

## Chapter 4

### **The South Australian women's football community and system**

This chapter sets the context in which women's football players pursue their technical development in South Australia. It will discuss the ideas of women's football communities and systems, and will define them in the framework of women's football in South Australia. Development is intended as the ability of players to 'take the next step' to the above level, and refers in particular to 'achievement' women's football. Women's football has been one of the fastest growing sports in Australia and worldwide in the last decade (Football Federation Australia, 2005, 2008b), and has evolved into a global phenomenon beyond differences of class, culture, nation and ethnicity (Hong, 2003). In South Australia, it was established in the Adelaide region in the 1970s, and since then it has grown dramatically both in its magnitude, geographical distribution, and associated purposes, largely mirroring the growth of the sport at the national and international scales (Rosso, 2009a). Women's football in South Australia is currently played in two different regions (Adelaide and Mount Gambier) and its outcomes range from pure recreation to the production of international athletes for competitions such as the World Cup and the Olympic Games. Following the conceptualisation of Bale (2003), women's football in South Australia has evolved from a 'fun and play' and a 'fitness and recreation' sport into its 'achievement' phase (Rosso, 2008, 2009a). Whilst 'fun and play' and 'fitness and recreation' sports are more commonly associated with values of recreation, physical activity and participation, 'achievement sports' aim at the production of results (Bale, 2003).

To appreciate the context of women's football, it is useful to think about the sporting region South Australia as a dynamic 'region of interest and involvement' (Bale, 2003), where the levels at which the sport is played and the systems in which it is organised overlap with the spaces in which the various expression of the sport occur. Just as for regional development purposes, regions can be conceptualised in terms of dynamic interests and issues that encourage local actors to work together (Beer et al., 2003, p. 55), we can think of South Australia as a dynamic sporting region, where

different levels, systems, aims and purposes co-exist to form the wider women's football community. 'Fitness and recreation' and 'achievement' women's football, for example, often occur in the same spaces and clubs, and share the same sporting institutions. In terms of players' development furthermore, often the phases of the sport are observable within a single player's career. Careers typically evolve from informal beginning ('fun and play') to playing at school and at junior level with a club ('fitness and recreation'), and to playing at state level and Premier League club level ('achievement') (Fig. 1.2). The levels at which women's football is played reflect the aims and purposes of the people involved and the technical proficiency of the players and coaches. For example, levels may be informal or formal, school, club or state, junior or senior levels, social or 'achievement' and so on. The idea of sport systems (Rosso, 2008, 2009a) refers to the structures in which women's football is organised, and does not draw on general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Women's football systems include the school system, the club system and the state system. The idea of women's football communities refers instead to the people involved with the sport and their sense of belonging together, and draws on the work on football communities of Andrews (1998, 1999) and Nadel (1998). The South Australian women's football community encompasses all the people who are involved with the sport at all its levels.

#### **4.1 The South Australian women's football community**

Women's football in South Australia exists within a community context. This not only relates to the framework of connections between sports and their local community dimension (Nadel, 1998), but also to the general community approach of FFSA (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.) that aims to bring together all football enthusiasts in the state. In this sense, football enthusiasts are seen as a sort of community within the community, united by their common sporting passion, and women's football people are no exception.

As Wild (1981) shows, it is indeed complicated to agree on the meaning of the term 'community', for which there are multiple definitions. In his work on Melbourne's 'football communities', Andrews (1998) maintains that communities are typically bound together by one or more factors comprising geographical locale, local social

system, sense of identity, sense of belonging, and ideology. Communities and their modes of behaviour are essentially defined by the common sets of interests, values and attitudes of their members, and by their sense of belonging together (Wild, 1981, in Nadel 1998).

Connections between sports and communities are often observable through sporting clubs. Examples of evident links between football clubs and the communities in which they exist can be found throughout the world. In several instances, the overlap between the identities (e.g. historical, ethnic, social) of particular communities and the football clubs that 'represent' them is so obvious that it becomes difficult to establish to what extent clubs draw upon the identity of communities and communities use the visibility of sporting clubs to reinforce their own identities. Some celebrated cases include the 'catholic Irishness' of Glasgow Celtic F.C. (Boyle, 2004; Bradley, 2006; Foer, 2004); the 'southern identity' of Portsmouth F.C. (Phelps, 2001); the 'Catalan nationalism' of F.C. Barcelona (Foer, 2004; Shobe, 2008); and the 'ethnic spirit' of Australian football clubs (Brabazon, 2000; Danforth, 2001; P. A. Mosley et al., 1997; P. A. Mosley & Murray, 1994).

Women's football clubs in South Australia, however, do not relate to local communities like many mainstream sport clubs around the world. The nature of relationships between South Australian women's football and local communities transcends the simple association between sporting clubs and their local reality (Andrews, 1998; Nadel, 1998). Clubs are not typically embedded in their local spatial dimensions (Andrews, 1999). They do not have exclusive associations with local ethnic communities (Charles, 1994; La Fiamma, 1963), or specific social or historical attachments (Nadel, 1998). The links between women's football clubs and their local communities tend to depend more on the personal networks of club members than on actual community involvement of clubs (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.; Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.). Generally, clubs lack deep historical roots within the local communities (women's football is a relatively young phenomenon). They also lack significant community visibility, partly because of relative low membership levels and partly because women's football remains a minority sport. The gendered nature of the sport, in this sense, is not deemed to favour the value that the wider community places on women's football (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). Sport tends to

remain a male-dominated world (Hong & Mangan, 2003b; Sleaf, 1998; Taylor & Toohey, 1997; Theberge, 2000) and the relationship between the general community and women's football clubs in South Australia is no different, with local clubs being often overlooked by the wider public.

Women's football people across the state, nonetheless, share a distinct 'sense of community'. Both in Adelaide and in Mount Gambier, women's football clubs exist within well-defined sporting communities and derive their identity from the association with women's football itself rather than from connections with their local realities. The unifying factor that creates the sense of belonging together (Nadel, 1998) is therefore not a feature of the local communities transposed to the sporting milieu, but the very involvement with the sport. Nadel (1998) suggests that the feeling of belonging together is perhaps the most important feature of communities. In this light, all clubs, groups, squads, networks whose members share a sense of identity based on the feeling of belonging together can be considered as communities. Notably, these sporting communities are not mutually exclusive, and often they overlap or co-exist within one another.

#### **4.1.1 The imagined women's football community**

In terms of the South Australian women's football community, another important concept is the idea of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983; Lechner, 2007), which Nadel (1998) used to define 'football communities' in the Australian Football League. Anderson (1983) states that "*all communities [...] are imagined*", as they are based on the reproduction of group self-awareness, often developed on myths and culture that may have no real historical foundations. In this light, women's football people in South Australia can be seen to be an imagined sporting community. The women's football community exists within the wider South Australian football community, which is an imagined sporting community in its own right. The wider South Australian football community is made up by people who are generally involved in or share a common passion for football and it is currently epitomised by Adelaide United F.C., the Adelaide-based team that represents South Australia in the men's national A-League. Adelaide United F.C. was founded in 2005 as 'the people's team' (Adelaide United F.C., 2008a) to unite South Australian football followers, historically divided by loyalty to clubs with marked ethnic attachments

(Charles, 1994), under one banner and grant the local team sufficient support to compete nationally. The team has been, from the start, a community-building exercise (Chaskin et al., 2006; Jarvie, 2006b). The inclusive approach of Adelaide United and FFSA (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.) is reflected by the numerous initiatives to establish connections between the club and the various South Australian football dimensions, and to create a sense of community among the local football people (Adelaide United F.C., 2008b). In the framework of the wider South Australian imagined football community there are numerous other football communities, defined differently according to the historical, social, geographical, sexual, gendered, or imagined (or other) factors that create the sense of belonging described by Wild (1981).

The South Australian women's football community is an imagined community the members of which are united by the passion for football, a commitment to it beyond gender barriers, and their active involvement in women's football. While the general football community may include members who simply follow the sport (without being personally involved in any way), the women's football people typically fulfil an active role in their community, as players, coaches, club or association officials, parents, relatives or friends. The women's football community is a relatively small and close-knit sporting community. While gender (in the case of players) or particular attachments to clubs may act as further factors of identity for some, an aspect that should not be overlooked refers to the self-awareness of the women's football community in relation to the men's football community. Although the gender rhetoric of women's sexual liberation through football (Hong & Mangan, 2003b) is not the constituent cultural element of the local women's football community, the recurrent general perception of football as a men's sport (Hong & Mangan, 2003b; Rosso, 2006) and the relegation of women's football to its minority status could act as a re-enforcing mechanism for the perpetuation of self-perceptions associated with subordination and domination. This process may ultimately favour the creation of tighter bonds across the community's relatively few members.

Similar examples along this line include the 'sense of community' that the Glasgow Celtic F.C. and the Adelaide City S.C. fans have developed also due to perceived generalised hostility towards and denigration of their clubs. One of the reasons that

favoured the development of strong bonds among the community of Glasgow Celtic F.C. fans (the traditional 'catholic' club of Glasgow founded by Irish immigrants), one of the most passionate in world football, was the hatred historically displayed by the other Glasgow football community, the protestant Rangers F.C. (Bradley, 2006; Foer, 2004). In Australia, the Adelaide City S.C. fans are historically largely Italian immigrants (Charles, 1994), and the discrimination that they and their club suffered during the years of mass-migration contributed to form a solid supportive community around the club (Rosso, 2007). It is fair to assume that both Celtic F.C. and Adelaide City S.C. do not suffer nowadays from the same discriminations that underpin the self-awareness at the base of their imagined communities (Anderson, 1983). However, those feelings have become part of their communities' culture and still bond their supporters. In the South Australian women's football community there are no feelings of discrimination or oppression as strong as those that characterise the Celtic F.C. community or the ethnic pride of other Australian football realities. However, the traditional association between football and masculinity (Hughson, 2000) and the general marginality of the women's game compared to its male counterpart may contribute to create a sense of camaraderie among women's football people that favours the maintenance of community identity.

#### **4.1.2 The virtual women's football community**

The sense of identity of the South Australian women's football community is maintained and reinforced also through the use of cyberspace. In particular, women's football people interact by means of computer-supported social networks including chat rooms and online forums hosted by an Adelaide-based website ([www.footballnews.com.au](http://www.footballnews.com.au)) that emphasises the underlying sense of community that exists among local football enthusiasts (FootballNews, 2008c). The website was established in 1998 as an experiment to develop online infrastructure for database-driven websites, but it soon developed into a very popular virtual location where local football people maintain and create social relationships and generally discuss local football issues (FootballNews, 2008a). Despite its South Australian focus and its lack of affiliation with any official institution, it is currently one of the top five football websites in Australia for number of visitors, with around 40 million hits a year (FootballNews, 2008a). The website is now explicitly devoted to the promotion of the local game and to the building of a virtual community (Koh & Kim, 2003;

Smith & Kollock, 1999) of local football enthusiasts. While there is debate on the definition of virtual communities (Porter, 2006), the community-building approach of the FootballNews phenomenon is evident in its mission statement to “*foster understanding and break down the traditional barriers in the football community that have held back the sport in Australia*” (FootballNews, 2008a). The barriers mentioned here are the traditional divisions typical of Australian ethnic football clubs (Danforth, 2001), but this general statement can also apply to other barriers, for example the ones posed by gender (Caudwell, 2004; Kay, 2003; Rosso, 2009a). The sets of computer-supported social networks created among South Australian football fans became the base for a virtual football community that, through the maintenance of strong and weak ties, may provide resources (social capital) such as information and support to its members (Wellman et al., 1996).

The women’s football virtual community exists within the wider football virtual community and it has its own dedicated women’s online forum (FootballNews, 2008b). Such a community presents several of the characteristics outlined in the typology of virtual communities developed by Dubé et al. (2006). It is a permanent, unrecognised, maturing virtual community, bringing together individuals across the whole Adelaide metropolitan area and potentially even the Mount Gambier region (Dubé et al., 2006). Its membership is open, voluntary, and the topic’s relevance to members is seemingly high (Dubé et al., 2006). It is hard to quantify the size of the community, but there is a significant discrepancy between its active and non-active members. Only a small number of members write comments on the forum on a regular basis, however the number of views of each topic suggests that a wide audience is somehow connected with the virtual community (FootballNews, 2008b). While typically topics are viewed 50 to 500 times, a recent topic that resulted particularly interesting has received over 3,000 hits (FootballNews, 2008b), which is by far more than the total number of South Australian women’s football players (Rosso, 2006).

While the virtual community can contribute to strengthen the overall sense of belonging of its members with the women’s football community, its value in the creation of social capital for the development of players is debateable. Virtual communities are deemed to foster social capital accumulation and community

engagement, particularly when they develop around physical communities and when they encourage additional community interests, such as exchange of information, education and participation in decision-making (Blanchard & Horan, 1998). The success of virtual communities may depend also on hypotheses based on social network theory (Scott, 2000), such as the ability of members to communicate and interact that derives from the networks' structure (Hinds & Lee, 2008). In this light, the women's football virtual community may offer some interesting implications in terms of increased levels of support that may become available to some of its active members. Similarly, virtual social networks may facilitate the flow of information among both the active and non-active members. On the other hand, freely accessible online personal comments may foster insecurity, lower levels of self-confidence and general negativity in vulnerable individuals. Membership in the virtual community may also favour the creation of close-knit cliques (Scott, 2000) that develop their own norms of trust and reinforce positions within the women's football community that may ultimately contribute to the inclusion or exclusion of other members. While this thesis does not have a particular focus on the women's football virtual community, and its ability to influence the development of players appears overall limited, its potential to create social capital among a restricted number of members of the general women's football community must be acknowledged.

#### **4.1.3 Factors of inclusion and exclusion**

In both the Adelaide and Mount Gambier regions, women's football is developing very rapidly. The approaches of the local governing institutions (SAWSA and SEWFA) reflect a philosophy of inclusion by promoting the sport to the widest possible pool of potential participants (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.; Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). This is in line with the community-approach of both FFSA and FFA. The first promotes Adelaide United as a sort of 'home for all' in South Australia (Adelaide United F.C., 2008b), and the second has tried to make the sport mainstream since the 1990s, opposing exclusivity and micro-identity in favour of a franchise-styled National League dominated by whole-city clubs with marked 'community flavours' (Danforth, 2001; Football Federation Australia, 2008a).

While there are no obvious factors of exclusion from women's football in South Australia, some elements of exclusivity should be considered, especially in relation



to the club level. Given that players normally engage with the state level due to technical abilities and personal resources accumulated as club players, the extent to which the club level guarantees a wide foundation of inclusion is clearly important. Connections between clubs and communities (both local communities and football communities) can contribute to the mobilisation of players from the school and informal levels to the club and then the state levels. Social capital arising from links between clubs and communities can provide both clubs and players with additional resources that can overcome barriers posed by factors of exclusion and generally contribute to a positive environment for the development of players. It can, for example, provide the necessary resources to players who struggle reaching playing venues (Pedlar, 2007, pers. comm.), or endow clubs with the necessary community contacts (e.g. local schools) to attract players (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.; Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.). By the same token, club-community relationships could bring negative connotations to clubs associated with unpopular community groups, or pose burdens on clubs strongly tied with (and therefore somewhat controlled by) particular community actors (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.).

The club level of South Australian women's football is the most accessible formal level at which local players can engage with the sport. While the school and the state levels carry components of exclusivity based on enrolment in schools, age and playing abilities, club women's football is theoretically accessible to all (Rosso, 2006). Social exclusion from women's football clubs, however, could take several forms. The main factors of exclusion are ethnic, sexual, cultural, and socio-economic factors.

#### *4.1.3.1 Ethnic, cultural and sexual factors*

Among common factors of social exclusion from sport participation at the club level, there are cultural, ethnic, sexual, and socio-economic factors (Back et al., 2001a; Collins & Kay, 2003; Wagg, 2004b). In Australia, the most recurrent form of exclusion in football is ethnic-based (Danforth, 2001; Hallinan & Krotee, 1993; Mosley, 1994; O'Hara, 1994; Rosso, 2007). In South Australia, although cultural and ethnic issues deserve further investigation, the reality of women's football does not seem to reflect the reproduction of social exclusion based on race or ethnicity. Despite the reputation of some clubs as particularly close to specific ethnic

communities, South Australian women's football seems to be relatively detached from the ethnic nature that has pervaded men's football throughout Australia for decades (Charles, 1994; Evans, 1997; Jones & Moore, 1994; Kennedy & Kennedy, 2007; Mosley, 1994; Mosley et al., 1997; O'Hara, 1994; Rosso, 2007; Vamplew, 1994). While it is undisputable that particular ethnic groups are more strongly represented throughout the local women's football community, evidence gathered in both Adelaide and Mount Gambier indicates that clubs typically welcome players and members of diverse ethnicities and cultures (Inglis, 2007, pers. comm.; Inglis, 2007, pers. comm.; Rosso, 2007; Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.). Many of the current clubs were formed as women's sections of ethnic based men's clubs and may still preserve links with ethnic communities around Adelaide (Rosso, 2007). However, women's football clubs do not tend to promote themselves as ethnically exclusive. An inclusive approach facilitates the ability of clubs to gain players on one hand, and financial resources on the other, considering that membership fees often represent the most important financial resources of clubs (Rosso, 2007).

Some would argue that sexuality is a determinant of exclusivity or exclusion within the Adelaide women's football community (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.). While interviews suggest that this is not an issue at all in Mount Gambier, some Adelaide clubs share a reputation of being 'lesbian clubs' (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.). However, as in the instance of clubs that may be labelled as 'ethnic', evidence suggests that 'lesbian clubs' are more a construction of reputation rather than a reality. Although within the local women's football community it is known that particular clubs display greater or lesser shades of diverse sexualities, interviewees indicate that exclusion from Adelaide women's football clubs due to sexual preferences is of little or no concern (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.; Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.). This is particularly true for those clubs that are actively involved in the production of high-quality players and run junior systems (i.e. 'achievement' clubs).

Cultural factors of exclusion depend normally on the culture of certain clubs that show hostility towards particular population groups or on the culture of the target population, which does not feel encouraged to participate or perceives negative connotations with its involvement. In South Australia, women's football clubs are generally not in favour of specific population groups. Cultural hatred (Hughson,

2000) based on nationality, race, or religion, for example, is not observable in the local women's football community. Communities culturally close to football (like European communities, for instance) are likely to be more heavily represented among members of South Australian women's football clubs than other communities with different sporting cultures. In this sense, in areas with high representations of migrant groups culturally close to football there will be more people prone to engage with women's football than in areas with little 'football culture' (Rosso, 2006; Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.). No evidence suggests that women's football clubs may discourage anyone from playing or being involved with the sport. On the other hand, there is a lack of obvious initiatives to actively encourage 'culturally disadvantaged' groups to take part in the sport. Clubs do not give the impression to consider particularly important the involvement of new sectors of the population with the game, such as under-represented migrant groups (Asians and Africans in particular) or women of non-English speaking background who are almost absent from Australian sports (Taylor & Toohey, 1997). In this light, South Australian women's football does not strive to provide opportunities to overcome the multiple disadvantage faced by women from non-English speaking backgrounds in Australia, who suffer from language difficulties, isolation and inadequate policies (Taylor & Toohey, 1997). Similarly, it does not provide particular relief for women challenged with the cultural burden of gender role that may undermine their participation in sport proper of particular cultures (Hong & Mangan, 2003b).

