participating clubs, the research design and subsequent survey failed to identify and include those players or parents who are interested in participating in youth club soccer in these clubs but are not able to or may have dropped out. Thus, the demographic makeup of the sample, which is based on club membership, fails to include adequate representation of families from varying racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. Further, an attempt to construct a sample of participants from these clubs will likely result in a population of participants who are not representative of the demographics of the counties or state of New Jersey as a whole.

### **Implications of the Study**

The findings from the present research study support two key implications. An exploration of parental motivation at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey suggested

that parents who identified as Black or African American or had a total household income of \$50,001-100,000, were increasingly motivated for their child to participate in club soccer. As such, researchers may be interested in further analyzing the motivational climate of parents whose children are involved in privatized youth sports while controlling for key demographic variables.

A second, equally important implication from the research showed that club membership at the three youth soccer clubs involved in this study was overrepresented by parents who were White/Caucasian, had higher levels of household income, and achieved higher levels of education when compared to the general population (see Tables 1 and 2). In some ways, this lack of variation may explain the findings in the study. Therefore, future research can explore similar questions while constructing a study which accounts for the demographic composition of youth, private soccer clubs or includes those interested but unable to participate in club soccer. Similarly, youth soccer club directors can consider this lack of variation in the composition of their club demographics and devise programs and policies which promote access, inclusion, equity, and diversity. Further, club soccer programs and directors can seek to make access to club soccer more affordable. To mitigate costs, club programs can utilize business sponsorships or family scholarships, allowing players from low-income or low-education families to play club soccer. Club soccer programs may therefore establish partnerships with schools or other community-based programs to host clinics, provide instruction, or make equipment available for players and families beginning at a young age. U.S. policymakers can consider investment in infrastructure in low-income communities that would allow for the construction and maintenance of soccer fields or courts to provide greater access to the sport in these areas.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on this research study and its findings, four gaps in research were identified which can be investigated further. First, and most significantly, participants, who were club soccer parents at one of the three clubs involved in the study, were predominantly White/Caucasian, represented higher levels of socioeconomic status, and had achieved higher levels of education than the average when compared to the three New Jersey counties. Future study can seek to sample youth soccer clubs or geographic regions which are more diverse and nearer to the average demographics of the sampled state at large.

Second, while the parents in the study were asked to provide the age of their son or daughter, the age of the player was not analyzed in relation to athletic opportunity, achievement, or parental motivation. Here, opportunity, achievement, and parental motivation may be proximate to a child's age. Therefore, future research can examine these dependent variables in youth club soccer while controlling for the age of the player. This is important because levels of achievement, opportunity, or motivation may vary based on how old the player is.

Third, data was collected related to parental motivation for their child's participation in club soccer. This extension of the research is relevant because the motivations of parents may differ from the player themselves. Thus, it is important to determine player motivations for their own participation in club soccer.

Lastly, the present research evaluated opportunity, achievement, and parental motivation in youth club soccer at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey. Future study may be interested in exploring these dependent variables within the context of another sport, such as youth basketball. This future analysis may help to explain participation rates according to race/ethnicity. Advanced study of this topic would help to explain participation rates in

individual sports and the barriers that may limit access to those sports. Additionally, such a study may shed light on parental attitudes and motivations towards a child's involvement in certain sports.

### **Chapter Summary**

The history of the world's most popular sport has seen global stars emerge from poverty-ridden neighborhoods. Famously, Brazilian star Gabriel Jesus was pictured barefoot painting the streets of São Paulo in the months leading up to 2014 Men's FIFA World Cup. Three years later, he would be signed by Manchester City, one of the world's best clubs, for a fee of \$38 million. Yet, youth soccer in the United States of America has long followed the pay-to-play model where families are required to cover a variety of fees before their son or daughter is able to step on the field. Thus, the purpose of this research study was to explore the impact of parental demographics on athletic opportunity, athletic achievement, and parental motivation at three youth soccer clubs in southern New Jersey. Findings from the study found that parents who were Black or African American or had an income between \$50,001 and \$100,000 were likely to exhibit greater levels of parental motivation for their child's participation in club soccer. It is important to note that a lack of variation in the sample population existed in this study which may have influenced the findings. This lack of variation presents opportunity for future research related to opportunity, achievement, and motivation in American youth club soccer.

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<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/THE-SOCIO-ECONOMIC-STATUS-OF-PARENTS-AND-THEIR-Cvetkovi%C4%87-Nikoli%C4%87/544f4af6f68cb546716daaacd4afd108b0479900>

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**TABLE 1**

*Table 1*  
*Demographic Data for All Counties*

Total Population	
<b>County 1, Burlington</b>	~446,000
<b>County 2, Gloucester</b>	~291,000
<b>County 3, Atlantic</b>	~266,000
Race/Ethnicity	% of Population
<b>County 1, Burlington</b>	
White or Caucasian	75.0%
Black or African American	16.9%
Asian or Pacific Islander	6.3%
Hispanic or Latinx	8.0%
<b>County 2, Gloucester</b>	
White or Caucasian	81.4%
Black or African American	10.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.1%
Hispanic or Latinx	6.2%
<b>County 3, Atlantic</b>	
White or Caucasian	65.8%
Black or African American	14.6%
Asian or Pacific Islander	7.9%
Hispanic or Latinx	18.8%
Household Income	% of Population
<b>County 1, Burlington</b>	
\$0-50k	26.2%
\$50k-100k	30.7%
\$100k-200k	30.8%
\$200k or Greater	12.2%
<b>County 2, Gloucester</b>	
\$0-50k	28.5%
\$50k-100k	28.5%
\$100k-200k	32.2%
\$200k or Greater	10.9%
<b>County 3, Atlantic</b>	
\$0-50k	41.4%
\$50k-100k	28.3%
\$100k-200k	23.7%
\$200k or Greater	12.2%
Educational Attainment	% of Population
<b>County 1, Burlington</b>	
HS GED or Less	28.1%
Associate's	8.5%
Bachelor's	24.3%
Graduate /Professional	13.7%
<b>County 2, Gloucester</b>	
HS GED or Less	32.0%
Associate's	9.1%
Bachelor's	21.5%
Graduate /Professional	11.5%
<b>County 3, Atlantic</b>	
HS GED or Less	32.0%
Associate's	7.0%
Bachelor's	18.6%
Graduate /Professional	9.6%

**TABLE 2**

<i>Table 2</i>		
<i>Demographic Data for the Sample (n=286)</i>		
<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% of Sample</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White or Caucasian	248	86.7%
Black or African American	15	5.2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	9	3.1%
Hispanic or Latinx	12	4.2%
Native American or Alaskan Native	0	0.0%
Other: Please Specify	2	0.7%
<b>Total Household Income (THI)</b>		
\$0-50k	9	3.1%
\$50k-100k	51	17.8%
\$100k-200k	152	53.1%
\$200k or Greater	74	25.8%
<b>Educational Attainment</b>		
High School GED or less	22	7.7%
Associate's Degree	36	12.6%
Bachelor's Degree	140	49.0%
Graduate or Professional Degree	88	30.8%

TABLE 3

*Table 3*  
*Regression Results, All Models*

<b>Model 1: Athletic Opportunity</b>	$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
White or Caucasian	-0.165	0.148	-1.113	0.267
Black or African American	-0.104	0.189	-0.549	0.583
Asian or Pacific Islander	-0.348	0.221	-1.573	0.117
50,001-100,000 USD (\$)	0.017	0.182	0.093	0.926
100,001-200,000 USD (\$)	0.040	0.173	0.231	0.818
Greater than 200,000 USD (\$)	0.028	0.178	0.160	0.873
Associate's Degree	-0.123	0.136	-0.901	0.368
Bachelor's Degree	-0.100	0.115	-0.869	0.386
Graduate or Professional Degree	-0.078	0.120	-0.648	0.518
<b>Model 2: Athletic Achievement</b>				
White or Caucasian	0.015	0.098	0.151	0.880
Black or African American	-0.029	0.125	-0.236	0.814
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.093	0.146	0.634	0.526
50,001-100,000 USD (\$)	-0.126	0.120	-1.056	0.292
100,001-200,000 USD (\$)	-0.116	0.114	-1.026	0.306
Greater than 200,000 USD (\$)	-0.121	0.117	-1.033	0.303
Associate's Degree	-0.003	0.090	-0.028	0.978
Bachelor's Degree	-0.011	0.076	-0.148	0.882
Graduate or Professional Degree	-0.034	0.079	-0.432	0.666
<b>Model 3: Parental Motivation</b>				
White or Caucasian	0.096	0.158	0.610	0.542
Black or African American	0.569	0.201	2.826	0.005***
Asian or Pacific Islander	-0.025	0.236	-0.104	0.917
50,001-100,000 USD (\$)	0.334	0.195	1.709	0.088*
100,001-200,000 USD (\$)	0.259	0.185	1.399	0.163
Greater than 200,000 USD (\$)	0.126	0.191	0.658	0.511
Associate's Degree	0.233	0.147	1.584	0.114
Bachelor's Degree	0.130	0.125	1.039	0.300
Graduate or Professional Degree	0.107	0.130	0.823	0.411

\*\*\*<.01, \*\*p<.05, \*p<.1

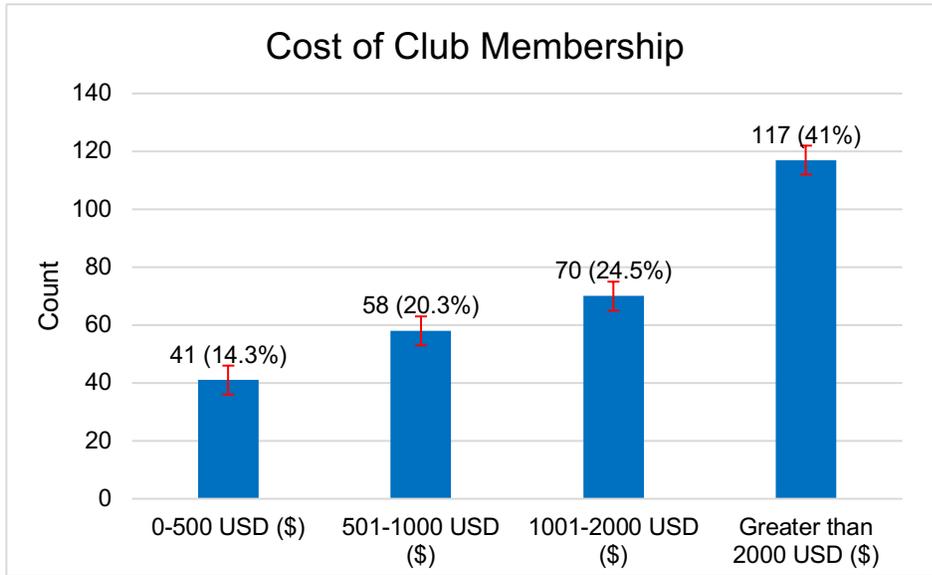
**TABLE 4**

*Table 4*  
*Overall Model Significance*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error	<i>F</i>
1: Athletic Opportunity	0.059	0.004	-0.006	0.503	0.423
2: Athletic Achievement	0.052	0.002	-0.007	0.331	0.266
3: Parental Motivation	0.155	0.026	0.016	0.539	2.575