There is no evidence indicating that cultural, ethnic, and sexual determinants of exclusion affect the ability of the South Australian women's football system to produce high-quality players at the club level. These forms of exclusion, however, may pertain to small clubs dominated by adult membership that focus mainly on social aggregation instead of sporting results. Such clubs – that are, to use Bale's (2003) terminology, 'fitness and recreation' clubs rather than 'achievement' clubs – may be more prone to embody exclusive attitudes towards sexuality or ethnicity. In particular, small, very homogeneous clubs that use their identities (e.g. social, sexual, ethnic, or cultural) as distinctive elements of aggregation and perceive their character to be at risk of discrimination or denigration may strengthen their individual character to the point of exclusive identification. Exclusive elements of the identity of such clubs may not even represent the clubs as wholes, but only a part of their

members. Strong points of view advocated by a determined minority, however, may be enough to discourage the participation of players who are perceived – or perceive themselves – as ‘different’. Examples of such processes were especially common in men’s football until the 1980s (Mosley et al., 1997), but there is no indication that they relate to any of the large women’s football clubs in South Australia, the ones engaged with the ‘achievement phase’ (Bale, 2003) of the sport, or to the women’s football community as a whole.

Women’s football seems to suffer less than its male counterpart from elements of social exclusion. Certainly, the scarce literature on the topic fails to highlight major concerns in this sense, while important contributions exist on social exclusion and men’s football (Back et al., 2001a; Wagg, 2004b). A reason for this could be that women’s football represents already a reaction to gender-based exclusion from the sport, and in most countries women’s football institutions struggle for rights and recognition (Hong & Mangan, 2003b; Mangan, 2003). Another reason could be that women’s football involves limited numbers of participants; in Adelaide, for example there were only just over 1,000 women’s football players in 2006 (Rosso, 2006) and in Mount Gambier there were only about 140 in 2007 (Dickins, 2007, pers. comm.). Excluding potential members would pose serious strain on the very viability of many clubs, especially considering the fact that one of the prime determinants of club choice is the presence of friends (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). An exclusive approach would imply the risk to become unattractive to wide groups of players in the small local women’s football community, where often players of different clubs share common acquaintances and social networks (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). Another more region-specific factor lies with the historical legacy of the period in which women’s football grew dramatically and became an ‘achievement sport’ in Adelaide (Rosso, 2006, 2009b). Women’s football in Adelaide experienced its greatest growth during the 1990s (Harlow, 2003a; Rosso, 2010a), when the exclusivity of men’s clubs was being challenged by the outcomes of the Report to Australian Soccer Federation on Structure and Organisation of Australian Soccer (Bradley report) of 1992, recommending the abolition of the ethnic identification of major Australian football clubs (Danforth, 2001). The sport, therefore, developed in a cultural environment that promoted inclusion (at least ethnic) as opposed to exclusion.

#### *4.1.3.2 Socio-economic factors*

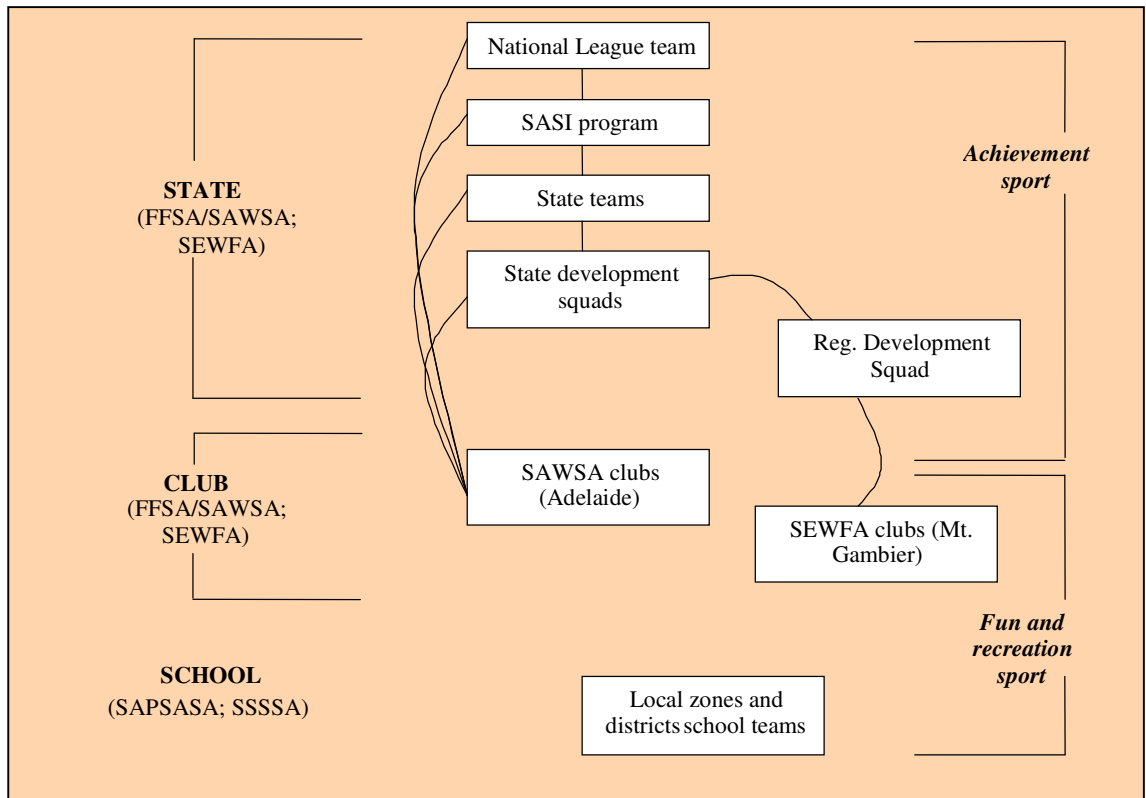
Socio-economic factors are arguably the most important ones in relation to exclusion from women's football in South Australia. Typically, club members are required to pay annual fees to sustain the clubs. In some instances, especially for high-profile players at the Premier League level, clubs may waive fees or even reimburse some expenses, but normally, to be part of a women's football club one needs to pay. In 2008, for example, Adelaide City Women's Football Club expected its members to pay club fees in excess of 300 dollars on top of SAWSA fees of around 100 dollars (Adelaide City Women's Football Club, 2007). This situation is even more striking if we consider that the equivalent level of men's football in South Australia is semi-professional, and players who play at the highest local level normally receive some form of payment from their clubs. While SAWSA makes available some forms of economic assistance for the worst-off players (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.), the lack of disposable income can be a serious barrier to participation in club women's football for lower socio-economic households. The lack of financial resources is often emphasised by distance from clubs (Rosso, 2008). While clubs exist throughout the Adelaide and the Mount Gambier regions, a degree of locational disadvantage (Forster, 2004) may affect the ability of worse-off households in certain areas to engage with the sport. This is especially true for the southern and outer sub-regions and the Mount Gambier region, where a lower concentration of clubs may force participants to travel long distances to reach their women's football clubs. Players or aspiring players from lower socio-economic households in disadvantaged locations in terms of presence of women's football clubs may experience hardship in making and maintaining connections with local clubs. This locational disadvantage is even greater if we consider the distribution of clubs that consistently contribute to the production of state-level players (Rosso, 2008). In particular, certain socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Adelaide's outer northern and southern suburbs are at risk of exclusion from elite women's football, given that both the state facilities and the clubs that have been most consistent in the production of state players tend to be located in the central area of metropolitan Adelaide (Rosso, 2008). Socio-economic disadvantage combined with the effect of distance from women's football clubs appears to be the most important risk of exclusion.

## 4.2 The South Australian women's football system

Women's football in South Australia is played at school, club and state levels. The school level is generally perceived as the first formal step in the engagement with the sport. It introduces young players to formal teams and competitions, and often precedes the commitment of players with formal clubs. Despite its growing popularity in South Australia (Rosso, 2008), girls' football at both primary and secondary school level is played only for educational, fitness and recreational purposes. At the club level, on the other hand, players may become engaged with the 'achievement' character (Bale, 2003) of women's football. Women's football clubs have both recreational and 'achievement' purposes, often observable within the same clubs. Certain clubs are purely recreational, while others are actively involved with the production of players, the defining characteristic of 'achievement' women's football (Rosso, 2008, 2009a). While the recreational character of club women's football is observable throughout the junior and the lower senior competitions, its 'achievement' side refers to those players who become involved with state and SASI squads, and often play in the SAWSA Premier League (South Australia's top club competition). The state level represents instead the true 'achievement' level of women's football. It comprises state teams, SASI squads and the National League team. It is explicitly aimed towards the production of athletes who may develop into national players.

The 'achievement' character of South Australian women's football does not preclude its 'fun and play' (informal) and 'fitness and recreation' (formal – school and club) expressions (Bale, 2003). The 'achievement' connotation is instead like a new layer on top of the pre-existing women's football reality. The overlapping purposes reflected by the different levels of women's football are also a characteristic of the ways in which these levels are functionally organised. The organisation of each level of the sport into functional structures constitutes the women's football systems (Rosso, 2009a). A system is intended as the milieu made up by people, clubs, organisations, and relative aims and purposes that characterise the sport at any given level and in any given region. South Australian women's football systems and sub-systems include school system, club system and state system. Figure 4.1 shows the institutional networks existing between the three South Australian women's football

systems.



**Figure 4.1: South Australian women’s football systems and institutional connections**

Systems are associated with their locale and their governing institutions. The associations with their institutions (i.e. SAWSA and SEWFA) are then reflected by the competitions that characterise the systems, for instance the SAWSA leagues (Adelaide) or the SEWFA leagues (Mount Gambier). While the state system encompasses the whole of South Australia, two distinct club systems exist in Adelaide and Mount Gambier (Fig. 4.1). The Adelaide and the Mount Gambier club systems do not overlap or interact in any way. They are associated with different locations and different institutions.

Club and state systems are connected by numerous institutional networks explicitly built to sustain a scenario in which clubs feed the state system, and ultimately the state system feeds the national system. Notably, numerous competitions and programs in club and state systems are managed by the same institutions (i.e. the local women’s football associations – SAWSA in Adelaide and SEWFA in Mount Gambier). Instead, there are no institutional connections linking the school system to

any other South Australian women's football system. This means that any connection between school football and other levels of the sport (e.g. clubs and schools) relies entirely on personal networks of school football actors.

This work does not draw on general systems theory (Johnston et al., 2000; Stein, 1974; von Bertalanffy, 1968). Despite the use of terminology such as systems, sub-systems and systems' outputs, this research refers to systems in a much simpler way. In this work systems are conceived mainly in terms of their interaction with other systems and sub-systems. There is no attempt to engage with theoretical perspectives on systems or to develop models of systems analysis (Martens & Allen, 1969). This work does not even seek to classify systems or to describe their form (Martens & Allen, 1969). It does, however, imply the idea of a parallel between concepts of systems and functionalism (Johnston et al., 2000, p. 818), in the sense that women's football systems are seen as having a purpose, being it recreation, socialisation or the production of players and results (Rosso, 2009a).

#### **4.2.1 The school system**

The South Australian women's football school system comprises all the primary and secondary schools that include women's football in their students' curricula in South Australia. While women's football is played at club level only in the Adelaide and the Mount Gambier regions, the school system includes also other country areas, such as Riverland, Port Pirie, Whyalla, and the Eyre Peninsula (South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, 2008a, 2008c). School football is the most geographically widespread level of women's football in South Australia. Various regions constitute sub-systems within the primary and the secondary school women's football systems, which belong to the general South Australian school sport system (South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, 2008).

Primary school girls' football is organised by the South Australian Primary School Amateur Sport Association (SAPSASA), while the governing institution of secondary school girls' football is the Secondary School Sport South Australia (SSSSA). These associations are not football or women's football specific, on the contrary they co-ordinate a great number of sporting activities throughout the state, generally sub-divided in zones and districts (South Australian Department of



Education and Children's Services, 2008a, 2008b). SAPSASA and SSSSA are part of the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, and members of School Sport Australia, the national school sport body (South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, 2008). Each year, SAPSASA and SSSSA organise school-based local tournaments throughout South Australia, and state carnivals for teams representing the school sport zones and districts (South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, 2008a, 2008c). In 2008, 29 district teams from metropolitan and country areas participated in the Primary School Soccer State Carnival held in early July (South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, 2008), while 96 school teams competed in the SSSSA Knockout Championship across the state (Secondary School Sport SA, 2008). SAPSASA and SSSSA run also girls' football state teams that participate each year in the national school tournaments (the SAPSASA State Team and the SA Schoolgirls). Secondary school players have also the opportunity to be selected in the Australian Schoolgirls, a national representative team that every year participates in one international school competition.

Despite the scale, the geographical distribution and the participation in national and international tournaments, school women's football remains overall a 'fitness and recreation' sport (Bale, 2003). For players, it often represents an excellent stepping-stone to establish their first football-related social networks (generally with other players) that may facilitate their involvement with local clubs. School football, however, fits within the much broader general education program conducted through South Australian schools (South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, 2008), and does not have a particular focus on the players' career pathway. Ms. Wendy Carter (2007, pers. comm.), executive officer of SAWSA, explained that the school system is somewhat of a parallel universe to women's football in South Australia, and that it does not share the purpose of SAWSA and the other women's football institutions to produce elite players. SAWSA tends to consider the school state teams (i.e. SAPSASA team and SA Schoolgirls) as second-tier teams, and does not confer particular values to the players' participation in such teams. The underlying difference in aim between SAWSA (and the club and state systems) and the school system is that "*with their program is not just about playing football. It's about all the other social aspects too. So when they appoint a coach, it doesn't seem*

*to be based on how good that coach is” (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.).*

The fundamental differences in aims and purposes between school football and ‘achievement’ football (state system and a part of Adelaide’s club system) limit the interconnections between the school and the other systems. In particular, there are no institutional links between the school and the club systems to facilitate the progression of the players’ careers (Fig. 4.1). The school system does not place any formal emphasis on school players joining clubs to develop their football skills. In terms of players’ development, the most important cross-system links here are provided by individuals (mostly players, but also coaches and other officials) who are involved at both the club and the school levels. Personal relationships between club members and school players may favour these players’ engagement with the club system (Neilson, 2007 pers. comm.), where players generally acquire the necessary technical resources to forward their career (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.).

In Mount Gambier, school football is comparatively more important than in Adelaide. This is mostly because the local club system is still in its early phases and does not reflect yet the characteristics of ‘achievement’ sports (Bale, 2003). The club system is still dominated by the values of fun and recreation typical of school sports, and playing in the local clubs does not necessarily imply playing at a higher level. The small size of the local women’s football community, moreover, favours clearer connections between clubs and schools, especially if we consider that most of the pool of the local club players is made up by local schoolgirls (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.). This favours a more straightforward flow of players between the few local schools and clubs.

#### **4.2.2 The club system**

Women’s football club systems exist in the Adelaide and the Mount Gambier regions. They refer to two different associations and are not connected to each other. They also differ in their main sporting values and their connectedness with the state system.

The Mount Gambier club system is governed by SEWFA (South East Women’s Football Association). In 2008, it comprised only eight clubs: six from Mount

Gambier, one from Millicent and one from Portland, across the Victorian border (Western Border Soccer Association, 2008). It is a very young system (women's football in the area was introduced only in 2002), simply organised into a junior and a senior division, and its structure is still rather primitive. As opposed to Adelaide, where women's football clubs are independent institutions affiliated to a football association (SAWSA), the south-eastern clubs are not standalone organisations and are all run by the SEWFA central committee (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.). The SEWFA 'clubs' are effectively only teams, all belonging to the same organisation, which is SEWFA itself. The SEWFA president explains:

*We manage and administer the SEWFA competition. We are in charge of looking after our [...] teams logistically and financially. [...] The teams don't have their individual committees, with presidents. The teams' make up can be a coach, an assistant coach, maybe a manager...and then the players. So, the competition is just run by us (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.).*

In Mount Gambier, club women's football is still strongly associated with recreational rather than 'achievement' values, and its connections with the state system are weak. The SEWFA club system contributes to the state output of high-quality players mainly by increasing interest in the sport in the Mount Gambier region. Its focus is still the growth of the local game in numerical terms, and the onus of high-quality players' production rests entirely with the local Regional Development Squad (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.), which represents the local state sub-system (see section 4.2.3).

The Adelaide club system, on the other hand, represents for most players the first opportunity to engage with 'achievement' women's football in South Australia. The system is governed by SAWSA (South Australian Women's Soccer Association) and, in 2008, it comprised 35 women's football clubs from the Adelaide metropolitan region (South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2008b). It is organised in several age groups and divisions, and has strong connections with the state system.

The Adelaide club system reflects both recreational and result-orientated connotations. Within it, certain clubs embrace the 'achievement' challenge of

players' production with a view to global women's football (Rosso, 2009a), while others cater for a more localised, recreation-orientated population (Rosso, 2008). It is difficult to provide approximations on how many clubs are 'achievement' orientated and *vice versa*, particularly because current SAWSA regulations allow the same clubs to field teams in both 'achievement'-orientated and essentially social leagues (South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2008a). 'Achievement' clubs typically have well-structured junior sectors, a senior team competing in the top league (SAWSA Premier League), and connections with the state system in terms of players or/and coaches involved with state teams (Rosso, 2009a). In 2008, fifteen SAWSA clubs did not have any junior team and only fielded teams in the social divisions (South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2008b). Nine clubs had junior teams, but did not have senior teams in the SAWSA Premier League, and so lacked the profile that contributes to attract good-quality individuals (especially players and coaches) so important in linking clubs with 'achievement' women's football (Rosso, 2009a). Nine clubs possessed 'achievement' characteristics such as well-structured junior sectors and Premier League teams. Only a minority of Adelaide clubs contributes consistent to the state's output of high-quality players (Rosso, 2008). The SAWSA club system, therefore, represents the link between the 'achievement' and the purely recreational aspects of South Australian women's football, embodied by the state level on one hand and the school and informal levels on the other.