**FIGURE 7**

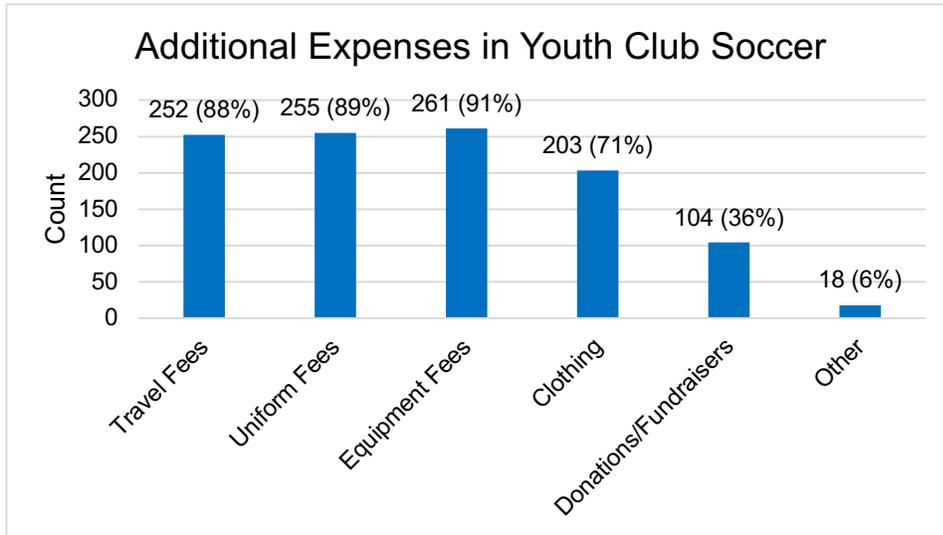
*Club Soccer Team Cost of Membership*



*Note.* Count totals for the first item related to athletic opportunity is shown.

**FIGURE 8**

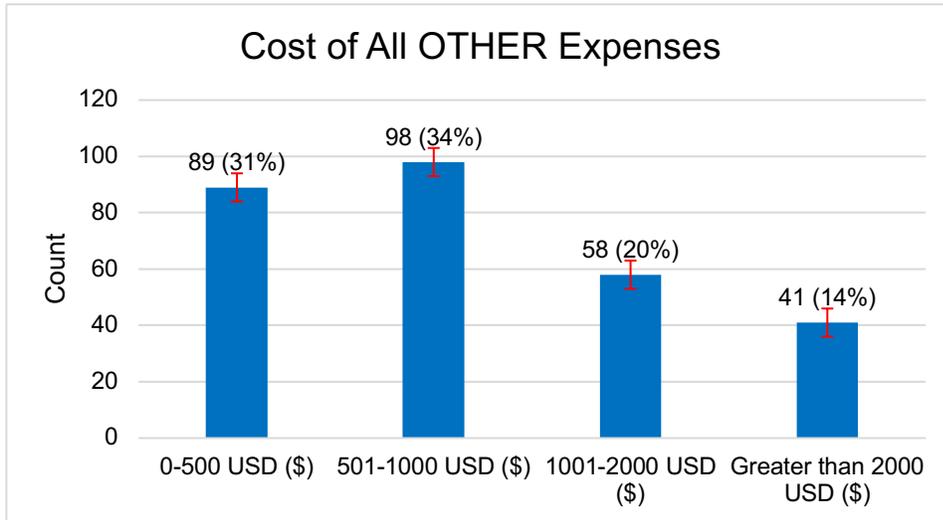
*Additional Expenses in Youth Club Soccer*



*Note.* Count totals for the second item related to athletic opportunity is shown.

**FIGURE 9**

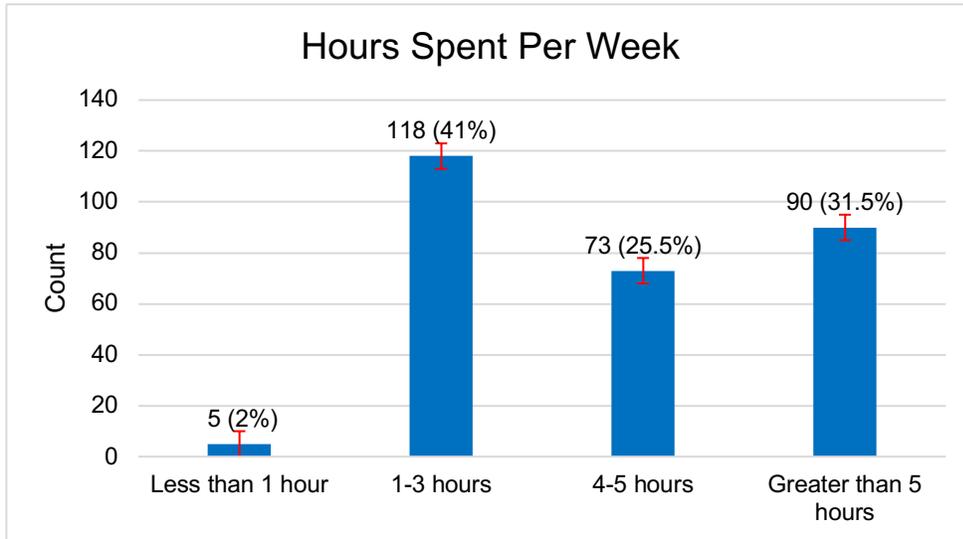
*Total Cost of All OTHER Expenses*



*Note.* Count totals for the third item related to athletic opportunity is shown.

**FIGURE 10**

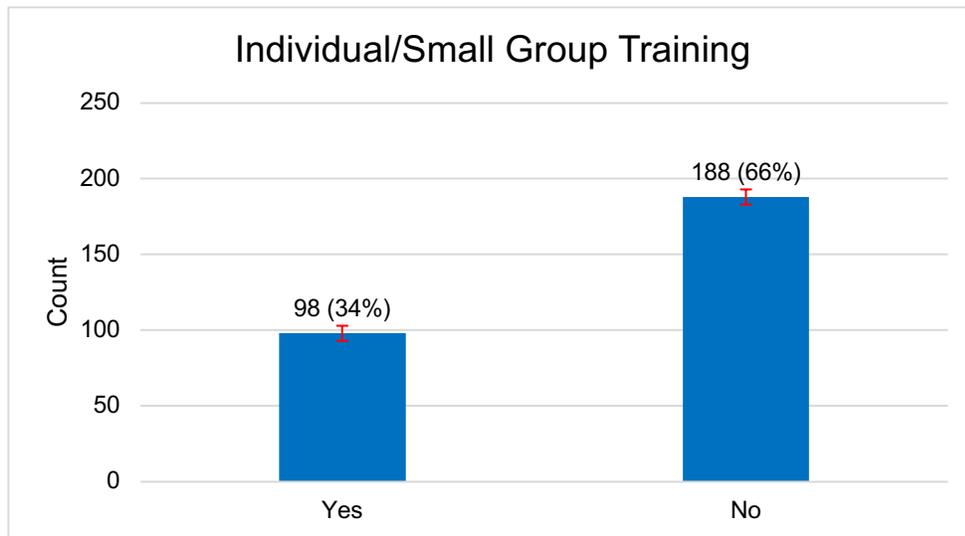
*Hours Spent Per Week*



*Note.* Count totals for the fourth item related to athletic opportunity is shown.

**FIGURE 11**

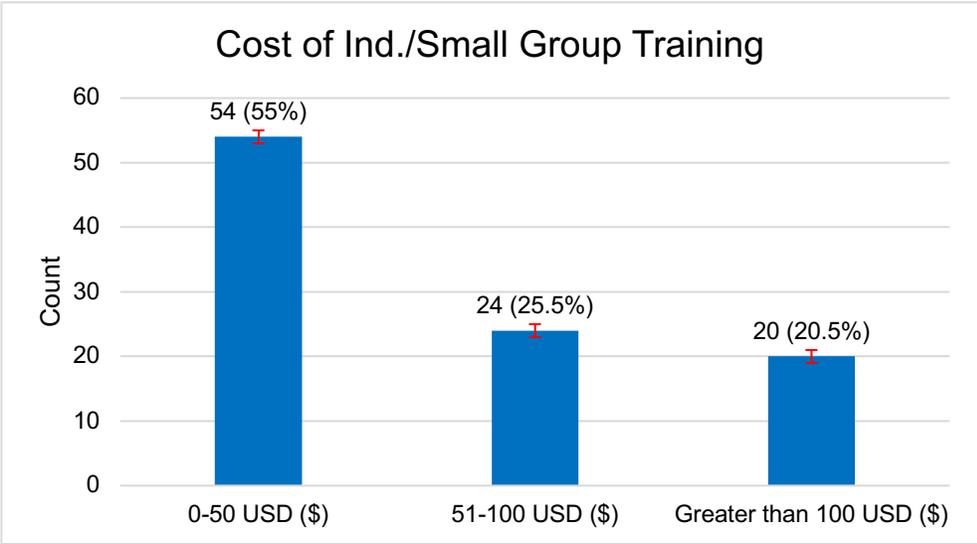
*Individual/Small Group Training*



*Note.* Count totals for the fifth item related to athletic opportunity is shown.

**FIGURE 12**

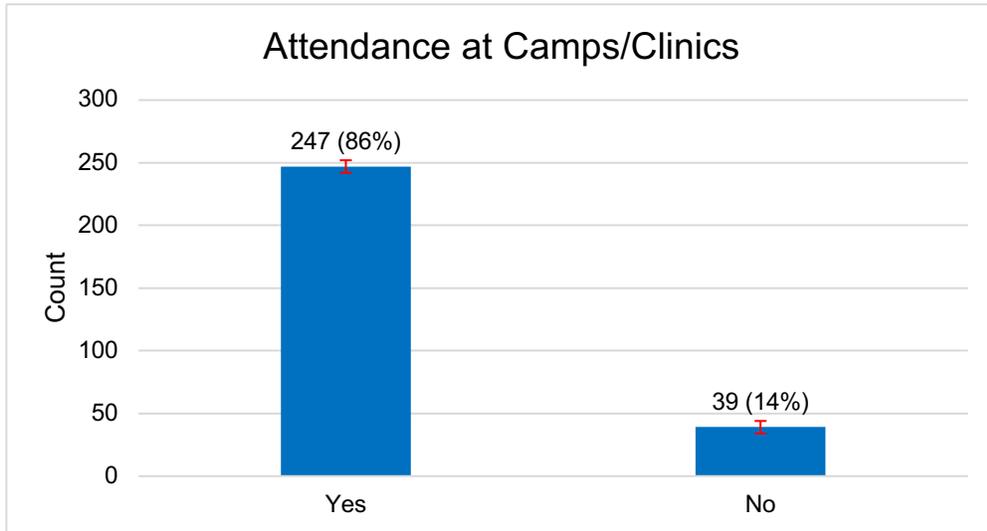
*Cost of Individual/Small Group Training*



*Note.* Count totals for the sixth item related to athletic opportunity is shown.

**FIGURE 13**

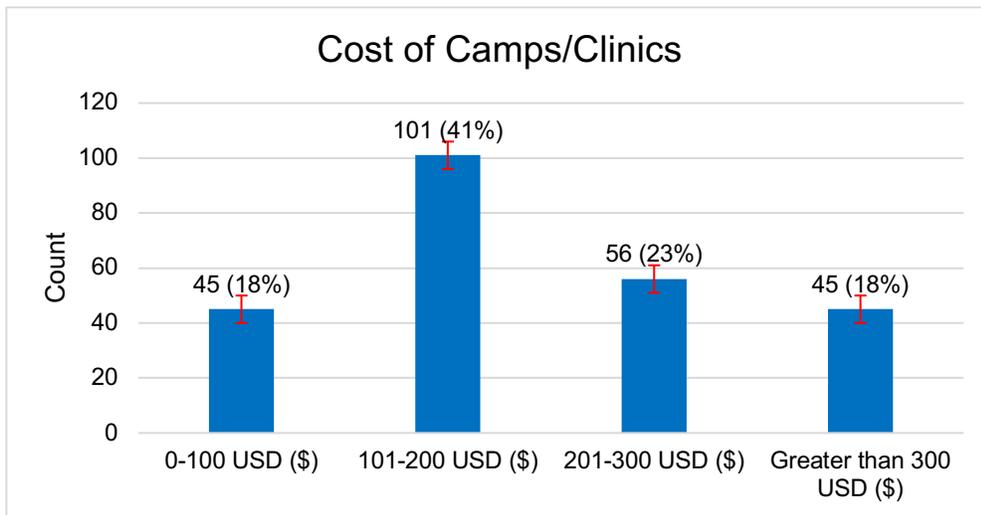
*Attendance at Camps/Clinics*



*Note.* Count totals for the seventh item related to athletic opportunity is shown.