The club systems supposedly accommodate players for the greatest proportion of their careers. While still eligible for the SAWSA state teams (seventeen years or younger), state players typically spend most of their football-dedicated time in a year playing and training with their own clubs. The age at which players join women's football clubs, moreover, is increasingly lower as it is reflected by the growing number of junior competitions (Rosso, 2006). In the last four years, Adelaide clubs have offered an Under 11 age group, and in 2009 there will be for the first time an Under 9 competition. In Mount Gambier, where the introduction of a junior league is only a very recent innovation, four clubs had junior squads (Under 14) in 2008 (Western Border Soccer Association, 2008) and SEWFA aims at increasing the proportion of young girls playing the sport in the region (Inglis, 2007, pers. comm.). Players who join women's football clubs in primary school and develop as senior

players are looking at approximately fifteen-year long careers at the club level. Typically, players engage with their clubs two to three days a week for eight to nine months a year. Even players who move into the state and the national systems often maintain their positions in the club system (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.). While state teams tend to be constructed groups with rapid membership turnover, relationships that players can access by membership in a club can be maintained and reinforced relatively easily. State players, coaches and officials, furthermore, are typically individuals involved with local clubs. In this light, the personal networks available to players during their club careers can become very important for their development.

The club system has also the strongest connections with the local communities. While women's football clubs rarely embody particular geographical, ethnic, cultural or socio-economic communities, they generally present characteristics of imagined communities (Anderson, 1983). The typical 'family approach' to their membership inevitably favours the creation of networks between club members and the local communities to which they belong outside football. Similarly, individual members' networks with the wider football community become naturally available to the general 'club community' of those particular members. By membership in local clubs, therefore, individuals have the opportunity to establish and cement relationships within the women's football community and with wider local communities. As clubs connected with the state system seem able to offer better resources and networks for the development of their players (Rosso, 2008), clubs well connected with their local communities or with the football communities could be able to make available important resources (e.g. expertise, facilities, support) to their players.

The connectedness of the club system is reflected by a dense network of formal and informal links between actors operating within and across different women's football systems (mainly club and state systems, but also school system). By membership in the Adelaide club system, players can establish wide sets of relationships with individuals and groups both within the system and across different systems. This complex web of relationships can influence the development of players at the club level and facilitate or undermine their passage to the state level. It includes actors

such as the clubs and the players themselves, the families of players, local schools, sporting communities, wider local communities, and the sport governing bodies.

### **4.2.3 The state system**

The state system is the true ‘achievement’ system of local women’s football, aimed at the production of players to feed the national system (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.; McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.). The state system comprises, at least theoretically, the whole of South Australia. This is because there are no rules that preclude players from anywhere in the state to trial for state development programs or state teams. In fact, however, it refers only to the Adelaide and the Mount Gambier areas, with the occasional exception of young players playing (generally in boys’ teams) in regional associations around Adelaide (Rosso, 2008, 2010a). Given the relatively minor dimension of the Mount Gambier sub-system, in women’s football terms the ‘state’ broadly coincides with the Adelaide region (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.).

The institutions that make up the women’s football state system are the South Australian Women’s Soccer Association (SAWSA), which is the traditional institution of the sport, the government-funded Institute of Sport (SASI), the Mount Gambier regional association (SEWFA) and the chief ‘umbrella institution’ of South Australian football, the Football Federation of South Australia (FFSA). Until only very recently, SAWSA and SASI were the sole institutions making up the state system. The regional association (SEWFA) entered the system in 2006, when it launched the Regional Development Squad in Mount Gambier, while the wide-ranging Football Federation of South Australia (FFSA) became involved in 2008. In 2008, following the recommendations of the Crawford Report (Independent Soccer Review Committee, 2003), significant administrative restructuring occurred in South Australia (see section 1.1.1).

SAWSA has been traditionally responsible for the management and delivery of state development squads and state teams. The state development squads usually run during the leagues’ off-season (between October and February) and aim at preparing potential state players for state and SASI trials (usually taking place in late summer-early autumn). They are the first step into the state system. In 2007/08, state development squads comprised Under 12, Under 14, Under 15, Under 17 and

Goalkeeper development squads (aimed at potential state players in the relative age groups), the Rising Stars program and the Young Sensation development squad (both in conjunction with SASI, aimed at potential SASI scholarships candidates). The state teams are the elite level of local junior women's football competing in national tournaments. In 2008, SAWSA fielded four state teams, Under 12, Under 14, Under 15 and Under 17. The Under 12 and Under 14 participated in interstate junior tournaments, while the Under 15 and Under 17 participated into the National Junior Championships, where national scouts typically identify players to invite to national training camps. The Under 15 and Under 17 state teams are regarded as stepping-stones to be identified as potential youth national team players (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.).

Except for SEWFA, which accounts for the Mount Gambier sub-system, all women's football institutions are based in Adelaide and their sphere of action has been traditionally focussed on the metropolitan region. In terms of state women's football, Mount Gambier constitutes in fact a sub-system. Since 2006/07, SEWFA provides a Regional Development Squad for local players who aspire to be selected in state teams. Mr. Stuart Birch (2007, pers. comm.), SEWFA president and founder, explains that the Regional Development Squad was created to fill the gap between the local women's football system and the state development squads run by SAWSA in Adelaide. Prior to the Regional Development Squad, the pathway for local players to state teams involved travelling to Adelaide more than once a week over spring and summer to take part in the state development squads, and then (if selected in the state teams) travelling to Adelaide for state teams training. National coach Mr. Tom Sermanni (2008, pers. comm.) recognises that regional areas like Mount Gambier are effectively subordinated to metropolitan areas where the state programs are run. The Regional Development Squad, however, provides an important initial opportunity for local players, as well as an important link between the Mount Gambier and the state system.

SASI is a division of the South Australian Office for Recreation and Sport (Office for Recreation and Sport - Government of South Australia, 2008), and runs elite development programs for selected players who are targeted as potential Australian players (see section 1.1.1). Typically, SASI players train several times a week (year-

long) with their SASI squad, and participate to national tournaments with the state teams. Selection into state teams and SASI squads is generally regarded as the pathway to advance to the national level. SASI was traditionally also responsible for the Adelaide Sensation squad, the team that represented South Australia in the now defunct National Summer League, and that provided further opportunities for local players to be observed by national officials.

The National Summer League was replaced in 2008 by a re-branded tournament (W-League), associated with the men's national A-League (SBS - The World Game, 2008). This newest (and very important) facet of the state system can be interpreted as a spillover effect of the 2003 Crawford Report (Independent Soccer Review Committee, 2003) that called for the creation of the national men's A-League and the administrative re-organisation of Australian football. In 2008, a new national league for women (the Westfield W-League) was established after the former National Summer League was no longer viable due to a chronic lack of financial means, as explained by the SASI head coach Mr. Kevin McCormack (2007, pers. comm.). The former national league teams were run by the states' Institutes of Sports (i.e. SASI in South Australia), and had minimal commercial value. The W-League instead benefits from its associations with the FFA and the A-League, and from important sponsorships (Ellis, 2008). A part from the Canberra side, the participating teams are all associated with the men's clubs of the A-League (Football Federation Australia, 2008c), and effectively became the highest level that players can aspire to below the national teams. Theoretically, these teams can be seen as the top tier of the state system, like an open-age state team. The W-League teams, however, do not necessarily pertain to state systems, because they can recruit players from outside their states (therefore not representing necessarily their states' production of elite players). The 2008 South Australian team, for example, is an Adelaide United women's squad that includes players from Queensland, Canberra and the US.

The state system is interconnected with the club system on one hand and the national system on the other. It operates as a catalyst for the 'achievement' outlook of the result-orientated clubs, and as a talent pool to serve the national system. It is characterised by important networks between SAWSA (and FFSA) and SASI, and between these institutions, the national teams and certain Adelaide-based clubs. The



Mount Gambier sub-system is instead only connected by weaker networks with SAWSA and, to a lesser extent, SASI. The system is now also connected with Adelaide United and the wider football community since the creation of the national W-League.

### **4.3 Concluding remarks**

The broad goal of the South Australian ‘achievement’ women’s football systems (state system and part of Adelaide’s club system) can be summarised as providing the opportunity to players to ‘take the next step’ in their careers. School football cannot be placed in the ‘achievement’ category (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.), nevertheless the step between school and club football is an important one as it serves as an introduction to result-orientated systems. Normally, the career path of high-profile South Australian players involves a progression from school football to the national teams: school to club, club to state, and state to national levels (South Australian Women’s Soccer Association, 2006). South Australia’s ability to produce elite athletes relies on the clubs’ effectiveness to access and develop young players, and the state system’s ability to identify and further develop those who possess particular qualities (e.g. technical). However, the factors that affect athletes’ development are not exclusively technical (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Helsen et al., 2000; Hoare & Warr, 2000; Morris, 2000; Reilly et al., 2000; Timson-Katchis & Jowett, 2005; Williams, 2000; Williams & Reilly, 2000). For example, access to training facilities, special development programs and high-quality coaching and advice are all important factors that can influence the players’ possibilities to develop their talent. Other key aspects of talent development include the players’ financial and logistic resources that enable them to take part into club or state activities, the players’ motivation to train (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Williams & Reilly, 2000) and their ability to overcome a varied range of sport-specific (e.g. injuries or unfavourable coaching decisions) and general life (e.g. emotional break downs, loss of income, sickness) challenges. Social relationships can facilitate and/or undermine the access to those resources that can both complement innate talent and/or facilitate its development.

For example, social relationships that players develop/hold can provide them with

additional strength to face unexpected challenges (e.g. moral support) and enjoy more their sporting experiences (Timson-Katchis & Jowett, 2005). At the same time, enjoyment deriving from positive social relationships can help athletes' to maintain high motivation and increase their willingness to train and further develop their talent (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Williams & Reilly, 2000). These are, however, not the only social relationships that can affect the development of athletes. There are also social relationships not involving players directly, but others who play key roles in their technical development, such as their coaches. For instance, their coaches can receive the same motivation boosts through positive relationships with other coaches, club members, members of football institutions or people pertaining to their private spheres. Moreover, by means of social relationships, both players and those who are in charge of their development can access and circulate information that would otherwise be more complex to obtain or understand, as well as share/access practical resources (e.g. coaching manuals, training facilities, equipment, automobiles) that contribute to facilitate technical development. These relationships can occur in both the sporting environments (e.g. team) and the private spheres (e.g. family), and produce different effects. For example, supporting and caring family members can be helpful to overcome long sickness and regain motivation after long injuries, and relationships within the women's football community can provide access to sport-specific information, and both can be important depending on the situation. Similarly, since social relationships can also produce negative effects (Portes, 1998), peer pressure from outside the women's football community can induce promising players to quit the sport, and feeling excluded by other team members can annihilate the self-confidence and motivation of many athletes. In line with Bourdieu (1986), the usefulness of relationships depends ultimately on the people that those relationships connect and their needs.

The capability of players to 'take the next step' can be influenced by social capital residing in a wide array of social connections, including the women's football community and the immediate social environments of players and others who can take part in the development process (e.g. coaches, school teachers, parents) of players. This affects the ability of both players and women's football systems to access resources (e.g. information) that can favour or hinder development by adding to or detracting from the players' and the systems' existing strengths. The next three

chapters will consider the steps (i.e. between recreational and club, state and national football) that typically define the careers of South Australian elite women's football players. Each career step will be considered in the light of the social networks that emerged from the interviews and survey carried out for this study as the most likely to affect the players' career paths. Each chapter will describe the nature of the networks that were indicated by the respondents as able to produce positive or negative effects on the players' careers, and will discuss the resources (and their effects) accruing from each network to both players and women's football systems.

## Chapter 5

### **Beyond recreation: from informal and school football to women's football clubs**

The first step towards the engagement with football as an 'achievement' sport (Bale, 2003) for South Australian women's football players is becoming involved with a club. Typically, before joining football clubs, young players play recreationally at school and informally with friends and/or family members. It is difficult to establish when young players begin to 'play seriously' (Bale, 2003), slowly combining the pure enjoyment of playing the sport with a focus on development as potential elite athletes. Whether playing at school or clubs, young players are arguably motivated by the pleasure of playing with their friends more than by realistic career expectations. Particularly at a young age, moreover, players are surrounded by peers displaying a mix of diverse motivations and skills, and are vulnerable to the (positive and negative) influence of their social environment. Even when they join clubs, social and recreational motivations are often the driver of their early engagement, and only later, they develop a focus on their football career progression. Nevertheless, joining a football club can provide young players with a set of significant technical and social resources to start off their career pathway (South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2006).

Players who play at school or informally may already possess reasonable technical skills, a marked passion for the game and even some acquaintances who can provide them with useful resources for their development (e.g. technically endowed friends to play with, coaches or other individuals involved with football to talk to). However, as Ms. Wendy Carter, executive officer of SAWSA, explains (2007, pers. comm.), it is through clubs that youngsters access the technical resources and the social connections that can enable their technical and mental development into potential 'serious' players. Among other resources, joining football clubs can endow players with access to technical knowledge (e.g. coaches); access to facilities and equipment; membership in a structure designed to assist them in their football career steps (both internal to the clubs – i.e. the club structural organisation – and encompassing the clubs – i.e. the club system); same age and similarly skilled peers (to share football

experiences and ‘feed off’ each other); and generally a network of acquaintances (i.e. social capital) that can provide motivation, moral support, access to additional knowledge, and practical assistance (e.g. transportation) towards football endeavours. In terms of career progression towards ‘achievement’ women’s football, the usefulness of joining a club combines with the technical and mental aptitudes of players, and depends on the quality of the club and the resources accessible through it. Similarly, drawing on Bourdieu (1986), the impact of social capital accessed through clubs depends upon the quality of social networks that the clubs make available to the players. However, whilst it would be inappropriate to equate joining a club with engaging with ‘achievement’ women’s football, it is clear that aspiring to become an ‘achievement’ player requires involvement with formal clubs.

As, in economic terms, social capital combines with other forms of capital (i.e. economic and cultural capital) to create and reproduce advantages for individuals (Bourdieu, 1986), in women’s football terms it can combine with individuals’ technical proficiency and sporting culture (Hay, 2006) to affect one’s ability to ‘take the next step’. Moreover, as it facilitates economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986 in Giorgas, 2007b), it can contribute to increase or decrease existing technical proficiency and value placed on players’ sporting culture.

Access to information, other resources (including moral and practical support) and career sponsorship, are all social capital-related key factors that can facilitate career success (Seibert et al., 2001) and can be influenced by social capital accumulated through both personal and communal networks. This chapter reports findings from interviews with players, parents and women’s football administrators and considers ways in which social capital can affect the passage of recreational players to formal football clubs. In doing so, it considers players’ personal networks and networks across clubs, women’s football institutions, football communities and wider local communities.

## **5.1 Personal networks**

Personal social networks of players are the most immediate factor by which social capital can affect the ability of recreational players to move to the club system.

Social capital residing in networks of which the players themselves are members can influence their passage from recreational football to club football by affecting the availability to players of resources including encouragement, moral and practical (e.g. logistic and financial) support, and opportunities of developing their football skills. The effect of resources accessible through social capital combines with existing physical, technical, psychological, socio-economic, and cultural factors to determine the degree of vulnerability to exclusion from (club) football (Collins & Kay, 2003; Wagg, 2004b) that young recreational players may experience. Personal networks of recreational players that can affect their ability to move to club football include family members, acquaintances who are not involved with the football community and acquaintances who have an active role in football in South Australia.

### **5.1.1 Influence of family members**

Relationships within families constitute one of the most important forms of social capital (Bourdieu, 1993; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995). For example, the willingness of family members to help children by giving them time and attention is seen as a very important factor facilitating achievement in school (Coleman, 1988). While family ties may sometimes become too strong and inhibit the sociability of children in the community at large, networks with family members can facilitate personal developmental outcomes of children (e.g. development of sporting abilities) (Winter, 2000). Family social capital, furthermore, plays also a role in constructing further social capital beyond the family, facilitating connections between family members and members of external networks involving kin (Winter, 2000). Relationships within families can affect important factors facilitating the passage between recreational and club football, including: the levels of moral and practical support available to players; the opportunity for recreational players to refine or acquire football skills; the cultural value that young players place on football; and the choice of the players' first club.

Among other attributes (e.g. skills and knowledge), motivation and self-confidence are important elements in shaping the ability of individuals to participate in sporting activities (Collins, 2004). This is no exception for women's football in South Australia, especially when players face the challenge of participating in any kind of trial, including the process of becoming part of a football club. As highlighted by

approximately 80 per cent of interviewed players (or players' parents), personal drive and self-confidence are often fostered considerably by moral support and encouragement from family members.

Ms. Sharon Black, another Adelaide player with extensive past national and international experience, also highlights that her family bonds provided her with significant encouragement when she commenced to play. However, having started much earlier Black experienced interesting differences from her younger colleagues. In particular, when she joined her first club (early 1990s), football in Adelaide was still perceived as a strongly gendered sport, and women's football was only in an embryonic phase (Rosso, 2006, 2009a). Her relationship with her mother, however, encouraged Sharon to pursue her passion for football, increasing her motivation and confidence to engage with what "*obviously wasn't a female sport*" (Black, 2008, pers. comm.). Building on her motivation and passion, she later became one of the most successful and recognised women's football players in South Australia, with 56 appearances in the Australian national team and a four-year career as a semi-professional footballer in Denmark (Black, 2008, pers. comm.). Mr. Stuart Birch, founder and president of the South Eastern Women's Football Association (SEWFA), asserts that also in Mount Gambier, players from encouraging and caring families are advantaged compared to players from less united or problematic families because their self-confidence and motivation tends to grow as a result of the encouragement of their kin.

For over half of the interviewed players, family bonds fostered their interest in football beyond the recreational level. Mr. Dave Pedlar, father of a Mount Gambier player who reached the state level, explains that one of the main reasons that motivated his daughter to play beyond school is that football became an important connection between father and daughter.

*We sit up on Saturday nights and watch it [...] I'm a single dad... [...] We'd set the alarm on Sunday morning, it may be three o'clock, we get up and watch the Reds [Liverpool F.C.] play...and you know, we sit up together, have a coffee [...]. Plus, I love going watching her play... I take out every Saturday, and watch...and take her to trainings (Pedlar, 2007, pers. comm.).*

Ms. Stacey Day (a current Adelaide-grown Australian national player) cites the encouragement always available through her parents and brother since she started to play informally and at school. She believes that the existing passion of her family members for football granted her support and encouragement to become a ‘serious’ player. The sporting culture of her family and the tight bond with her brother strongly influenced her choice to play football instead of other sports: “*My brother played [...] and my mum and dad both played [...] so, it was within the family. So, I just followed and, yeah, here I am*” (Day, 2008, pers. comm.). Stacey’s parents were indeed keen for her to play the sport, and glad to help her in what they considered a valuable endeavour. A shared passion for football provided, therefore, a further incentive for support than the simple kinship.