**FIGURE 14**

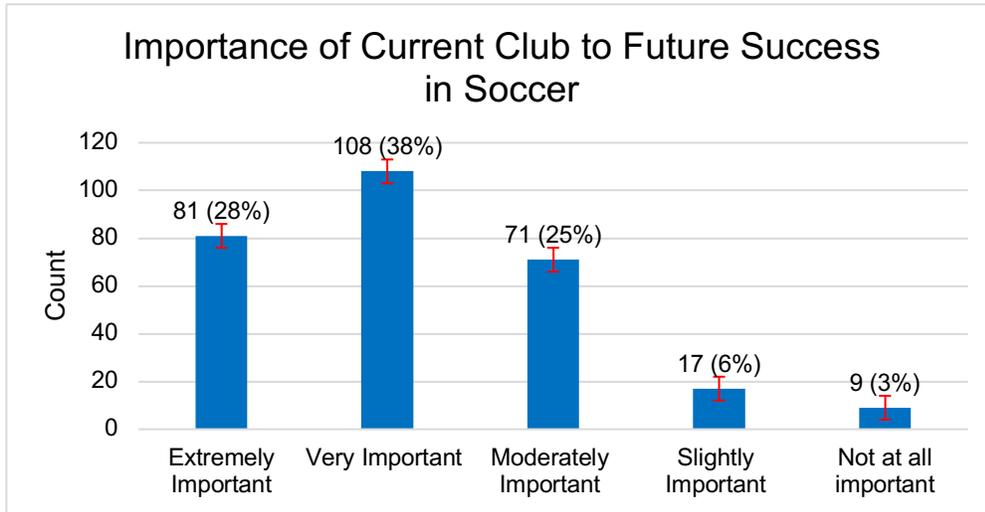
*Cost of Camps/Clinics*



*Note.* Count totals for the eighth item related to athletic opportunity is shown.

**FIGURE 15**

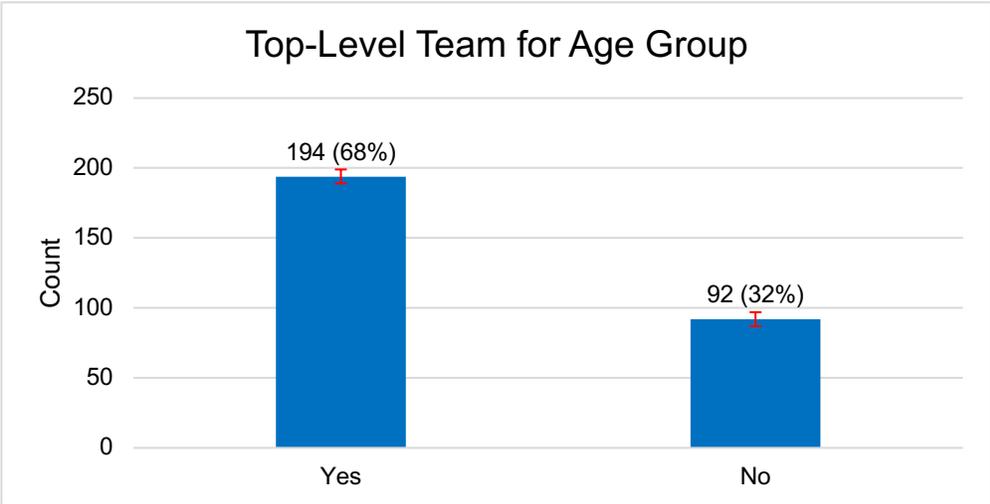
*Importance of Current Club to Future Success in Soccer*



*Note.* Count totals for the first item related to athletic achievement is shown.

**FIGURE 16**

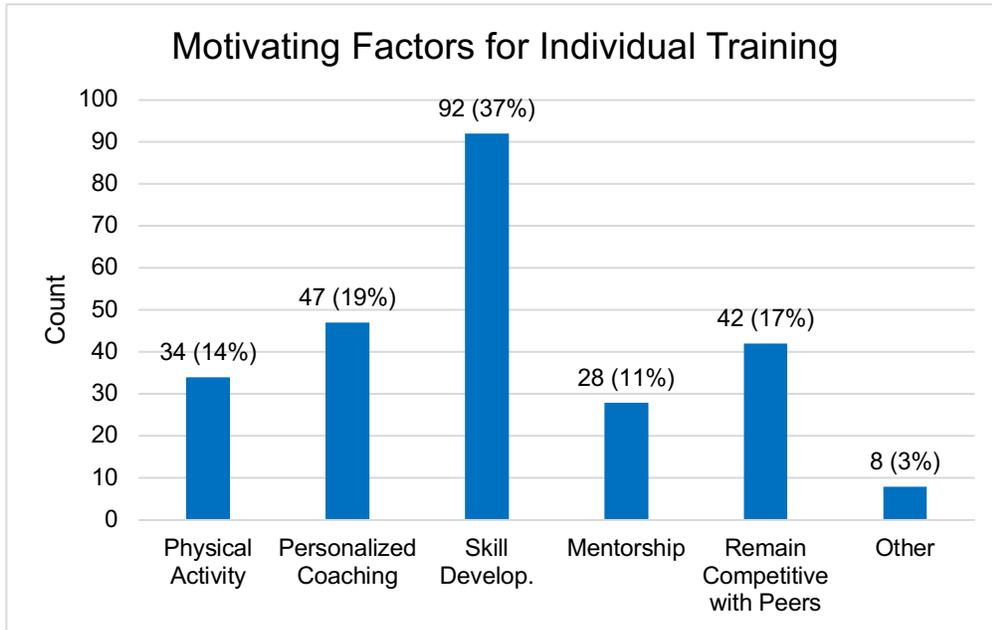
*Top-Level Team for Age Group*



*Note.* Count totals for the second item related to athletic achievement is shown.