Over 20 per cent of interviewees noted that family bonds often influence not only the decision of young players to become members of a club, but also the choice of the club. In other words, family bonds are an important determinant of the technical and human environment in which recreational players ‘take the next step’. To this extent, the parents’ personal links with clubs (including club loyalty), the clubs’ reputation and location (Day, 2008, pers. comm.), and logistic reasons are often important drivers for their choices. Notably, the combination of these factors can result in young female players joining boys’ clubs as their first clubs. This is possible because the football governing bodies allow young females to play in boys’ teams. Among the main reasons for young girls to join boys’ clubs is the importance of logistics in influencing their families’ choices. Logistics needs often emerge when young girls have brothers who already play football and parents prefer to bring two or more children to a single club until the girl(s) can compete physically with the boys (Day, 2008, pers. comm.). Parents also choose to send players to particular clubs due to their club loyalty, including to boys’ clubs. For instance, young female players may end up playing in boys’ teams because their fathers are loyal to clubs where they play or have played in the past (McCormick, 2007, pers. comm.). Club loyalty is considered as an important value especially in Mount Gambier, where, as Mr. Nigel Inglis (vice-president of the South Eastern Women’s Football Association) explains: “*quite often if your older brother has played at, say, Central [Football Club], then when the girl is coming up she’ll start at Central*” (Inglis, 2007, pers. comm.).



Relationships within their families are important for recreational players who intend to join formal clubs also in terms of accessing practical resources, such as financial and logistic assistance. This is especially clear considering that the step between recreational and club football typically occurs when players are still young and therefore dependent on their families for club fees and transportation (for example, Black, 2008, pers. comm.). In Adelaide, for instance, most ‘achievement’ clubs expect players to join their squads when under thirteen years of age (South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2008a). In both Adelaide and Mount Gambier, the chances of players developing beyond the school level depend significantly upon their families’ abilities and possibilities. For example, parents who experience socio-economic disadvantage and have more than one child may simply not have the time and financial resources to take players to clubs (Rosso, 2006, 2008, 2009a). This is particularly true for those who do not live in close proximity to any club (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.).

*Parents are huge. If a child wants to go on...if they haven't got the support of the parents...then you are going to struggle. You will struggle, full stop. Someone to drive you to training, someone to drive you to the game, someone to pay your fees, someone to look after you (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.).*

Other practical resources accessible to recreational players by means of family bonds include the opportunity of practicing their football skills with their kin. Ms. Sandra Scalzi, an Adelaide-based player with state teams, SASI and National League experience, thinks of the special relationship with her brother when she considers the reasons that stimulated her desire to become a ‘real’ player and play for a club. The bond with her brother was instrumental for her to develop a love for the game and, importantly, to acquire the foundation of her notable technical skills. “*My brothers [...] always took me to the park, you know, touch up on my skills [...] My brother is soccer crazy [...] I probably learned most of my skills with my brother, just having fun in the backyard.*” (Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.). The brother’s willingness to spend time with her gave Sandra access to his football knowledge in the same way as the adults’ human capital is accessed by children in Coleman’s examples on parents facilitating school achievements (Coleman, 1988, pp. S109-S111).

The influence of family members can also combine with local sporting cultures to affect the ability of recreational players to ‘take the next step’ to club football. For example, if the local sporting culture does not favour football, the reinforcement of self-drive and self-confidence accruing to players from family bonds can represent a primary resource for players, and mitigate the adverse attitude towards football held by other members of their social networks (Black, 2008, pers. comm.). To this extent, strong motivation gained from relationships within families can be especially important for young players living in areas where football is considered a minority sport. At present, women’s football is the fastest growing team sport for girls and women in Australia (Football Federation Australia, 2008b). Nevertheless, Mr. Tom Sermanni, the women’s football national head coach, points out that football, for both men and women, is often still seen as a relatively minor sport and the competition of other sports has a major impact on young players’ choice of sport (Sermanni, 2008, pers. comm.). While data on participation at school suggest that in Adelaide football is definitely a popular sport for both boys and girls (South Australian Primary School Amateur Sport Association, 2006), in Mount Gambier it is generally seen as a secondary sport. Mr. Morris Dickins, member of the SEWFA committee, explains that:

*Traditionally we are a football [Australian Rules] and netball town, and a lot of hockey. The footy clubs have netball teams, and they travel all over the countryside [...] the whole family goes, because the sons or the dads are going to play footy and the girls are going to play netball. [...] A lot of [the Mount Gambier women’s football players] play two sports, and the second is soccer (Dickins, 2007, pers. comm.).*

While family bonds can reinforce recreational players’ motivation to join a club and overcome external barriers, in families that are actively involved with other sports they can inhibit the players’ motivation. Recreational players can face lack of support or even opposition within their families to join a football club. In the instance of strong family sporting cultures openly critical of football, young girls need particularly strong positions within their family networks (Burt, 2000) to obtain the necessary (i.e. financial) support to play football beyond school.

When players lack resourceful relationships with their family members, they can experience serious difficulties in building adequate self-drive and confidence, and gaining access to fundamental practical resources such as transportation and financial means to pay club fees in order to join football clubs. Although family bonds remain crucial, players may access some of the resources that facilitate their passage from recreational to club football also by means of social capital deriving from relationships with acquaintances.

### **5.1.2 Influence of acquaintances**

Together with family members, acquaintances may endow young players with important resources to progress from recreational to club football. Resources acquired through relationships with acquaintances can relate to both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors regarding the association with formal clubs. Factors that ‘push’ players towards the club system can be provided by relationships between recreational players and acquaintances not belonging to formal football communities. ‘Pull’ factors that attract players to clubs, instead, relate to relationships with acquaintances already associated with formal football, in particular clubs.

Relationships with people not involved with formal football (‘push’ factors) can occur among peers and between young players and adults, and can encompass both the school and the private spheres. They can occur, for example, between fellow recreational players (e.g. school players), between recreational players and other friends who do not play football at all, or between recreational players and adults (e.g. teachers or family friends). Acquaintances not involved with club football can provide a channel for moral support, encouragement and feeling of acceptance for young players to ‘take the next step’ towards club football. These resources contribute to reinforce the young players’ interest for the game, and to provide a social environment in which players can develop enough self-confidence and motivation to consider joining a football club.

Acquaintances who are not involved with club football can provide recreational players with supportive networks and environments, which can convey a sense of encouragement leading to the build up of self-confidence and motivation. A minority

of interviewees thinks that acquaintances not formally involved with football are not particularly important in influencing players to make critical football-related decisions, such as taking the step between school and clubs. Nevertheless, the experiences of most interviewed players in both Adelaide and Mount Gambier indicate that their relationships with acquaintances influenced their decision to join their first football club. For example, Adelaide player Sandra Scalzi (2007, pers. comm.) recalls that, when she was a young recreational player, a particular bond with her Physical Education teacher who “*thought I was fantastic, he just kept pushing me to play*” reinforced her motivation to become a ‘serious’ player. The encouragement derived from this relationship, combined with the support of her brother, gave her the necessary self-confidence to join Adelaide City Women’s Football Club, one of the main clubs in South Australia.

Networks with acquaintances outside the club system provided motivation to engage with club football also to Ms. Kristyn Swaffer (2008, pers. comm.), one of the most recognised South Australian players with over five years experience with the Australian national team. In particular, the value placed on football by her community of peers influenced her early interest in the game. Football was the mainstream sport among her early group of friends and she quickly found herself “*playing [football] at lunch time and recess with the kids at school*” (Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.). Interestingly, she notes that, had another sport been the sport of election of her community of peers, she would have perhaps played it instead of football. Belonging to that ‘football group’, and especially being accepted as a player by boys, helped Kristyn to acquire early some important football skills and granted her considerable self-confidence in regards to her football abilities. This would assist her in several occasions throughout her football career, including when she was confronted with the idea of joining her first club (Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.). Notably, in the southern suburb of Adelaide where she grew up (Hackham West), football was particularly popular due to the significant number of British migrants who settled in the area (Burnley, 2001). This a typical example of immigration patterns affecting the sporting culture of local communities (Mosley et al., 1997; Mosley & Murray, 1994).

Also relationships with acquaintances involved with club football (‘pull’ factor) can

contribute to initiate or reinforce an interest for football and enhance motivation and self-confidence. Acquaintances in the club system may also provide recreational players with opportunities to further develop their skills, and an important degree of reassurance deriving from a feeling of ‘not being alone’ once they join a club. Acquaintances possessing technical knowledge (e.g. coaches or players) can also help players to refine their skills prior to club trials, enhancing both the players’ technical proficiency and their motivation and self-confidence in regard to the trial process. These kinds of relationships occur typically between peers (i.e. recreational and club players), but may also involve recreational players and adults.

Through relationships with peers involved with clubs, recreational players can gain enhanced awareness of their own abilities and the possibility to learn from more experienced players. This can occur if recreational and club players share football experiences, and can contribute to recreational players’ self-confidence in undergoing club trials (Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.). These relationships can also have a much more direct impact. For example, despite having played successfully at primary school level, when young Swaffer moved to high school she was discouraged by her new schoolmates from playing in the school team. This was essentially because there was no girls’-only team, and they did not welcome the idea of a girl player in their boys’ squad (Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.). When faced with the possibility of not making the school’s team, she resorted to her primary school ‘football networks’ to seek a way to keep playing football. At primary school, she had developed a strong relationship with her school coach, Mr. Colin Pearson, who demonstrated particular interest in her as a football player and always tried to foster her interest for the game, including with extra-school activities.

*He was my first ever soccer coach, and coached us for a few years [...] He certainly encouraged me along. I can remember him taking me to see Australia play [...] at Footy Park...so he took me along as a primary school aged kid to see Australia play [...] (Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.).*

Apart from being a school coach, Mr. Pearson was also the president of a local boys’ club, Seaford S.C. His networks with both the local school and the wider football community resulted in important ‘bridging’ social capital (Putnam, 2000) that

provided the necessary knowledge and social contacts to encourage Kristyn to perform the step between school and club football. *“He encouraged me to go there and to try out for the boys’ club team there...and so I got selected there”* (Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.).

Over one third of the interviewees think that recreational players often decide to join football clubs due to their relationships with peers who already play at the club level and ‘pull’ new girls along. The acquaintance with club players endows recreational players with interest towards the club environment on one hand, and a feeling of comfort brought by the consciousness of not being alone in their forthcoming experience on the other. These relationships are often established at school, and are a very important source of recruitment for clubs. In 2007, for example, Sturt Marion W.S.C. *“had trials, we got new girls out [...] they never ever played for a club...all because their friends play for a certain school, and they said: “Come and try out”* (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.). The same dynamics are common in Mount Gambier, where half of the interviewed parents say that the presence of friends strongly influenced their daughters when they joined their first clubs, or that the presence of their daughters strongly influenced others to join.

Relationships with acquaintances both involved or not with club football can also bear negative components, and lead to unacceptance, marginalisation or mockery of recreational players if they carry elements of negative social capital (Portes, 1998; Portes & Landolt, 1996). This can be the case if these relationships lack to convey a sense of encouragement, or if they bear feelings of inadequacy (Andrews, 2007, pers. comm.). The negative influence of acquaintances, therefore, can also frustrate self-confidence and motivation, and pose a barrier for the ability of young recreational players to ‘take the next step’. To this extent, it is interesting to question the effect that mockery would have produced on Swaffer’s self-confidence, or contempt on Scalzi’s motivation, as opposed to acceptance and unconditioned encouragement. For example, Birch (2007, pers. comm.) is convinced that peer relationships can become a burden for young players who need to ‘take the next step’. He suggests that recreational players can undermine each other’s self-confidence and motivation by being unsupportive and making fun of each other’s efforts. He also notes that the risk is higher for those girls who are not particularly popular with their peers, on or off

the football field. The implication, therefore, is that personal relationships of recreational players, even if unrelated to their families or their football networks, may carry sufficient negative social capital (Portes, 1998; Portes & Landolt, 1996) to undermine their willingness to join a football club.

## **5.2 Communal networks**

The players' personal networks are not the only level of relationship that can influence the passage between recreational and club football. Networks connecting different sectors of the communities in which players live and aspire to play football can play an important role too. Collins (2004) calls this shared form of social capital 'communal' capital, as opposed to 'personal' social capital. Drawing on Putnam's (2000) idea of social capital as a sort of 'social glue' that keeps communities together, Collins (2004) maintains that participation in sport is affected by 'communal' social capital shared by clubs, groups and institutions. While the accumulation of 'communal' social capital still relies on networks held by individuals and shared with groups (Lin, 2001), this form of shared social capital enables social groups to maintain and reproduce themselves (Glover & Hemingway, 2005). In this sense, relationships across the community, in both its generalised and sporting conceptions (Andrews, 1998; Nadel, 1998), can affect the ability of football clubs to gain access to human resources (i.e. new players) to sustain themselves. In parallel, networks connecting local communities, football communities, local schools, local clubs, and football institutions can favour or hinder the passage of players from school or informal football to the club system.

### **5.2.1 Club networks**

An important kind of communal networks that can facilitate or hinder the passage of recreational players to formal football clubs consists of connections involving the clubs themselves. Clubs are characterised by more or less strong internal ties (i.e. between the club members and their immediate networks) and by connections with external social groups (e.g. schools, community groups, sporting institutions) that certain club members make available to the club as a communal entity. The terminology of 'intra-club' and 'extra-club' ties and networks that follows is inspired by the terminology of 'intra-community' and 'extra-community' ties and networks used by Woolcock (1998) in the framework of social capital and economic

development. Following the conceptualisation of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital (Putnam, 2000), intra-club ties can be associated to ‘bonding’ social capital, while extra-club networks to ‘bridging’ social capital. These club networks retain some of the characteristics discussed by Giorgas (2007b) in terms of their respective value in ‘getting by’ (‘bonding’ social capital) and ‘getting ahead’ (‘bridging’ social capital). However, it is important to bear in mind that these two concepts “*are not either/or categories*” but only “*more or less*” dimensions” (Putnam, 2000, p. 23) to be used to consider different forms of social capital.

#### *5.2.1.1 Intra-club networks*

‘Bonding’ social capital accumulated through intra-club networks plays an important role in the passage of recreational players to the club level. Networks internal to clubs affect the image that recreational players perceive of them, therefore affecting the clubs’ desirability. On the other hand, intra-club networks constitute the social environment of which new players become part in the period immediately after their joining. They contribute, therefore, to the extent to which new players feel welcome at their new club, and affect the club’s ability to retain the new recruits.

All the players interviewed for this study acknowledged that feeling welcome was a crucial factor when they joined their first club. They all agree that the social relationships that new players (particularly when young and inexperienced) find when joining a club can strongly affect the level of success that they experience at the club. In particular, these networks can affect the willingness of players to continue their involvement with their new club. On one hand, existing intra-club networks can produce a friendly environment for learning where new players feel included in the club’s social fabric (e.g. coaching staff, fellow players, parents) and feel safe to express themselves, make mistakes and develop new relationships. On the other, close-knit bonds between existing club members can constitute a barrier for new arrivals, especially when the personality of new players is not particularly expansive (Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.)

Most interviewed players explain that developing friendships rapidly with the already well-bonded groups of existing players and officials they found when they first joined formal clubs was very beneficial. Positive outcomes include feelings of



safety to express themselves through football (Black, 2008, pers. comm.), and encouragement of fellow players and coaches (Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.). Moreover, Scalzi (2007, pers. comm.) remembers that the bonds within her new club (Adelaide City Women's Football Club) compensated the lack of support of her parents, who were not enthusiastic about her becoming a football player:

*Initially my mum and dad were scared of the sport, they didn't want me to break a leg or anything. [...] There were a lot of people at the club, especially parents, who could take me to training, 'cause I couldn't get there 'cause my parents couldn't take me [...]. The first person who took me was Francesca's dad, she played in the same team as me and they lived in the same area [...] Everyone [at the club] made sure that I'd get there and be available to play [...] and helped me (Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.).*

Sandra, however, adds that despite the inclusive attitude of her new fellow club members, her outgoing personality was a major factor in her inclusion in the existing intra-club ties. The implication is that the same close-knit bonds that she encountered when she joined her first club could have failed in making her feel included, had she been a shy or introverted person. To this extent, it must also be added that, despite Sandra having no existing friends within the club when she joined it, she shared common characteristics with several fellow players, coaches and volunteers, including ethnic background, school acquaintances and area of residence (Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.). She also displayed well-developed football skills. In other words, her natural sociability, her desirable skills, and some common elements with other fellow club members represented a significant initial advantage in terms of inclusion (Wagg, 2004b).

As indicated by most interviewees in both Adelaide and Mount Gambier, for introverted players who do not share acquaintances or common characteristics with their new team mates, the close-knit networks typical of sporting clubs (for example, Tonts, 2005) could act as a barrier to inclusion. Strong ties among existing players can result in feelings of intimidation or inadequacy, particularly when young players feel ignored by a majority of well-bonded fellow players. As a former top profile National League male player and current FFSA Coaching Education Officer

explains, this often leads to self-consciousness and decreased ability to learn and perform, and can undermine the motivation of young players (Alagich, 2008, pers. comm.).

Intra-club networks are also important for the image that outsiders perceive of a certain club. For instance, Neilson (2007, pers. comm.) explains that at Sturt Marion Women's Soccer Club members place a lot of attention on building intra-club relationships. For example, they organise social events like pub crawls for senior players and quiz nights for all members, and bonding events based on bringing players together outside the football pitch, by means of attitudinal exercises and small games. They also try to reinforce club loyalty by developing former players or other club members into coaches, for example by offering to pay course expenses. Neilson asserts that Sturt Marion W.S.C. is defined by strong ties among its members and generally a "good club spirit". She believes that this attracts recreational players to the club as it portrays an image of 'togetherness' that appeals to those who want to belong to a community. This process works especially when it is reinforced by the mediation of someone within the club that acts as a 'recruiter' establishing connections, for instance, with local schools ('bridging' social capital).

However, building on Neilson (2007, pers. comm.), the same strong networks can also portray clubs as excessively close communities and can intimidate outsiders. Sturt Marion W.S.C., for example, has the reputation of being a particularly homosexually-orientated club because many well-known homosexual players have played or play in its senior teams. The club president is very firm in stating that gay women are well represented at Sturt, but the club as an institution is not influenced by the sexuality of some members (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.). Nevertheless, before she joined Sturt Marion W.S.C., she had heard that it was a 'lesbian club', and admits that the club's image of a close-knit community with significant homosexual membership can constitute a barrier for the attraction of recreational players:

*I had parents who communicated to me that they were very wary to come here because this was known as a 'lesbian club'. Now, that kind of reputation probably went back ten years, if not more. [...] You are going to get different sexuality...it's a diverse club...however, it was given a title and I think it still*

*hangs around [...]* (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.).

#### 5.2.1.2 *Extra-club networks*

‘Bridging’ social capital is often not seen as having detrimental effects such as the reinforcement of exclusivity caused occasionally by close-knit bonds (Tonts, 2005). However, connections between football clubs and external social groups can produce undesirable effects for the recruitment of new players. In particular, connections with certain community groups can create or reinforce undesirable reputations of clubs in the imagery of the wider community. Examples of this kind include the stigma associated with ethnic football clubs (men’s) in Australia until recent years (Danforth, 2001; Hay, 2006; Hughson, 2001; Mosley, 1997b; O’Hara, 1994; Rosso, 2007). In the case of South Australian women’s football, Rosso (2007) highlighted Adelaide City Women’s Football Club, which has deliberately attempted to shake its image as an Italian club to avoid difficulties in attracting players of other backgrounds. While strong extra-club networks may attract significant membership from a specific community (e.g. an ethnic or gay community), they may alienate clubs from reaching out to wider audiences. Both Nielson, as an administrator, and Scalzi, as a player, recognise that women’s football is sometimes perceived as a ‘lesbian sport’ (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.; Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.). Moreover, Neilson refers to the fear of some parents that girls may “*come home lesbians*”. In these terms, extra-club links with the ‘lesbian community’ can certainly reduce the ability of Sturt Marion W.S.C. to be appealing to recreational players looking for a club.

Nonetheless, extra-club networks can be important to link recreational players and football clubs, and to enhance the desirability of clubs within local communities. Birch (2007, pers. comm.), for instance, says that in Mount Gambier, women’s football clubs are well connected with local sport institutions, men’s clubs and the local schools, and that through such links, they often gain access to facilities (e.g. sharing them with men’s clubs) and players (i.e. from the local schools).

Links between clubs and local community groups (including schools) are very important in facilitating the passage of local players between recreational and club football. This is particularly true for the younger age groups, when players are more

dependent on parents in terms of club choice (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.). The idea is that clubs with solid community networks combine the attractiveness of location (that often lowers financial and logistic difficulties associated with joining a club) with traceable reputation within the local community. A well-respected name, in turn, translates into credibility and favours the establishment of further connections (Bourdieu, 1986). Joining a local club, moreover, implies that the children often share their experiences with other players from the same local communities. This can allow parents to share transport commitments with other families, and increases the players' opportunities to develop friendships with peers who live nearby. This opportunity of sociability can represent a considerable incentive, especially for parents who value community involvement, to send the children to their local football club. At the beginning of the 2000s, Noarlunga Women's Soccer Club was an important club in Adelaide southern suburbs (Rosso, 2008). Combining Australian football, cricket, football (soccer) and bingo, it was well embedded in the local community and this contributed to the creation of new social relationships and friendships. Being embedded in the local community, for a club:

*It does help, because [...] they know you by your first name...there's that trust there, that level of trust, that I think it's really important [...]. You don't need to have an intimate relationship, but just have a relationship. [...] When you have a level of trust..."how can I go about this?" or "I need that"...and they will give it to you. Because they know who I am, they know where I belong and that I am part of this community (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.).*

The main links between women's football clubs and local communities are often established through schools. Sturt Marion W.S.C., for example, advertises within schools for players. A selected committee member takes on the role to "talk to the schools" (approached "as a school in general", not through any specific person like for example Physical Education teachers, with whom a more personal relationship could be established) (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.). However, apart from formal contacts by means of newsletters, networks with local schools are mostly unplanned. They are typically established through parents who simply act as ambassadors for their daughters' club, by word of mouth (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.). While the club does not maintain privileged networks with any particular school, there are three

primary schools (Happy Valley, Woodcroft and Brighton – all in the geographical area of Sturt Marion W.S.C.) where networks have been particularly successful in attracting new players (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.).

Another category of extra-club networks that can influence the ‘next step’ of recreational players refers to networks created with explicit investment in social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) purposely aimed to ‘pull’ particular players to clubs. These networks are typically established by club members with players or their family members, and are often referred to as ‘scouting’. For young Sandra Scalzi, for example, being approached by a club coach after a game with a local representative junior team represented an important incentive to join her first club (Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.). ‘Scouting’ can take place in several forms, but always involves an investment in time (e.g. going to watch players during a school competition) and sociability (i.e. approaching players, families, teachers, coaches) on behalf of club members. ‘Scouting’ often involves also some form of career sponsorship (i.e. the ‘scout’ introduces the new player to his/her club, therefore acting as a sort of guarantor) (Seibert et al., 2001). Although it is not always the case, ‘scouting’ often involves membership in some strong ties that can provide the motivation for the initial investments in sociability and time. For instance, membership in strong intra-club networks can provide club members with the necessary motivation to take the time to attend the local school games and to approach parents and players who are deemed good enough to join the club. Generally, it is very unlikely that individuals who are not strongly connected to a club act as ‘scouts’ for recreational players.

### **5.2.2 Institutional networks**

Most interviewees agree that positive working relations across football governing bodies promote effective co-operation and communication, which in turn favour the good functioning of the systems and the mobilisation of talent from the bottom to the top of South Australian women’s football. Mr. Tom Sermanni (2008, pers. comm.), national head coach, thinks that effective networks between institutions are particularly important to allow information to flow throughout and across systems. However, he adds that often football institutions do not communicate with each other effectively, especially across different systems, and that building social networks (Gittell & Vidal, 1998; Glover et al., 2005; Yuen, Pedlar, & Mannell, 2005) between

institutions could help to disseminate valuable information within systems. Moreover, Sermanni indicates that effective cross-institutional networks would be particularly useful in a country like Australia, where football competes fiercely for athletes with many other sports.

The institutions involved with the passage between recreational and club football are the South Australian Women's Soccer Association (SAWSA), the Football Federation South Australia (FFSA), the South Australian Primary School Amateur Sports Association (SAPSASA) and the Secondary School Sports South Australia (SSSA). SAWSA and FFSA bring together the clubs (see section 1.1.1), while SAPSASA and SSSSA govern school football.

Ms. Wendy Carter, SAWSA executive officer, explains that the connections between school and club governing bodies in Adelaide are particularly weak (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). SAWSA helps SSSSA in running the secondary school state team (SA Schoolgirls) by assisting with the appointment of a coach and the provision of facilities. Nevertheless, school football remains a significant resource largely untapped by clubs and by SAWSA (and FFSA) in terms of investments in social relationships aimed at the recruitment and development of players. This is especially true for primary school football, where there are important proportions of players who do not play for clubs. Carter explains that productive institutional networks between SAWSA and the school sporting associations could result in a clearer career pathway for South Australian players. In particular, co-operation between these institutions based on trust and common interests (i.e. social capital) could help to encourage recreational players to join clubs, and to direct them towards clubs that meet their needs in terms of football development.

The most effective networks would be between SAWSA and SAPSASA (primary school sporting association). While secondary school players with reasonable potential to develop into elite players tend to play already for formal clubs, talented primary school players would benefit greatly from further guidance on joining clubs. The collaboration between SAWSA and SAPSASA, however, is extremely poor. It is limited to the advertisement of trials for the primary school state team, when SAWSA places an advertisement free of charge on its website and advises the clubs'

delegates of the event (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). In any other instance, SAWSA and SAPSASA do not tend to work together. The underlying lack of trust between the two associations resides in their inability to find a common ground of interest. While SAWSA tends to focus on technical development of players, SAPSASA has more general educational and personal development purposes (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). In other words, SAPSASA is deemed to place too little value on technical issues of football and to run its programs without enough focus on the girls' career pathway (South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2006).

Interestingly, however, Carter thinks that the lack of trust between SAWSA and SAPSASA is not necessarily negative for the development of South Australian players: "*We run now programs in conflict with their [primary school] program. So, for instance, our Under 12 state team is basically the same age group as what that primary schoolgirls' team is*" (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). The lack of trust and collaboration between these institutions, therefore, has culminated in the creation of additional SAWSA development programs for very young players (i.e. Under 12 state team), which are deemed to provide higher technical standard than the school-based program conducted by SAPSASA (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). Unfortunately, however, those players who take part in the SAWSA initiatives are already playing for clubs, and the synergy (or lack of it) between SAWSA and SAPSASA fails to favour the movement of primary school players to club football.

In Mount Gambier, the relationship between SAPSASA and the other women's football institutions is closer than in Adelaide. The great majority of interviewees indicate that most members of the local women's football community know each other (the local SAPSASA representatives are no exception), given the small size of the regional players' pool, and the small amount of local clubs and schools. Most local school football volunteers (e.g. coaches and administrators) are also involved with club football, and can provide encouragement and guidance to school players wishing to join clubs. The president of the local clubs' association (SEWFA) says that in a "*small country town*" like Mount Gambier, people tend to know each other within the local community independently from football (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.). In other words, he refers to the type of social capital described by Putnam (1995; , 2000) and asserts that those connections facilitate actions within the football sphere,

for example, reaching out to players and parents and inviting them to join clubs. Moreover, while in Adelaide there is a focus on the development of potential elite players (i.e. 'achievement' phase), the broad purpose of Mount Gambier football institutions in regards to women's football is still the general growth of the sport (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.). To this extent, SEWFA does not perceive the general educational approach of SAPSASA as detrimental for its own aim.

### **5.2.3 Local community networks: the example of Mount Gambier**

Other kinds of communal networks that can influence the engagement of recreational players with club football are the connections between the football communities and the general local communities (Nadel, 1998) of which they are part. These local community networks involve connections between members of football communities (i.e. individuals, groups and institutions) and other local community actors including individuals, businesses, community groups, local government and local schools. In other words, they refer to social capital seen as a feature of social networks that promotes social co-operation at the wider community level (Putnam, 2000). This type of social capital is especially important for the first step in the players' career from recreational to club football, when the players' connections with wider local communities are still stronger than their links with football communities. That is, once players are involved with clubs, the importance of football-related networks (e.g. personal networks with other 'football people', club and institutional networks) becomes instead crucial for their ability to advance to the state and the national level, as they can be conducive to football-specific resources that general community networks cannot provide.

To explore the extent to which local community networks can facilitate or hinder the passage of players from recreational to club football it is useful to consider the example of Mount Gambier, which offers an interesting insight of a football community with strong connections with the wider local community. It is important to remember that the Mount Gambier experience relates to a specific region and cannot be translated to the whole of South Australia without addressing issues of rural-urban social capital (for example, Hofferth & Iceland, 1998; Winter, 2000). The geographical and socio-economic characteristics of where people live affect the way in which they relate to others and form social networks (Winter, 2000). In turn, social



capital arising from social networks within families and communities affects participation in sport and physical and recreational activities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009b). Edwards and Cheers (2007) state that rural communities generally are richer in social capital than their urban counterparts. Arguably, rural societies stimulate greater solidity of social ties among community members than urban areas, where social relationships tend to be more impersonal and transitory (Hofferth & Iceland, 1998). Rural residents, for example, are thought to share a greater sense of responsibility to others than their urban counterparts (Lee, Coward, & Netzer, 1994, in Hofferth & Iceland, 1998). While urban residents are more likely to develop weak ties that facilitate the flow of information (Granovetter, 1973, 1983), social capital in rural areas arises especially from strong ties (Wilkinson, 1991). Rural areas are therefore arguably richer in ‘bonding’ social capital, an important factor of community cohesiveness (Tonts, 2005). The community networks observed in Mount Gambier make clear that general community cohesiveness (i.e. social capital) can play a part in the development of young football players.

Two thirds of Mount Gambier interviewees indicate that, due to the general willingness of others to help typical of small country towns, in Mount Gambier it is relatively easy to obtain help for women’s football purposes from local community members. This is so even considering that football (and even more so women’s football) is generally identified as a minor sport within the Mount Gambier community (Dickins, 2007, pers. comm.). For example, strong bonds within the local community can enhance fundraising opportunities:

*We went to a lot of local businesses down here [...] You know, being in the country...a lot of people are really supportive and things like that, they help you out [...]. Lot of people know each other here, you know, so they don’t mind helping you out [...]. It all adds up...and that’s the best thing about being in the country (Pedlar, 2007, pers. comm.).*

According to Mr. Scott Dickson (Regional Development Squad coach and local school teacher with extensive connections with the local community), the social fabric of Mount Gambier helps the local women’s football clubs and institutions also to gain access to other resources, in particular facilities and equipment:

*We are really lucky in Mount Gambier that people ‘bend over backwards’ for us. [...] Getting pitches and all that sort of stuff is no problem, getting sponsorships is also not that difficult [...] If I needed a pitch I just would ring up one of the presidents of the boys’ clubs [...](Dickson, 2007, pers. comm.).*

The access to facilities is an important factor for the local women’s football association and clubs in order to attract recreational players to club football. Birch (2007, pers. comm.), the president of SEWFA, explains that SEWFA normally gains access to facilities of local sporting clubs and schools through its members’ connections with the local community. Adequate facilities are vital for SEWFA’s ongoing quest to ‘put on a good show’ to interest new players in women’s football. For example, in summer, SEWFA organises a social tournament open to all girls and women in town to promote football, and invites players who normally play other sports as well as school players (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.). In winter, instead, all SEWFA league games are played on the same day (Sundays) at a single venue in Mount Gambier, in an attempt to create a greater scale for the event. In this way, most women’s football community members can meet at the same place, reinforce their bonds and create a sense of vibrancy around the games and players. Furthermore, once a year, SEWFA shifts its competitions to the regional towns of Millicent (50 kilometres away), Penola (51 kilometres away) and Naracoorte (102 kilometres away), where potentially good football players may play at school or play other sports. The use of the current Mount Gambier venue was facilitated by networks between members of SEWFA and members of the local Softball Association, who agreed to make available their grounds for the women’s football league in winter. The venues in Millicent, Penola and Naracoorte were also secured through personal connections with local community actors (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.).

Whilst women’s football is definitely not a mainstream sport in Mount Gambier, local community networks often help the local clubs to recruit new players and grow (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.). In Mount Gambier, the relatively small scale of the local community offers a significant advantage in establishing connections, and approaching new players is relatively easy. People are well interconnected and it is

simple to find common acquaintances to approach target individuals (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.). SEWFA deliberately uses its social connections to attract new players to women's football. Its members always make explicit efforts to establish personal connections with people, schools and organisations identified as having useful resources. Typically, they get in touch with other actors through the mediation of common acquaintances, however, if that is not practicable, they do not hesitate to contact directly those in which they are interested (e.g. potential players or parents). The cohesiveness of the local community supports, on one hand, strong relationships among school girls (who tend to know all their peers in town) and, on the other, the ability of women's football volunteers to reach out to the local population to promote the sport. Moreover, the consciousness of each other's inclination to reciprocal support endows local volunteers with a positive attitude towards seeking social contacts to obtain assistance, favouring further investments in social capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

A further advantage in establishing relationships with local community actors derives from the structural organisation of SEWFA. Because the local clubs are not independent bodies but are all integral part SEWFA (see section 4.2.2), any contact made for each club is in fact made by the association itself. The association offers immediate institutional credibility that individual actors may not offer, and people are more comfortable being approached by an association, rather than an individual club or a single person (e.g. a coach, a volunteer or a parent) (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.).

The ability of a sporting system to introduce recreational players to club football is vital to its growth and to the production of 'achievement' athletes. The example of Mount Gambier shows that local community networks can be important in favouring this passage. Nevertheless, Mount Gambier's 'small country town' social dynamics can also pose significant barriers to this endeavour. Membership in close-knit communities can produce negative social capital that restricts individual freedom of initiative (Portes & Landolt, 1996). In particular, close-knit social relationships within the wider local community combined with cultural values placed on sport participation can create significant social pressure on recreational players to undertake mainstream sports instead of football. Over half of Mount Gambier

interviewees mentioned that often promising young football players are also proficient in other sports, such as cricket or netball. In those cases, community networks can contribute to produce feelings of obligation in recreational players to fulfil general community expectations towards sports generally regarded as more prestigious. As a result, football at the club level risks losing potential ‘achievement’ minded players, who decide to fully dedicate themselves to other activities (e.g. netball, cricket or hockey) or are content to play football as a second sport, mostly for social and recreational purposes.

#### *5.2.3.1 Local schools*

All Mount Gambier interview respondents indicated that important social relationships that can encourage recreational players to play at clubs are established and maintained at the local schools. Scale plays an important role here, since (unlike in Adelaide) most Mount Gambier players are of school age and virtually all the town’s girls are connected through the same school social networks (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.). Strong local community bonds, moreover, favour an active involvement of the local schools with women’s football, which provide the local clubs with facilities, coaches and players. The personal involvement as coaches of school employees, for example, facilitates the access to school facilities for women’s football training purposes (Dickson, 2007, pers. comm.). On the other hand, as highlighted by over half of Mount Gambier respondents, coaches, players and volunteers attending or working at local schools act as recruiter for other women’s football personnel (e.g. players) within the local schools.

Apart from the general closure (Burt, 2000) of Mount Gambier wider community’s and schools’ social networks, two factors are particularly important in fostering interest around women’s football among local school actors: Mr. Scott Dickson’s football teaching program and the ability of SEWFA to create and maintain school networks.

Mr. Dickson is a local teacher as well as a well-known local football personality, and is one of the most influential women’s football representatives in the local sphere, including schools. He is currently in charge of the SEWFA Regional Development Squad, and, since 2000, he runs a program for the teaching of football as a school

subject for local high school students. Currently, the program is offered at both public high schools in town (Grant High School and Mount Gambier High School), with gender-exclusive classes for Year 11 and 12 students. The school program was one of the main factors that created local interest in women's football, which later (in 2003) brought to the inception of the women's association and league (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.). The schools are the most important ground of players' recruitment in Mount Gambier. Since women's football is still a very recent phenomenon, the current is the first generation of local players. Most are aged nineteen or below, and many have joined the local clubs coming through the school programs:

*Initially all the girls who played in the league were school girls. We didn't have anyone from outside. [...] Two of the high schools in town now do it [the football school program] and [...] it was running before we had the girls' competition. So, those girls who were in the soccer program didn't have an opportunity to play anywhere. [...] We were fortunate that Scott was pushing those girls: "Now, here there's a competition that you can play in". [...] The girls knew girls in school, had friends who wanted to come along, knew some girls that may be on the soccer program, or interested in playing. [...] I'd say that most of the girls that play had come from the two state schools [...] Mount Gambier High and Grant High School. The girls did the recruiting for us initially (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.).*

All the local women's football administrators interviewed pointed out that fruitful relationships between SEWFA and the local schools can result in greater ability to attract recreational players to the local clubs. This is particularly true for the primary schools, which represent a vital pool for the development of local junior leagues (currently under-developed) and the sustainability of the local game. As it has been the case in Adelaide, the development of junior leagues is also a crucial step for the local sport to enter its 'achievement' phase (Rosso, 2008, 2009a). SEWFA maintains networks with the local schools, especially through the players themselves, Mr. Dickson, and SEWFA committee members associated with particular schools. For example, there are committee members who work in local schools, like Mrs. Althea Inglis, who include women's football information in the schools' newsletters and strive to encourage potential players and volunteers to become involved with the

sport (A. Inglis, 2007, pers. comm.).