**FIGURE 17**

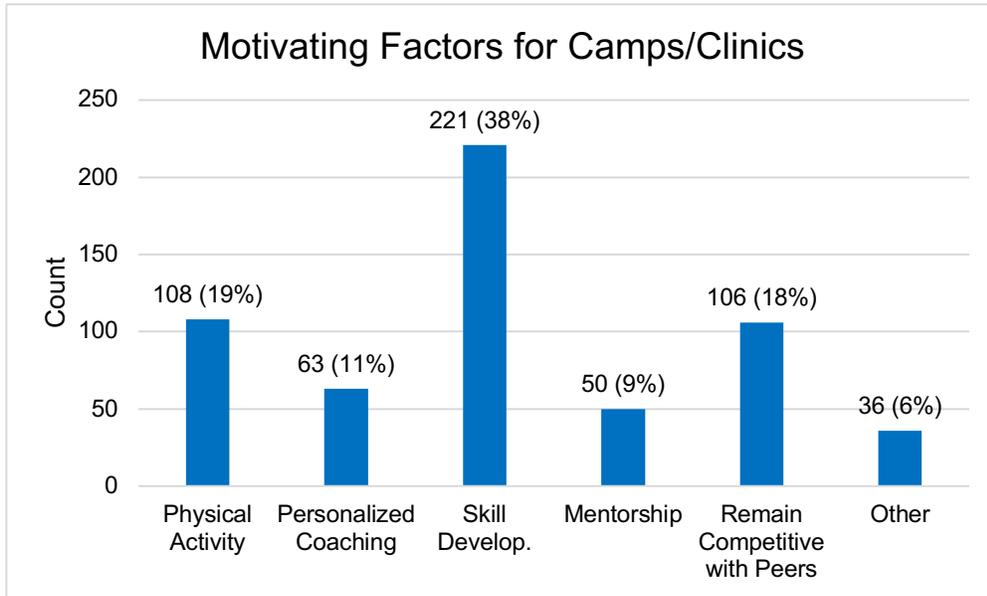
*Motivating Factors for Individual Training*



*Note.* Count totals for the first item related to parental motivation is shown.

**FIGURE 18**

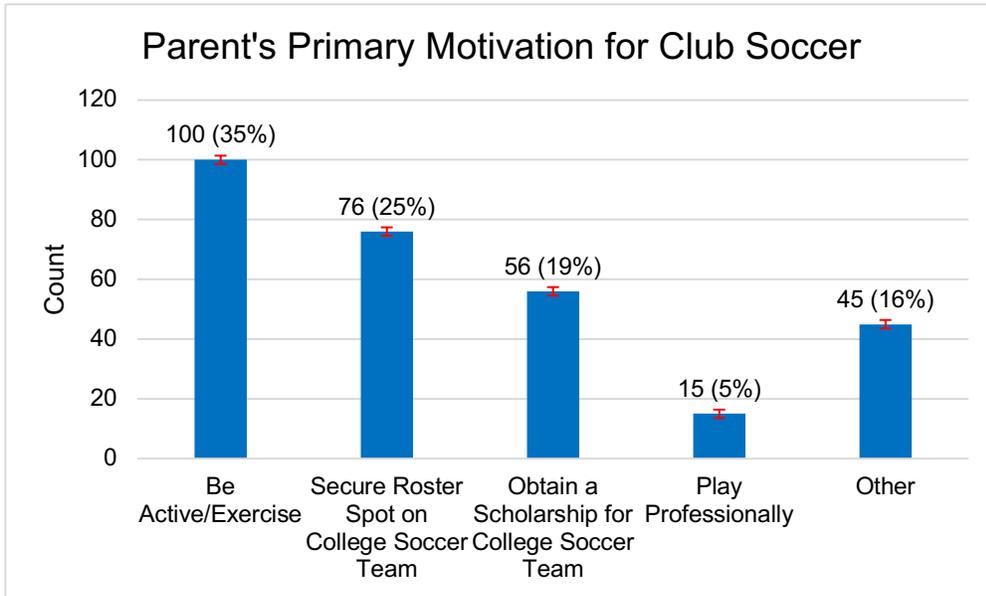
*Motivating Factors for Camps/Clinics*



*Note.* Count totals for the second item related to parental motivation is shown.

**FIGURE 19**

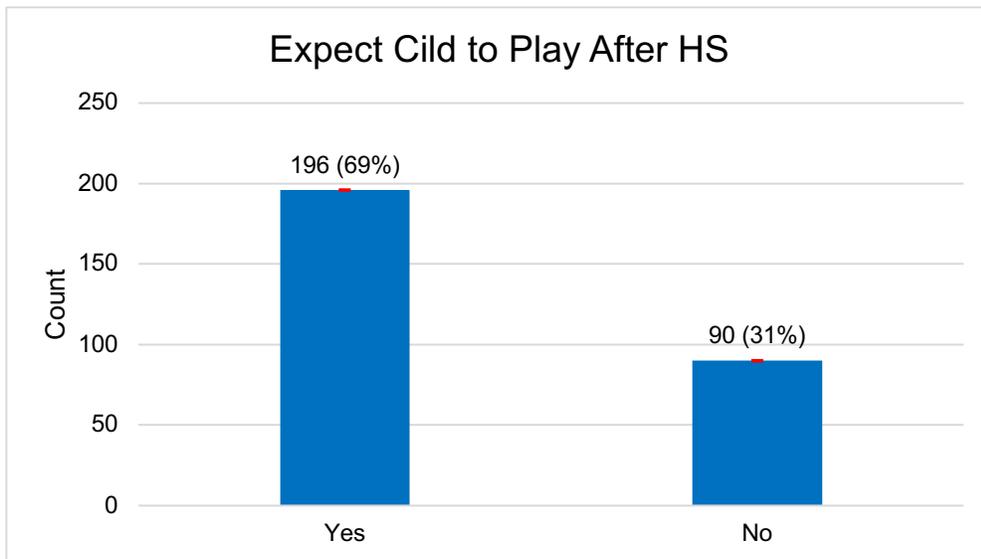
*Parent's Primary Motivation for Club Soccer*



*Note.* Count totals for the third item related to parental motivation is shown.