SEWFA and the clubs, however, are principally connected with high schools, where most of the players come from. The connections with the primary schools rely especially on Scott Dickson, who is deputy principal at a local primary school. While Scott has a successful record in local football as a coach, extensive social connections and catching enthusiasm about his involvement with the sport, the local women's football community places a great deal of expectations on his role. For instance, even if SEWFA is conscious that its connections with the local primary schools could be strengthened to gain access to a wider and younger pool of players (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.), it expects a single individual to carry the weight of such a crucial task for its growth. Notwithstanding that Scott may in fact be the most appropriate person to generate social capital between SEWFA and local primary schools, this apparent dependence on an individual can be of concern for the ability of local women's football to sustain its growth and progress towards the 'achievement' phase. As highlighted by several interviewees, he became a vital 'gatekeeper' of local women's football networks and his role would be extremely difficult to replace should he cease his involvement with the sport.

### **5.3 Concluding remarks**

While it is difficult to establish at what stage of their careers players engage with 'achievement' women's football, and although it is inaccurate to equate joining a club with becoming an 'achievement' player, joining a club is the first step in that direction. Social capital residing in personal networks of players and communal networks connecting clubs, football institutions and wider local communities can affect both positively and negatively the success of this first career step. In particular, consistent with the model of Seibert et al. (2001), social capital affects the next step of recreational players by facilitating access to information, access to resources, and career sponsorship. In this way, social capital affects important individual (relevant to players) and communal (relevant to sporting communities and systems) factors of success, including self-confidence, motivation, feeling of acceptance and appreciation, opportunity to practice skills, logistic and financial resources, ability (of clubs and systems) to reach out and appeal to players, and to access facilities.

Access to general information on club football (e.g. what it is like playing for a club, what to expect from trials, how team members may relate to each other, what coaches may be like) and access to technical knowledge/expertise can derive from personal networks of recreational players with family members or acquaintances. This is particularly true if they are linked to the football community. Access to this type of information can produce technical and psychological benefits for recreational players who consider trying out for a club, including enhanced self-confidence and motivation.

Motivation and self-confidence are crucial factors of success in ‘taking the next step’, and are facilitated by access to moral support and encouragement through personal networks with family and acquaintances. They can result from encouraging social environments both connected or not with football communities. Networks with actors linked with football communities, however, can produce situation-specific moral support and encouragement, as well as favour the sponsorship of a player to club officials.

Personal social capital, and particularly family social capital (Winter, 2000), is also critical to access other important resources, such as financial and logistic assistance. Given that the passage between recreational and club football normally involves young players who are not financially independent, their relationships with family members is particularly important, especially in regards to club fees and transportation. Consistent with the analysis of Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986), the value of social capital as a means to access resources grows when it is combined with cultural capital (intended here as the sporting culture of families and/or social groups). For recreational players, it can be easier to access resources (e.g. financial, logistic, moral) through relationships with individuals with a ‘football culture’, or at least an interest in the sport. In this case, the common ground can enhance the willingness of network members to make their resources available to others.

While personal social capital facilitates success factors relating to the individual players (e.g. one’s motivation or financial abilities), communal social capital facilitates the general functioning of the school and the club systems, in particular in

regard to facilitating connections between clubs and recreational players. Communal networks, and especially networks within local communities (e.g. Mount Gambier), can also provide recreational players with general feelings of acceptance and support that can increase personal motivation and self-confidence. However, the importance of communal social capital here refers to enhancing the ability of clubs to access facilities and to attract recreational players. Networks within clubs (i.e. 'bonding' social capital) can contribute to a cohesive environment where players will feel accepted and welcome after joining. They can also increase the ability of prospecting/new players to access other resources from fellow club members (e.g. transportation), which can replace shortfalls of their family networks.

Networks across clubs, football institutions and community organisation (including schools), instead, are particularly useful to connect recreational players with the club system, promoting the flow of information across systems. In particular, they can facilitate connections between the club system and local schools, where typically young players play recreationally. To this extent, the benefits of social capital increase when different institutions (i.e. institutions governing club and school systems) share common goals, for example the development of players or the general growth in participation, and have therefore an incentive to seek each other's co-operation. Solid communal networks across local communities and football communities facilitate then the dissemination of information within the school system and favour the access to human resources (i.e. recreational players).

Social capital can also produce negative effects for the passage from recreational players to club football. Consistent with the indications of Portes and Landolt (1996), social capital (in particular 'bonding' social capital) can restrict individual freedom to engage with club football, or contribute to the exclusion of outsiders. Both personal and communal networks (especially local community networks) can generate lack of motivation and low self-confidence when recreational players are object of mockery. Strong local community bonds, especially if combined with a sporting culture orientated towards sports other than football, can discourage recreational players from 'taking the next step' towards football in favour of other mainstream sports. Club networks can also hinder the next step of recreational players. Strong bonds within clubs (i.e. 'bonding' social capital) can reduce the



willingness of prospecting players to become members. 'Bridging' networks, interestingly, can have the same effect: connections between clubs and community organisations (e.g. ethnic or lesbian communities), for example, can contribute to undesirable images of clubs and discourage potential new members. Other potentially detrimental 'bridging-type' networks can take place between institutions. Poor relationships between school and club football institutions can reduce the ability of clubs to reach out effectively to the recreational players' pool.

## Chapter 6

### From club to state women's football

The state level is the true 'achievement' level of South Australian women's football. While the career path of 'achievement' players involves playing at the club level (South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2008a), the production of elite players is not the principal objective of the entire club system. A large proportion of club players simply plays for fun and fitness purposes, and, while there is an 'achievement' dimension to club football, it is mostly limited to clubs involved in the top state competition, the Adelaide-based Premier League (Rosso, 2008, 2009a). The state system, instead, is purposely conceived to develop elite players with a view to supply the Australian national teams. The state system comprises the state development squads, the state teams, the SASI squad, and the national league team (i.e. W League)<sup>6</sup>. There is also a state sub-system in Mount Gambier, where the Regional Development Squad provides a bridge between the local association and the state development squads (see section 4.3.2).

The passage of players between club and state women's football is influenced by a combination of 'push' and 'pull' factors. These refer chiefly to the ability of players to gain desirable technical skills, self-confidence and motivation while playing with their own clubs, and the ability of the state system's institutions to know who and where the desirable players are, and how to facilitate their next career step. Social capital residing in bonds and networks within and across the club and the state systems (i.e. 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital) can play an important role in facilitating the introduction and circulation of knowledge between the systems. This makes available technical resources for players' development to the clubs on one hand ('know-how'), and favours the state's access to the best club players on the other ('know-who'). It also contributes to the creation of a positive general environment for development, in which information circulates freely, and moral support, mentoring and role modelling are readily available. More general social

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<sup>6</sup> In 2008, the National Summer League (a tournament for teams representing each state and run by the states' Institutes of Sport) was replaced by the Westfield W-League, featuring teams associated with the men's A-League clubs. In South Australia, Adelaide United F.C. is now responsible for the female Adelaide United team, which replaced the SASI-run Adelaide Sensation (the local National Summer League team).

relationships across the women's football community, especially involving the players themselves, are particularly important for the reproduction of a feeling of identification with 'achievement' women's football that makes players feel part of an encouraging and caring sporting community. These include virtual social networks (Wellman et al., 1996). Social capital residing in family and local community networks, instead, can help players to overcome structural difficulties such as financial and logistic disadvantage and to develop personal social skills useful to become truly complete athletes (including the ability to maintain social networks and establish new social capital).

Consistent with expectations arising from the broad social capital literature (Portes, 1998), social relationships carry also negative implications for the passage between club and state women's football. The downside of social capital (Portes & Landolt, 1996) in this case includes the marginalisation of individuals in well-bonded squads; the reproduction of feelings of isolation favoured by close club-based social groups and inter-club rivalry; negative role-modelling; excessive distraction and relaxation; and over-reliance on particular individuals.

This chapter draws from interview and questionnaire survey data to understand what type of social relationships can provide access to resources including information, moral support, financial and logistic resources, and career sponsorship that can facilitate the passage of club players to the state system. In so doing, it also keeps into account the negative outcomes of social relationships and the ways in which these can undermine the players' career progression. While it is clear that players maintain social connections outside the football sphere, and that social capital outside football may affect the impact of their football-related social relationships, this chapter is especially concerned with resources accruing by means of connections within the women's football community.

## **6.1 Club networks**

Social networks connecting clubs with each other, with state football institutions, and more broadly with the women's football community, as well as bonds within the clubs, can provide important 'push' and 'pull' elements for the passage of players

from club to state football. Extra-club networks (i.e. ‘bridging’ social capital), for example, can facilitate the process of identification of talented club players, promote a feeling of belonging with the ‘achievement’ women’s football community among clubs, and provide clubs with additional knowledge on the players’ technical development. Intra-club bonds (i.e. ‘bonding’ social capital), on the other hand, can provide friendly and caring environments for the development of players, and contribute to the spread of technical knowledge within the clubs’ structures (i.e. coaching structures). The same networks, however, can also affect negatively the ability of players to move from clubs to state teams. Extra-club networks, for instance, can create excessive dependence on a few individuals to gain access to information, and can exacerbate hostility among clubs and state officials. Intra-club bonds, on the other hand, can pose impediments to the flow of information within clubs, discourage players from participation to state trials and development programs, isolate clubs from the women’s football community (particularly its ‘achievement’ dimension), marginalise talented players and provide excessive distractions from technical development.

### **6.1.1 Extra-club networks**

The function of the state system is to identify talented players from the local pool of athletes, introduce them to special development programs and provide them with the necessary technical abilities and experience to be considered by national coaches. Mr. Tom Sermanni (2008, pers. comm.), the Australian senior national coach, explains that the ability of women’s football systems to access and ‘discover’ players is especially important for Australia to compete internationally, given its significantly lower overall number of players compared to other countries. In 2006, for example, while in Australia there were 189,482 female footballers, other prominent women’s footballing countries could count on much broader players’ pools (i.e. Brazil: 1,444,950 players; Canada: 895,334; China: 1,900,005; Germany: 1,870,633; U.S.A.: 7,055,919) (Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 2007a). Sermanni adds that cross-system social networks can provide an effective means to access and develop the most talented players among the existing Australian pool. He suggests that fruitful social relationships (i.e. ‘bridging’ social capital) between systems produce two-way benefits: on one hand, they favour the passage of up-to-date technical information (‘know-how’) from the upper to the lower system,

and on the other, the transfer of personal information ('know-who') from the lower to the upper one (i.e. identification of local players).

Connections between the club and the state systems can be developed by several categories of social actors. These include the players themselves; club coaches, officials, and volunteers; state coaches and officials; and state leaders (i.e. those in charge of state football institutions). In particular, relationships between club and state coaches and relationships among players involved with clubs and state squads are seen as key facilitating factors for the cross-system circulation of 'know-how' and 'know-who'.

An important barrier that can be overcome by social capital is the reliance of state officials on club members to sponsor the state system within local clubs. While all state squads have appointed coaching staff and officials, they tend to be unpaid volunteers, undertaking these demanding roles on top of their normal life/working schedules. Often, they also maintain positions with local clubs. Notwithstanding their experience, good will and skills, there are significant limitations on the time they can effectively dedicate to state football. This is particularly true in regards to scouting promising players and encouraging them to participate into state/SASI trials, which, notably, is one of the key contributing factors to the state's output of potential national players (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.). State officials tend to promote state squads within their own clubs, where they spend most of their time, often with positive results in terms of own club's players participating to state trials. Generally, however, they do not provide such a strong connection for other clubs, except when social relationships link them to influential club members (e.g. players and coaches).

Adding to the time constraints of state officials, a further barrier to accessing players is the lack of trust that some clubs demonstrate towards the state leaders, particularly SAWSA and SASI. While SAWSA leaves the responsibility to promote players' participation to state trials with the clubs, all club officials and state leaders interviewed in Adelaide confirmed that clubs at times feel alienated from the state system, and do not promote it to their members. Knowing that often players move between clubs to follow friends, clubs become wary of losing their players if these take part in state-run programs, due to social networks that they can form with

players or coaches of other clubs. This is further exacerbated by club rivalries, in the case that state squads are coached by, or include a strong presence of, members of clubs seen as ‘enemies’.

Poor relationships between clubs and the state system can result in club members undermining the participation of their players in state programs (e.g. undermining the image of state coaches and institutions; not communicating relevant information to players, for example trial dates); club coaches being un-cooperative with state coaches (e.g. not releasing players for training sessions); and ultimately, clubs becoming further alienated from the system. Carter (2007, pers. comm.) explains that clubs have a real power to hold back their players from state football, by discouraging them and withholding important information. She highlights that SAWSA and SASI do not interact with all club members, but only with head coaches and club delegates. These, then, refer information to their clubs (mostly by word of mouth) and become effectively the ‘gatekeepers’ of the cross-system networks. Trust between these ‘gatekeepers’ and the state leaders, on the other hand, can assist with increasing the general social capital within the women’s football community (Putnam, 2000; Putnam et al., 1993), enhance the clubs’ feeling of belonging with the state system, and ultimately persuade clubs to actively pursue the development of their players with a view to state squads.

#### *6.1.1.1 Networks among players*

Important connections in strengthening and broadening relations between the state and the club systems can be provided by the players, especially those already involved with state squads. Players are very important to act as ambassadors for the state squads with their own team mates and other players within the club system. They often maintain social relationships and friendships with players from different clubs (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.), including the dedicated virtual social networks provided by the online women’s football forum community (FootballNews, 2008b). For example, nearly 40 per cent of 2007-08 state development squads’ participants indicated that they had more than three friends from other clubs in their development squad prior to the starting date. Moreover, over 60 per cent of 2007-08 state development squads’ participants stated that they normally see women’s football people outside their sport environment. Players, therefore, can be a source of both

first-hand information on the state system and encouragement for their peers.

The self-drive of potential state players is often unable to overcome the feeling of intimidation associated with joining a competitive elite squad. While only 21.7 per cent of surveyed state development squad players asserted that the presence of friends was an important factor in their decision to participate into the program, about 75 per cent of interviewed players with state experience indicated that having friends in a state team can be an important benefit. Scalzi, for example, was a high-profile club player for several years and even took part to state teams as a junior player, but never felt comfortable in joining the SASI program until a fellow player provided a reassuring personal connection.

*I came to the point where I wanted to [...] pursue something more...and Leanne [...] suggested to go to SASI with her, so we went out and trialled together...If she wasn't there, I don't think I would have gone to trial out. Her being there, was definitely a big factor for me going out to trials [...], she was like my safety net [...]. You know, I prefer her to be there...with me (Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.).*

The more players from more clubs become involved with state football, the more they will be able to encourage others to strive to play at that level too (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). In the last few years, SAWSA and SASI have tried to broaden the pool of state players by creating additional development programs (e.g. the Rising Stars and Young Sensations development squads, independent feeding squads to the SASI program; the Under 12 development squad; and the Goalkeepers' development squad) that linked a greater number of local young players to the state system. SAWSA and SASI expect these initiatives to bring further cohesion and new members to the 'achievement' women's football community, which in turn are assumed to provide state leaders with better access to human resources. As confirmed by McCormack (2007, pers. comm.), the breadth of personal links that SASI can establish with clubs through 'sharing' players can result in accessing further club players on one hand, and coaches and volunteers on the other.

Relationships between state and club players play also an important role in introducing 'know-how' in the club system. This refers particularly to 'technical'

social capital accruing to club players who establish connections with state players. This concept refers to relationships based on the exchange of technical resources, typically knowledge and ‘know-how’ (Rosso, 2010b). ‘Technical’ social capital discounts camaraderie in favour of a more professional base for relationships and fosters the passage of knowledge between individuals. ‘Technical’ social capital is accumulated by ‘rubbing shoulders’ (e.g. playing and training frequently) with more experienced and developed individuals, from which players (but also coaches and administrators) can learn. Its effects are similar to the ones of mentoring or role-modelling (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006). For example, Mr. Richie Alagich (2008, pers. comm.), former men’s National League player and current FFSA Coaching Education Officer, is convinced that interaction with high-quality players has the power to stimulate other players, and that introducing experienced individuals into a group can bring out the abilities of others. Alagich suggests, however, that social relationships between players are not necessarily sufficient for ‘technical’ social capital to be effective, as a vital condition is the self-drive to improve of the players themselves. Nevertheless, their establishment is an efficient strategy to transfer knowledge among players, as they can learn directly from role models. On the other hand, as several interviewees put forward, working closely with more advanced role models can also enhance the self-drive of players, who can gain first-hand examples from successful peers. McCormack sums up this aspect pointing at the sixteen out of twenty-one SASI players that in 2007 played at clubs while taking part into the SASI program:

*They [the clubs] get a better trained player [...] who plays at a higher level more often than the rest of the club players do [...]. Other players look up to those SASI players [...] and if they are at training, that’s a benefit for those players as well, ‘cause they can learn from them, and there is potential ‘hero worship’ as well. A lot of the players in the clubs are younger players, and if they get the opportunity to train with a SASI player or National League player, or ever a national team player, there are great benefits for role models and long-term development” (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.).*

While networks among players of different clubs and state squads can positively affect the passage from club to state football (i.e. increasing self-confidence and



drive, and gaining technical proficiency), they can also instil pessimism and exacerbate tensions within the women's football community. For instance, negative accounts of other players' experiences can inhibit new players from engaging with state squads: "[...] before I even went in...something that I have heard...I was actually very very scared. I have known a few people who have been in the program and were not happy about it [...]" (Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.). Another interesting example is provided by the online women's football forum (FootballNews, 2008b), where numerous players maintain virtual social networks (Wellman et al., 1996) with each other and other women's football community members. Protected by user names and relative anonymity, virtual women's football community members often discuss issues relative to state squads and development programs giving vent to frustration, disagreement and conflicts that can adversely affect the enthusiasm of numerous other readers (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). For instance, the lack of support and the bitter criticism that emerged after the unsuccessful first season of the new National League local team (FootballNews, 2008e), or the inherent defeatism transpiring from topics attacking SAWSA and SASI (FootballNews, 2008d) can undermine the confidence of players in the state leaders.

#### *6.1.1.2 Networks among coaches*

Notwithstanding the 'pull' factor provided by relationships between players, an even more critical set of personal relationships can facilitate the mutual exchange of resources between state and club systems. These refer in particular to the flow of information ('know-how' and 'know-who') facilitated by connections between state and club coaches. The link between SASI and the club system, for example, provides clubs with additional resources to develop their players, such as access to sport scientists and leadership (e.g. guidance of experienced coaches). In exchange, state leaders gain access to information regarding potential state players yet to be identified as well as existing state players shared with clubs (behaviour, attitude, technical growth), and 'advertisement' for the state system within the clubs. The SASI head coach (Mr. Kevin McCormack) is aware of the benefits that can accrue from social networks. He takes the time to "*say hello to coaches*" when he goes to watch local competitions, offers them his leadership, and maintains friendly relationships with several club coaches (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.). His official role, however, is not providing resources or guidance to SAWSA, the state

teams or the clubs. He is only expected to select and develop the SASI players. He underlines that building relationships with the local club system is his own initiative and it can only bring mutual benefits if club coaches return his investments in sociability.

Establishing connections and trust between club and state coaches proved not to be a straightforward task. Time constraints on volunteers, prejudice and the inward-looking mentality of some clubs, and the fact that the state system institutions do not prioritise relationship-building strategies (for example, Gittell & Vidal, 1998; Glover et al., 2005) are significant hurdles in linking coaches. The ones who tend to build the most fruitful relationships outside their club remain the ones who are already (or have been previously) involved with state squads or have players in the SASI program, and are willing to invest in sociability. In particular, shared players represent an important common objective for state and club coaches, constituting the opportunity for mutual gain that according to Bourdieu (1986) motivates sociability and is a key condition for the functioning of social capital. For example, club and state coaches who are willing to invest in social capital can develop relationships leading to mutual understanding of the needs and the prospects of the common players, and assist each other in the planning and management of the players' development (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.).

By sharing players with the state system, some club coaches have developed particularly good relationships with the state leaders over the last few years (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.). Significantly, after establishing these relationships, clubs maintained desirable levels of productivity, and tended to become further focussed on players' development and supportive of the state squads (e.g. by providing volunteers). McCormack (2007, pers. comm.) offers the example of Cumberland United W.F.C., which since 2004 is highly consistent in the production of state players, and the coaches of which have repeatedly invested in creating connections with the state system.

*They [the Cumberland coaches] told me regularly that they were [...] about developing players [...] to come into the SASI program [...]. And they were energetic and outspoken to promote that...they were the ones I had the strongest*

*links with. It wasn't just me e-mailing or calling, or saying "hello", they were doing the same back. They came to training sessions, they came to watch games...and they supported us in many other ways, so there was a mutual benefit (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.).*

Mutual investments in social capital, in this instance, were followed by a significant increase in the number of Cumberland United W.F.C. players going to state trials, and relatively high productivity of state players. In 2007, for example, the club has provided over 28 per cent of all players and volunteers involved in the state teams (South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2007), and more were involved in the various development squads (including SASI). Sturt Marion W.S.C. is another club that increased its output of state players after establishing links with the state system through the provision of state coaches (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.; Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.). Scenarios like these are the result of a combination of factors, including social capital. Social capital, in particular, contributes to encouraging club players to take the step to state football, increasing coaching knowledge, and creating the opportunities for career sponsorship.

Trust established between the coaches (often building on formal relationships started with sharing players) and opportunities for mutual gain increase the club coaches' willingness to encourage their players to participate in state trials and to promote the state system within their own clubs. This can enhance the confidence of players in participating, and draws the attention of state coaches to the clubs' players' pool. By enhancing the communication between club and state coaches, furthermore, cross-system coaching networks can also provide the opportunity for career sponsorship. Typically, this occurs when club coaches refer information to state coaches stressing the ability of particular players, who otherwise would not be noted by state coaches.

Cross-system coaching relationships, however, can also affect the technical ability of clubs to develop their players, by making available coaching knowledge that normally pertains to higher levels (i.e. state and national level). All the coaches interviewed (Adelaide, Mount Gambier and national coaches) stated that relationships with other coaches are extremely useful to share knowledge. Sharing knowledge can help coaches to discuss in depth sport-related issues with other

experts, increase problem-solving skills, and update their technical knowledge. Sermanni (2008, pers. comm.) considers off-field relationships among coaches “[...] *Hugely valuable [...], since there are different ways people do things [...]*” to access new knowledge. Also Mr. John Buchanan (2008, pers. comm.) former Australian national cricket coach, maintains that sharing knowledge is a fundamental tool for coaches to develop all-round athletes (“*it’s about exchanging ideas and thoughts...issues and problems, and then solutions to that*”). For example, recently, a Sturt Marion W.S.C. coach brought considerable innovation (i.e. coaching ideas) to her club after establishing coaching connections with the SASI program and the youth national teams (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). Also Ms. Sharon Black, former international player currently coaching, points out that her ability to contact experienced coaches (i.e. SASI coaches) and discuss technical matters is a valuable advantage to overcome difficult situations (Black, 2008, pers. comm.).

Sharing knowledge with state coaches is especially important in relatively isolated systems or sub-systems. Country players (e.g. from outside metropolitan areas) all over Australia, including Mount Gambier, experience a distinct locational disadvantage to play at the state level. This is because in all states the main football systems (and the state squads) refer to the metropolitan areas, and country systems often suffer from lack of coaching expertise (Sermanni, 2008, pers. comm.). Lack of coaching expertise and links with state coaches and state leaders can combine with distance and contribute to further isolate non-metropolitan systems. Cross-system coaching relationships, instead, are an effective way to overcome the inconvenience of distance, bringing closer the country players’ pool and the state coaches on one hand (e.g. encouraging players, promoting state squads, career sponsorship) and introducing needed coaching expertise on the other.

In Mount Gambier, the contacts that Scott Dickson, the Regional Development Squad head coach, maintains with Adelaide and state coaches are the most important channel for the introduction of ‘know-how’ in the regional system. Through his ‘bridging’ social capital with several state and club Adelaide-based coaches, he is generally able to obtain case-specific technical information, coaching resources (e.g. videos), advice and guidance that otherwise would not be available through local networks (Dickson, 2007, pers. comm.). ‘Know-how’ acquired through social capital

also helped Dickson to pass an advanced coaching accreditation course, and to set-up the local Regional Development Squad. The benefits for both the local and the state system as a whole are evident. Building on the trust between himself and the state leaders, Dickson became the ‘gatekeeper’ between Mount Gambier and the Adelaide-based state system. He coaches local players and prepares them for state development squads’ trials; he actively promotes state football as an achievable ‘next step’ for regional players; he keenly sponsors regional players with state coaches; and he strives to engage and interest the state leaders in further developing women’s football in Mount Gambier (Dickson, 2007, pers. comm.). Nearly all the interviewees in Mount Gambier agree that Dickson’s work and his attention to building resourceful relationships with state coaches produced a generalised optimism in the local women’s football community, and endowed several local players with the necessary technical skills, self-confidence and motivation to take part into state trials.

### **6.1.2 Intra-club networks**

Social relationships within clubs pertain mostly to the sphere of ‘bonding’ social capital (Atherley, 2006; Tonts, 2005). Intra-club networks can occur among all club members, including administrators, coaches, other team officials and players. Intra-club networks can be decisive for the passage of club players to state football, both positively and negatively. Strong club bonds can favour interest groups versus widespread development for all players; fuel feelings of isolation from the ‘achievement’ women’s football community; exacerbate fears of losing players due to extra-club social connections; produce negative role modelling and excessive distraction or relaxation; and yield significant peer pressure. On the other hand, networks among players, coaches and administrators can produce a constructive environment for development; career sponsorship; access to extra training; and effective information flow amid club members. To this extent, relationships within clubs (i.e. ‘bonding’ social capital) can complement the effects of extra-club networks (i.e. ‘bridging’ social capital) in terms of introducing information and ‘know-how’ in the clubs. While extra-club connections act as a bridge to bring information into a given club, intra-club networks are useful to propagate that information throughout it.

Strong internal bonds (including players, coaches, administrators, and volunteers) are

often seen as an objective to pursue in South Australian women's football clubs, as confirmed by the commonly observable attempts to boost 'club spirit' through team bonding exercises, club trips, pub crawls and other social events. Internal bonds, however, can also be detrimental for the development of club players. For example, Noarlunga Lions W.S.C. ceased dramatically to produce state players after internal turmoil reinforced by the club's close-knit social fabric caused the loss of valuable players and coaching staff. In 2001, Noarlunga Lions W.S.C. had eight players representing the club at the state level (Rosso, 2006). However, as Neilson (2007, pers. comm.) explains, strong bonds among a group of parents and committee members originated a powerful sub-group of interest advocating decisions against the will of the coaching staff and other committee representatives, effectively splitting the club and compelling the head coach to leave. Moreover, those bonds reinforced the inward-looking attitude of many club members who feared that social networks that their players were establishing with fellow state players would ultimately lead Noarlunga players to follow acquaintances to other clubs. The departure of the coach caused then an exodus of the most talented players (i.e. state players seeking good-quality coaching elsewhere), the loss of connections with state squads, and a prolonged isolation of the club from state football.

On the other hand, intra-club bonds can help to create and maintain a positive sense of community in women's football clubs, providing players with friendly atmospheres and the general support of club members. Furthermore, intra-club bonds can facilitate dialogue and mutual help among club coaches and other members, assisting with the circulation of knowledge within clubs and the management of specific development strategies (Neilson, 2007, pers. comm.). Intra-club bonds, therefore, are important to spread technical knowledge within clubs, often introduced by means of 'bridging' social capital held by single members (e.g. extra-club networks linking head coaches and state leaders). At the same time, however, they can also constitute a barrier to the circulation of information within clubs. This is particularly evident when relationships between head coaches or club delegates and state leaders facilitate the introduction of information, but the quality of clubs' internal networks is too poor to promote effective communication among club members (i.e. lack of trust, lack of interest) (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.).

Although state players do not necessarily come from close-knit clubs, a significant majority of the 137 surveyed state development squad players suggested that the social fabric (Putnam et al., 1993) of their own clubs facilitated their development to some extent. For example, 68.4 per cent obtained encouragement and support from their clubs to make the state squads; 73.9 per cent generally trusted their clubs; 67.4 per cent felt that they could ask club fellow players for help with any football matter; and 54.3 per cent extended that feeling also to any matter not related to football. Moreover, 65.2 per cent stated that they were always aware and up-to-date with plans and programs relative to their club teams, and 71.7 per cent felt a sense of belonging with their clubs and saw them as friendly learning environments where development results from everybody's co-operation. The majority of surveyed players also indicated that, within their clubs, they obtained most support from their team coaches and team mates, as opposed to general club members not part of their teams. Bonds within club squads, therefore, deserve particular consideration as factors of players' development.

#### *6.1.2.1 Bonds within club squads*

Social relationships within club squads, particularly relationships between players and between players and coaches, can result in important 'push' factors towards the state level. Social capital accumulated among team members (including coaches) can contribute to constructive team environments; facilitate career sponsorship with state coaches (when links exist between club and state coaches); facilitate access to extra-training; facilitate the creation of 'technical' social capital; and facilitate transfer of knowledge from coaches to players. To this extent, if resourceful extra-club networks are in place, bonds within club squads can complement their function to introduce technical knowledge and favour its promulgation among club players. The same kind of relationships, however, can also produce negative role modelling; isolate or undermine certain players within club squads; produce excessively relaxed environments (loss of focus); and produce excessive peer pressure.

Social capital between players and coaches is particularly useful for the transfer of knowledge. Trust facilitates communication and increases the willingness of players to follow directions. Knowledge acquired by club coaches through 'bridging' social capital (e.g. with state coaches) can therefore be transmitted more effectively to

players if ‘bonding’ social capital exists within the clubs’ squads. Particularly good relationships with certain players can even motivate coaches to design *ad hoc* training sessions for individual players, or organise additional practice time. For example, Adelaide players Stacey Day and Kristyn Swaffer (both played at state and national levels), during their period in the Adelaide club competitions, were able to gain access to extra training through their coaches:

*I have always had good relationships with my coaches, which [...] goes in your favour [...]. If you wanted to work with someone on something...I found it always easy ‘cause I had a good relationship [...] so I’d just ring up and say: “Are you free here? Can we do this and that?” and if it worked for both of us then we were out there doing extra sessions (Day, 2008, pers. comm.).*

*I had a coach, when I was fifteen and had a part-time job that [...] clashed with my training, he came out with me on alternate nights, he met me one on one and we did some training (Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.).*

Social capital can also stimulate club coaches to sponsor particular players with state coaches. Players interviewed in both Adelaide and Mount Gambier point out examples of coaches being particularly active in encouraging state coaches to consider particular players with whom they had close ‘on-field’ relationships. It is important to note that often those relationships do not involve friendship, but are instead ‘professional’ bonds, maintained exclusively within the football environment.

Intra-club networks at the squad level, including both coaches and players, are important for the creation of constructive team environments, as they promote generalised support and encouragement, and relatively relaxed settings. Readily accessible encouragement within teams helps to boost players’ self-confidence and motivation, which are seen as key factors in ‘taking the step’ to state football (Black, 2008, pers. comm.). On the other hand, bonds between players (particularly when young) can be conducive to excessive relaxation and excessive opportunities for distractions, especially during training sessions. This leads players to lose focus on their development in favour of the social relationships within the team and ultimately negatively affects their motivation.



Peer relationships among players can enhance the effect of role modelling. By developing personal relationships and trust, players become comfortable in seeking each other's help and offering guidance. This facilitates the accumulation of 'technical' social capital, one of the most effective means of development for young players. 'Technical' social capital is occasionally pursued by deliberate club strategies, particularly those clubs with efficient extra-club networks. Swaffer (2008, pers. comm.) tells the story of when she and other high-profile players were signed by Cumberland United W.F.C. with the declared purpose of acting as role models for the broad pool of young talented players composing the club's senior team. She points out that the technical relationships established in that club squad (matched by the players' drive to succeed) have helped to develop several current state players, as confirmed by the high proportion of Cumberland United W.F.C. players selected by state coaches in the last few years (South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2007).

Role modelling is not always positive. As bonds among players on a same squad can be conducive to 'technical' social capital, they can also favour the transfer of undesirable habits and attitudes between players, as well as exacerbating peer pressure. For example, Swaffer (2008, pers. comm.) points to her experience with a local club when the most popular players used to indulge in drinking, and often included other players in "*so-called bonding sessions*" where alcohol was consumed. Under the influence of alcohol, the group dynamics became extreme, and the bonds between the players led to the marginalisation of some. The situation evolved then in a breakdown of 'on-field' relationships, and subsequent lack of performance and development.

## **6.2 State networks**

Once club players become engaged with the state squads, they face the challenges of adapting to a new reality, forming new bonds with the other state players, and, especially, maintaining their position within the state system and succeeding in their development. Social capital residing in bonds within state squads can enhance the players' motivation, enthusiasm and self-confidence, and help them to overcome the

initial difficulties associated with state football. On the other hand, excessively strong bonds within state squads can be conducive to the marginalisation and/or early drop out of newcomers. Social capital residing in networks between football institutions, instead, can provide access to ‘hidden’ resources, such as players playing in other systems and subsystem (e.g. boys’ leagues), and facilitate the inclusion of regional players in the state system. Cross-institutional networks, however, can also lead to excessive reliance on a few individuals for the interaction between systems, and lack of initiative to develop new networks.

### **6.2.1 Bonds within state squads**

Relationships within state squads are an important element for the success that players may experience at the state level. In particular, relationships between players can stimulate or hinder the self-confidence and motivation of fellow players, especially newcomers. Social bonds within squads can affect the relative feeling of inclusion that newcomers experience when joining the state system.

Newcomers need to adapt quickly to the competitive environment of state squads, and often they face the challenge of being introduced into groups with pre-existing social bonds. While state squads are formally re-constituted each year, the core groups of players composing them tend to remain together for several seasons moving through different age groups (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). Introduction into state squads can indeed be a challenging experience for outsiders. Swaffer (2008, pers. comm.) says that, at times, state squads are characterised by tight sub-groups (“*cliques*”) that tend to reinforce their own identity and “*can be intimidating*” for newcomers.

The high expectations and the competitiveness of the environment can become significant hurdles for players who cannot rely on the immediate support of peers accruing from social relationships within their squad. While the players’ self-drive can balance the lack of support that they may experience at first in state squads, social relationships within squads can boost motivation through the reinforcement of self-confidence accruing from moral support provided by caring fellow team members.

*Obviously, if you are with people you know you are more comfortable. You are more likely to come out of your shell [...]. If you enter an environment where you don't know anyone [...] that could be hard, because you tend to go in a shell. You are not sure of how you are going to be accepted [...]* (Alagich, 2008, pers. comm.).

The most evident examples of difficulties of newcomers lacking social capital within state squads refer to the Mount Gambier players. The Mount Gambier sub-system has started only recently to supply players to the state system. This, combined with the physical distance from Adelaide (approx. 450 kilometres), where the state squads are run, and the fact that Mount Gambier players play in different competitions from their Adelaide counterparts, determines an almost total lack of pre-existing social connections between players of the two areas. All four regional players selected in state squads experienced isolation and consequent loss of self-confidence when they first joined their respective programs in Adelaide (Andrews, 2007, pers. comm.; McCormick, 2007, pers. comm.; Peate, 2007, pers. comm.; Pedlar, 2007, pers. comm.). A parent remembers that: *“When we went to the trials, it was all these girls...and somebody knew somebody, and we knew nobody. [...] I didn't know who to look for. All I could look for was the person with the clipboard! [...] That was really tough”* (McCormick, 2007, pers. comm.). While the Mount Gambier players all knew each other well, their bonds did not help to mitigate the isolation that they felt in their allocated squads. Their parents agree that had they all been in the same state squad, their football performance would have been more consistent in the first period. Instead, loss of self-confidence brought up by feelings of isolation undermined the players' motivation to continue and affected their performance. Critically, all players improved their performance once they started to establish the first social connections with their fellow players, and feeling accepted in their new squad environments boosted their confidence and convinced them to persevere with their experience.

The ability of players to establish social capital within state squads, therefore, affects the likelihood of drop out. Social bonds within squads can help players to overcome technical challenges, and motivate them to focus on their development. For instance, players experiencing frustration or excessive pressure can find relief by sharing their

distress with team mates, and knowing they are not alone in their experience can prove an important motivating factor (Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.). For current national player Stacey Day, friendship with a fellow player provided significant benefits during her first period at SASI, and helped her to overcome the initial hurdle of being accepted by her new team mates.

*Me and one of my friends, Kirralea [...], we went into SASI at the same time, so I had someone to partner up with. She was going through the same thing at the same time. [...] I knew her through all the state teams [...] We were both going through the same thing...and she was my age, [...] so we just kind of stuck together for that initial period. And then...we met other people. [Had Kirralea not been there] I would have been probably very shy, and a bit 'stand-offish'. [...] You wouldn't go out your full potential, 'cause you wouldn't want to do something wrong...look like...look stupid or anything like that. [...] But if I did, I knew she was there...it did help. A lot. (Day, 2008, pers. comm.).*

On the other hand, excessively strong bonds within state squads can lead to the marginalisation of certain players. Players lacking connections within their squad face the risk of being excluded from the squad's social networks, which often anticipates poor interaction on the field and ultimately technical isolation. This is especially observable when particular sub-groups (i.e. cliques) wield psychological power over the others. This can be due to simple lack of off-pitch social attractiveness of new players (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.), specific social dynamics of the rest of the group (Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.), but also due to the competitiveness of the environment. In state squads, often, players are primarily concerned with their own development and opportunities and may see talented new additions to their squads as threats (Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.). In this case, strong social bonds among squad members can favour more or less deliberate attempt to undermine undesired newcomers.