**FIGURE 20**

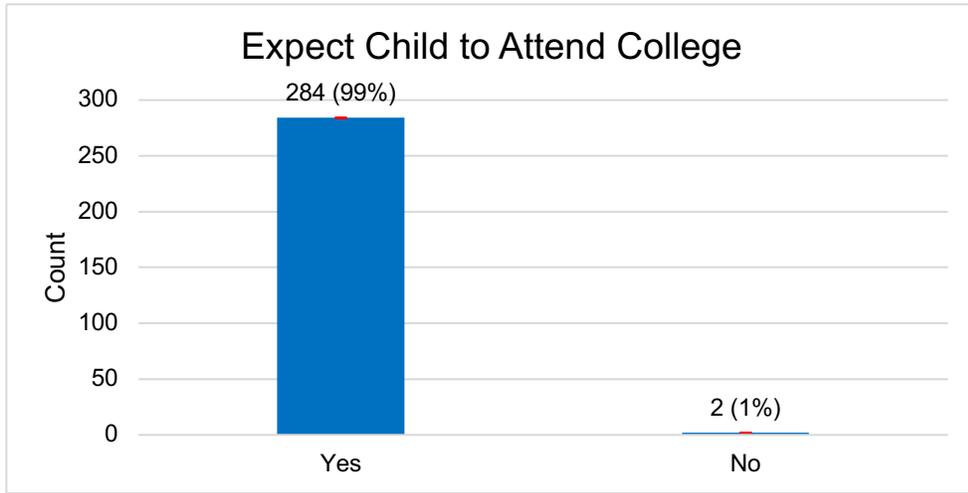
*Expect Son/Daughter to Play Soccer After HS*



*Note.* Count totals for the fourth item related to parental motivation is shown.

**FIGURE 21**

*Expect Son/Daughter to Attend College*



*Note.* Count totals for the fifth item related to parental motivation is shown.

**APPENDIX A**  
**LETTER TO SOCCER CLUBS REQUESTING PERMISSION**

August 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

As a graduate student in the Department of Sports Management at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Master of Science in Sports Management degree. The title of my research project is “Pay-to-Play: The Development of Elite Athletes” and the research seeks to closely examine the youth sport experience in the United States and the pathway to elite levels of competition in American sport. The specific purpose of the study is to analyze the “pay-to-play” model in youth club soccer.

I am writing to request your permission to utilize your **parent contact directory to recruit participants for my research**. The researcher further requests that the soccer club distribute a pre-written email from the researcher inviting parent participation in this study. Participants will be asked to navigate to and complete a brief, anonymous online survey through Qualtrics. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to with a signed copy of the pre-filled “Permission Letter” which has been attached.

Sincerely,

Alec Golini  
Graduate Student, Liberty University

**APPENDIX B  
RETURN LETTER GRANTING PERMISSION**

August 2020

President  
Soccer Club

Dear Researcher:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled “Pay-to-Play: The Development of Elite Athletes”, we have decided to grant you permission to contact members of the soccer club by email to request participation in the research study. The soccer club will facilitate this process by distributing a pre-written email from the researcher which describes the research study, provides a link to access the survey, and invites club members to participate in the research.

**Check the following boxes:**

- The soccer club will distribute a pre-written email from the researcher inviting parent participation in this research study.
- We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

*(Sign Above)*

President  
Soccer Club

**APPENDIX C**  
**IRB APPROVAL LETTER**

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 25, 2020

Alec Golini  
Kevin Heisey

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-73 Pay-to-Play: The Development of Elite Athletes

Dear Alec Golini, Kevin Heisey:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b): Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration. Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,  
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP  
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research  
Research Ethics Office

**APPENDIX D**  
**RECRUITMENT LETTER**

October 2020

Dear Recipient:

As a graduate student in the Department of Sports Management at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Master of Science in Sports Management degree. The purpose of my research is to closely examine the youth sport experience in the United States and the pathway to elite levels of competition in American soccer. **I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.**

Participants must be a parent/guardian with a son/daughter, aged ten (10) years or older, who participates in youth club soccer. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a brief, **anonymous** online survey detailing your son or daughter's participation in youth soccer and pertinent family information. The estimated time requirement for completion of this survey is no more than fifteen (15) minutes. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

In order to participate, **[PLEASE CLICK HERE](#)** to complete the online survey.

A consent document is provided as the first page of the online survey. The consent document contains additional information about the research. After you have read the consent form, please click the link to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Thank you in advance for your time and assistance. It is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Alec Golini  
Graduate Student  
Liberty University

**APPENDIX E**  
**FOLLOW-UP RECRUITMENT LETTER**

October 26, 2020

Dear Recipient:

As a graduate student in the Department of Sports Management at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Master of Science in Sports Management degree. Two weeks ago, an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in the research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to complete the brief, online survey if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is **November 2nd, 2020**.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief, **anonymous** online survey detailing your son or daughter's participation in youth soccer and pertinent family information. The estimated time requirement for completion of this survey is no more than fifteen (15) minutes. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, **[PLEASE CLICK HERE](#)** to complete the brief, online survey.

A consent document is provided as the first page you will see after clicking on the survey link. The informed consent document contains additional information about my research. Please click on the survey link at the end of the informed consent document to indicate that you have read it and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

Alec Golini  
Graduate Student  
Liberty University

**APPENDIX F**  
**CONSENT FORM**  
**Consent**

**Title of the Project:** Pay-to-Play: The Development of Elite Athletes

**Principal Investigator:** Alec Golini, Liberty University

**Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a parent/guardian with a daughter or son, aged ten (10) years or older, who participates in youth club soccer. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

**What is the study about and why is it being done?**

The sport experience in the United States, and the pathway to elite levels in sport, are impacted by a multitude of factors. The specific purpose of the study is to examine the “pay-to-play” model in youth club soccer through the lens of parental motivation for their son or daughter’s participation.

**What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- (1) Complete a brief, **anonymous** online survey detailing your son or daughter’s participation in youth soccer and pertinent family information. The estimated time requirement for completion of this survey is no more than fifteen (15) minutes.

**How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include further analysis of the “pay-to-play” model in American youth sports and its direct or indirect influence on organizational policies or practices.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Please note the following:

- Participant responses to the survey will be **anonymous**.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the soccer club to which your daughter or son is affiliated. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study Alec Golini. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at . You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Kevin Heisey, at .

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)

**Your Consent**

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher/study team using the information provided above.

**APPENDIX G  
QUALTRICS WEB-BASED SURVEY**

**Q1 Participants are asked to open and read the consent form below prior to beginning this survey.**

**CLICK BELOW TO VIEW THE CONSENT FORM  
Consent Form - Research Study**

*By selecting “I consent”, I agree to participate in the study.*

- I consent (1)**
- I do not consent (2)**

End of Block: Consent Form

Start of Block: Demographic Information

**Q2 Gender:**

- Male (1)**
- Female (2)**

**Q3 Age:**

- 25-30 (1)**
- 31-35 (2)**
- 36-40 (3)**
- 41-45 (4)**
- 46-50 (5)**
- 51-55 (6)**
- 56-60 (7)**
- 61-65 (8)**

**Q4 Race/Ethnicity:**

- Asian or Pacific Islander (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- Hispanic or Latinx (3)
- Native American or Alaskan Native (4)
- White or Caucasian (5)
- Other: Please specify (6) \_\_\_\_\_

**Q5 What is your country of citizenship or nationality?**

- United States (1)
- Other: Please specify (2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Q6 What is your current occupation?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Q7 What is your approximate household income?**

- 0-50,000 USD (\$) (1)
- 50,001-100,000 USD (\$) (2)
- 100,001-200,000 USD (\$) (3)
- Greater than 200,000 USD (\$) (4)

**Q8 What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?**

- High School/GED or LESS (1)
- Associate's Degree (2)
- Bachelor's Degree (3)
- Graduate or Professional Degree (4)

End of Block: Demographic Information

Start of Block: Survey Questions

**Q9 Is your son or daughter aged ten (10) or older?**

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

**Q10 What is your son or daughter's age?**

- 10-12 (1)
- 13-15 (2)
- 16-18 (3)

**Q11 On a scale of 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely), how important is your son or daughter's current club team to their future success in soccer?**

- Extremely important (1)
- Very important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Slightly important (4)
- Not at all important (5)

**Q12 Is your son or daughter on the top-level team for their age group?**

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

**Q13 What is the approximate cost of membership for your son or daughter's club team for ONE YEAR? (Does NOT include other fees)**

- 0-500 USD (\$) (1)
- 501-1,000 USD (\$) (2)
- 1,001-2,000 USD (\$) (3)
- Greater than 2,000 USD (\$) (4)

**Q14 What OTHER expenses are you required to pay for your child's participation in soccer? (Includes travel fees, uniform fees, equipment, clothing, etc.) Select all that apply.**

- Travel fees (gas/tolls, food, lodging, flights) (1)
  - Uniform fees (2)
  - Equipment fees (Cleats, etc.) (3)
  - Clothing (Active wear, etc.) (4)
  - Donations/Fundraiser Contributions (5)
  - Other: Please specify (6)
- 

**Q15 What is the approximate cost of ALL OTHER EXPENSES from the previous question per year?**

- 0-500 USD (\$) (1)
- 501-1,000 USD (\$) (2)
- 1,001-2,000 USD (\$) (3)
- Greater than 2,000 USD (\$) (4)

**Q16 What is the average amount of hours per week that you/your family spend traveling for soccer (includes traveling to practice, games, tournaments, etc.)?**

- Less than 1 hour (1)
- 1-3 hours (2)
- 4-5 hours (3)
- Greater than 5 hours (4)

**Q17 Does your son/daughter receive one-on-one, individualized, or small group personal training outside of the club?**

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

**Q18 If YES, what is the cost associated with this training per session (per person)?**

- 0-50 USD (\$) (1)
- 51-100 (\$) (2)
- Greater than 100 USD (\$) (3)

**Q19 If YES, what are the motivating factors for this individualized/personal training? (Select all that apply)**

- Physical Activity (1)
  - Personalized Coaching (2)
  - Skill development/enhancement (3)
  - Mentorship (4)
  - Remain competitive with peers (5)
  - Other: Please specify (6)
- 

**Q20 Has your son or daughter attended soccer camps or clinics?**

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

**Q21 If YES, what is the average cost of a camp/clinic?**

- 0-100 USD (\$) (1)
- 101-200 USD (\$) (2)
- 201-300 USD (\$) (3)
- Greater than 300 USD (\$) (4)

**Q22 If YES, what are the motivating factors for attending these camps/clinics? (Select all that apply)**

- Physical Activity (1)
  - Personalized Coaching (2)
  - Skill development/enhancement (3)
  - Mentorship (4)
  - Remain competitive with peers (5)
  - Other: Please specify (6)
- 

**Q23 What is the primary motivation for your child's participation in elite-level club soccer?**

- To be active/exercise (1)
- To secure a roster spot on a college soccer team (2)
- To obtain a scholarship on college soccer team (3)
- To play professionally (4)
- Other: please specify (5) \_\_\_\_\_

**Q24 Do you expect for your son or daughter to play soccer after high school?**

Yes (1)

No (2)

**Q25 Do you expect your son or daughter to attend college?**

Yes (1)

No (2)