## **6.2.2 Networks between football institutions**

The passage of club players to the state system can be facilitated by effective networks between the women's football governing bodies. In particular, social capital between institutions can facilitate access to hidden human resources ('know-

who'), especially players. Perhaps even more importantly, relationships between sports institutions can bring closer different systems by establishing institutional trust, which can then translate into joint development initiatives. While its effects are mostly positive, social capital across institutions can also create excessive reliance on single (or few) individuals to efficiently run development initiatives aimed at driving players towards state squads.

Networks across football governing institutions can endow state leaders with access to hidden human resources. This is particularly relevant for players playing in regional sub-systems (e.g. Mount Gambier) and in boys' leagues who are not directly accessible to SAWSA through conventional networks (i.e. with women's football clubs). While state players tend to come from the Adelaide club system, where the great majority of South Australian women's football players play, it is important for SAWSA and SASI to gain access to talented exceptions who for logistic or personal (often family-related) reasons play in different systems. As seen in chapter 5, it is not uncommon for young girls to play in boys' teams. Furthermore, numerous current and past South Australian state and national players share common experiences in boys' leagues, and, those interviewed, indicate that playing with boys as young players helped their development significantly (for example, Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.).

Accessing such human resources, therefore, can increase the state's output of elite players. However, gaining access to players outside the women's football community is often complicated. A significant hurdle lies in the problems that SAWSA and SASI experience in communicating with other boys' football associations, often due to the lack of common goals for female players and consequent difficulties in establishing networks: "*Although we send out information to every [boys] junior association [...] about our development squads, [...] there is that breakdown in communication [...]*" (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). Apart from the Western Border Soccer Association of Mount Gambier, no other boys' associations in South Australia (this does not include FFSA, the state's umbrella institution of which SAWSA is now part) demonstrate a real interest in developing the women's game (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.).

In Mount Gambier, instead, SAWSA managed to create connections with the local association (Western Border Soccer Association), which since 2006 incorporates the only regional women's association in the state (SEWFA – South East Women's Football Association) and since 2003 supports local girls' competitions (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.). The positive relationships between SAWSA and the Mount Gambier institutions are key elements for the development of women's football in the region, and the recent local contribution to South Australian state squads. The development of networks between SAWSA, Western Border Soccer Association and SEWFA established an important level of trust linking institutions and regions, which favoured the willingness of all actors to seek and offer co-operation in order to further develop women's football in Mount Gambier and link the local players with the state system. As Carter (2007, pers. comm.) puts it: "*Mount Gambier was different, they had some really proactive people within their organisation [...]. From that, we had discussions with people from Mount Gambier on how to assist the players who have the potential to go on state teams [...]*". Trust and common goals facilitated joint initiatives that created opportunities for local players to be seen by state coaches without having to undertake the trip to Adelaide to take part into state trials outside the comforting environment of their own sporting milieu.

Joint initiatives of SAWSA and SEWFA include the organisation of an annual Mount Gambier summer tournament and the institution of the Regional Development Squad. The Mount Gambier Tournament started in 2006, when SAWSA involved Western Border Soccer Association in the organisation of a two-day pre-season tournament for South Australian and Victorian teams (Football Federation Victoria, 2005). The tournament is important for the local women's football community, as it brought about the feeling of belonging to a wider sporting community (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.). Furthermore, it offers local players the opportunity to be seen by SAWSA representatives and state coaches and be invited to state trials, as SAWSA sends its state development squads to participate (Pedlar, 2007, pers. comm.).

The Regional Development squad is the most notable example of results deriving from cross-institutional co-operation. It was set up in 2006 thanks to the trust that SAWSA developed in Scott Dickson, a motivated local coach deemed sufficiently prepared to deliver a high-quality development program and represent the state

system in the Mount Gambier region. After some initial frictions on the institutions' respective roles (SAWSA and SEWFA) in the initiative, moreover, the personal trust existing between state leaders and local representatives (in particular Scott Dickson) led to SAWSA empowering SEWFA with all aspects of the program in 2007 (Birch, 2007, pers. comm.). The Regional Development Squad became the 'technical bridge' between Mount Gambier and the state system, and, since its inception, facilitated the passage of several local players to state squads, as Carter (SAWSA executive officer) tells:

*We have actually set up a Regional Development Squad in Mount Gambier. There were fourteen-fifteen players involved last year [...]. Those players come to Adelaide, trial with our state teams, and if they are selected then they have a program that they can work with within their own region, rather than having to come to Adelaide every week. [...] There were two players who were selected [in state teams] [...] and two players who were shadow players. This is only the second year that this is up and running, so it is a very new concept, but we think it is beneficial for that area. [...] But what happened along the way, the South East Women's Football Association felt they had no ownership over it. This year [...] they will administer everything to do with that program, and we will be like the resource that they can call on if they have any difficulty, or they need any assistance [...]. We have been able to help them to form something. For instance, with the Regional Development Squad we provided them with information about selection processes [...], we were able to link their coaching with Kevin [McCormack – SASI head coach] and our development squad coaches (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.).*

The only limitation to the role of networks between football institutions as facilitators of players' movement to the club system consists in the risk of building excessive reliance on a few individuals to maintain the networks themselves. Institutions and regions should be connected by a variety of personal relationships, to guarantee the maintenance of the institutional networks if the actors change. However, institutions are often linked by single personal connections. The very existence of a connection, moreover, can prevent actors from investing in new relationships (i.e. creating wider regional social capital), as opposed to strengthening

the existing one. SASI and SAWSA, for instance, are mainly connected through one strong relationship between the respective leaders (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.). The link has proved resourceful in several occasions, such as the recent institution of two joint development squads, the 'Rising Stars' and the 'Young Sensations' (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.), but the quality of the outcomes would arguably decrease should one of the two leaders be replaced. Similarly, McCormack (2007, pers. comm.) notes that the closeness between the Adelaide and Mount Gambier women's football regions relies heavily on the figure of Scott Dickson (the Regional Development Squad coach), and explains that, should this link disappear, SASI and SAWSA would be lost in identifying players from that region.

### **6.3 Family and community networks**

Resources accruing to players from family and local community social capital are less important in reaching the state level than in becoming involved with women's football beyond its recreational sphere. However, while the passage to state football is affected more by football-related networks than 'unrelated social capital', relationships within the players' families and their wider local communities can nonetheless facilitate access to certain important resources. Family social capital (Winter, 2000) can provide access to logistic and financial resources, as well as contributing to maintain the players' self-confidence and motivation. Generalised social capital at the community level (Putnam, 2000), instead, can help players to gain social skills useful for their all-round development as athletes, including the ability to create further personal social capital (Collins, 2004).

As seen in chapter 5, relationships within the players' families can be particularly important for the self-confidence and motivation of players. To be considered for state squads, players normally possess satisfactory drive and confidence. Furthermore, confidence and motivation to 'take the step' to state football are often maintained and increased through relationships with other football players or coaches. Nonetheless, caring and attentive families can provide additional encouragement in difficult moments, and mitigate the negative effects of social relationships (or the lack of it) within clubs and state squads (see sections 6.1.2.1 and 6.2.1). In contrast, Scalzi (2007, pers. comm.) maintains that the general indifference



of her family during her difficult period at SASI contributed to her lack of confidence and her decision to quit the program.

Considering that most players engage with state football under the age of eighteen, families are also key sources of financial resources. This is particularly evident in the case of players living in metropolitan fringe and regional areas far from the city of Adelaide, where the state squads are normally conducted. As suggested by Neilson (2007, pers. comm.) and Birch (2007, pers. comm.), the importance of family social capital, or the willingness of parents to help their children (Coleman, 1988), increases with the increase of relative disadvantage of the players' families, in particular economic and locational disadvantage. For example, all the Mount Gambier state players relied heavily on their families to travel to Adelaide every week once they were selected for state squads. Families contributed to organise fundraising events, travel arrangements and accommodation in Adelaide for overnight trips (Andrews, 2007, pers. comm.; McCormick, 2007, pers. comm.; Peate, 2007, pers. comm.; Pedlar, 2007, pers. comm.).

Also general local community social capital can contribute to overcome logistic and financial hurdles. For instance, fundraising events tend to be more successful if held within a well-bonded local community (Pedlar, 2007, pers. comm.), and community bonds can help players to access transportation in the form of lifts and carpooling (Dickins, 2007, pers. comm.). To this extent, resourceful community networks can mitigate the adverse effect of distance. More to this point, as Birch (2007, pers. comm.) suggests, Mount Gambier players are in greater need of support than their Adelaide counterparts to travel to state squad events. However, they may find support more easily than many city-based players due to the relatively high levels of social capital in their local community.

Social capital within local communities is also helpful in endowing young players with precious social skills. Often, elite players dedicate much of their time to football and relegate their social lives outside football networks to the minimum. While this may imply the ability to establish strong connections within the women's football community, it risks depleting players of other relationships and experiences useful for their social development as all-round persons. Both Sermanni (national women's

football coach) and Buchanan (former men's national cricket coach) assert that young athletes can gain important experience and skills through social interaction within their local communities, including playing (even just for fun) other sports (Buchanan, 2008, pers. comm.; Sermanni, 2008, pers. comm.). These skills, at times, make the difference between successful and unsuccessful players. Social interaction outside a single sporting community (i.e. women's football community) favours the development of emotional and social skills, including the ability to form and use further social capital. The development of emotional and social skills, in turn, favours the technical development of the athletes.

*Skills, but also interaction...social interaction [...]. As a person...if all those things are happening, I think that they'd lead to a maturing of the individual, and a maturing of the individual make them able then to handle, I think, situations [...] that they can bring on the sport's field. So they become better problem solvers...become better decision makers (Buchanan, 2008, pers. comm.).*

To this point, Sermanni (2008, pers. comm.) adds that in communities with solid social fabrics, where the level of perceived risk of “*letting children play in the streets*” is lower due to the trust towards other community members, children are more likely to be involved in different sporting activities. He also suggests that in country towns, where generalised social capital is arguably higher than in cities (Hofferth & Iceland, 1998), community networks offer better conditions for the development of athletes into potential state and national players.

*Very much so [...]. Not just the players' development, also the social development. You know, I find that the kids that we have from the country are very well grounded and good to deal with. [...] The more I go to country towns and mix in those kind of communities, the more convinced I am that it gives them a great grounding for sports [...] because they are still in a system where they play all the different sports, [...] so they have multi-skills. [...] The problem is that kids don't play anymore...unless you are from a country town, kids don't go out and play in the streets.*

For potential state players, therefore, local community networks can provide

resources that complement the effects of other types of relationships, in particular relationships with fellow club members and actors involved in the state system. Football-related social capital affects in particular the abilities of players to gain sport-specific technical resources, while local community (and family) social capital can endow players with more general, but highly desirable, problem-solving abilities.

## **6.4 Concluding remarks**

The state system, conceived to identify and prepare potential future national players, is the real ‘achievement’ level of South Australian women’s football. State players, typically, are club players possessing particular technical and psychological strengths identified by means of trials or scouting. In 2008, the state system comprised seven junior development squads (for players aged between twelve and seventeen) based in Adelaide and one in Mount Gambier, four state teams largely made up of players selected from the development squads, the SASI squad (comprising a mix of junior and senior players), and the National League team (mostly made up of senior players). Apart from the Regional Development Squad, every other state squad is based in Adelaide.

The production of state players is strongly dependent on the ability of club players to acquire appropriate technical and psychological attributes, and of state football institutions to access desirable players. These abilities are affected by the introduction and circulation of information (‘know how’ and ‘know who’) between and within club and state systems and sub-systems, and by the levels of confidence and motivation of players. Moreover, state players must hold the necessary logistic and financial resources to pay fees and be able to travel frequently to central Adelaide. Social capital, both in its communal and personal forms (Collins, 2004), and its ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ conceptions (for example, Tonts, 2005), can influence access to information, practical resources and career sponsorship that, consistent with the model of Seibert et al. (2001), affect the possibilities of career success of women’s football players.

The introduction of knowledge into the club system is a key component to foster the production of high quality players for the state squads, and is favoured by social

capital accumulated across the club and the state systems. Relationships linking players are effective vehicles for the accumulation of ‘technical’ social capital (i.e. the ability to learn directly from role models), one of the most important resources accessible to players by means of interpersonal connections. Similarly, relationships between club and state coaches (i.e. ‘bridging’ social capital) can be especially effective to enhance coaching knowledge (‘know-how’) throughout the club system. ‘Bridging’ social capital across systems is also a key component to the transfer of ‘know-who’ from the club to the state system. Cross-system coaching relationships can endow state coaches with precious information about club players, relieving some pressure from state officials to scout and monitor potential elite players while playing for their clubs. ‘Know-how’ and ‘know-who’ across systems are also facilitated by effective relationships between football institutions. Cross-system social capital can also produce the opportunity for career sponsorship of particular players.

The ability to create ‘bridging’ social capital across system, however, depends chiefly on the willingness of individual actors (e.g. coaches) to invest in sociability, which, as envisaged by Bourdieu (1986), relies upon opportunities for mutual gain. Consequently, the most fruitful relationships in this sense tend to occur between coaches who share players (i.e. players who play in club and state squads at once), and who share the common goal of their overall development. The existence of a pretext to form a relationship is therefore an important element in the creation of social capital among coaches.

‘Know-how’ and ‘know-who’ are facilitated by a mix of ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ social capital. While ‘bridging’ social capital can play an important part in introducing information in women’s football systems, the circulation of that information within the systems is also affected by ‘bonding’ social capital. Relationships within individual clubs, for example, help to disseminate coaching knowledge acquired by individual coaches (e.g. club head coach) through ‘bridging’ relationships with state coaches throughout other club squads. In the same way, ‘bonding’ social capital within a regional system can make resources (i.e. knowledge) acquired by one club available to others, contributing to the general enhancement of coaching knowledge throughout the system (or parts of it). This is

consistent with the theory of ‘weak ties’ (Granovetter, 1973, 1983), by which innovation is diffused throughout dense networks by means of strong bonds, but is introduced into those networks by means of ‘weak ties’ held by particular network members with actors belonging to different social groups. In this sense, ‘bonding’ social capital is important to complement the positive effect of ‘bridging’ relationships as facilitators of knowledge transfer across and throughout women’s football systems.

Social capital can affect the passage from club to state football also by influencing the self-confidence and motivation of players, their financial and logistic abilities, and their overall development as athletes. Self-confidence and drive can be boosted or markedly spoiled by relationships among players, within both club and state squads. In particular, existing networks within state squads can be very important for the feeling of belonging that newcomers experience when they first engage with the state system. The presence of acquaintances in state squads, for example, can significantly affect the feeling of inclusion that players experience in relation to the ‘achievement’ women’s football community, which in turn can be a determinant of their football performance. Also family and local community social capital can affect motivation and confidence. However, they are particularly relevant to the players’ financial and logistic abilities (especially for those living far from central Adelaide) to participate to state football programs, and their overall personal development as athletes, which includes the ability to relate to others and to create and draw on social connections as means to advance their sporting careers.

## Chapter 7

### From state to national women's football

Playing at the national level is the ultimate aim of all Australian 'achievement' women's football players. In 2009, the national system comprises three teams: the Matildas (senior), the Young Matildas (Under 19), and the Matildas U17 (Football Federation Australia, 2009c). While the Matildas can draw on the two under-age squads to select their players, the national system relies heavily on the state systems to sustain its youth athletes' pool. State players (e.g. state teams, SASI program, National League team) are monitored by state coaches and state leaders, observed by national scouts at national tournaments and, if deemed good enough, invited to national camps to be closely observed by the national coaches in a competitive and highly specialised environment. Players can then be incorporated into the national teams' group, invited regularly to training camps and selected to represent Australia in international competitions.

For South Australian players there are two possible pathways to national selection. They can be identified by state leaders (in particular the SASI coach) from the local competitions and state squads and recommended to national coaches, or they can be noticed directly by national scouts during National Youth Championships (attended by the Under 15 and Under 17 state teams) or the National League (attended by Adelaide United and formerly by Adelaide Sensation). Players identified as potential national players are offered a 'full scholarship' with the SASI program, which entitles and requires them to participate into the SASI program on a full-time basis (i.e. five to six days per week). Generally, players with realistic possibilities to 'take the next step' to the national level are youngsters aged fifteen to eighteen (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.).

Social capital can be an important factor in facilitating the passage of South Australian players to the national system. In particular, while families, friends and acquaintances can still provide players with general moral support and encouragement, the high level of achievement associated with national selection makes resources accruing from football-related social capital especially useful to this

purpose. Social capital can also play a part in undermining the players' opportunities to move to the national system. However, at this high level, the “*dark side of social capital*” (Portes, 1998) is a significantly less powerful component of underachievement if compared to the passages between school, club and state football.

Personal relationships of players within state and national squads can affect their self-confidence and motivation, and, subsequently, their football performance. These relationships can also affect the players' ability to accumulate ‘technical’ social capital, experience effective mentorship, and take advantage of career sponsorship. Relationships across systems (e.g. state and national systems), instead, especially those involving coaches, can facilitate career sponsorship and the flow of information. In particular, cross-system coaching networks can favour access to innovation and coaching knowledge (‘know-how’), access to information on specific players (‘know-who’), and enhanced understanding on the requirements of national coaches for aspiring national players (‘know-what’).

This chapter makes use of data from interviews with women's football state and national leaders and players with significant experience to underline the role of football-related social connections in influencing the access to resources affecting the passage of South Australian players to the national system.

## **7.1 Bonds within squads**

Personal social capital (Collins, 2004) of players within state and national squads can influence the ability of athletes to perform by affecting their self-confidence and motivation. This can result in enhanced or reduced possibilities to be appreciated by states coaches and leaders and to be recommended for national selection, or to retain positions with national squads. Social capital within squads can also facilitate the accumulation of ‘technical’ social capital, and increase the effectiveness of mentorship. For example, Carter (2007, pers. comm.) states that: “*The networking of players [...] is very important in terms of the fact that they are [...] players of the same abilities or higher abilities, and that certainly does help players' progression*”.

It is important to note that both the state and the national systems have significantly increased in size in the last decade, thus increasing the players' opportunity to accumulate social capital. In the 1990s, for example, there was only one open age South Australian state team and one national team, and all national players were selected directly by the national coaching staff at the annual National Championship (Black, 2008, pers. comm.). Prior to the establishment of the Intensive Training Centre (ITC) in Adelaide and the creation of the SASI program in 1994 and 1995 (Harlow, 2003a) aimed at the introduction of local players into the national system, the opportunities to create social capital among elite players were few. Today instead, because there are several age-exclusive national and state squads, players can develop social networks with coaches and with a relatively extensive web of high-quality players of similar age who share their same experiences. Within this framework, local players can count on various social references when seeking moral or technical support, and have numerous opportunities to be noticed by actors who can provide links with the national system. Similarly, those who reach the national level can often count on already established, potentially resourceful networks.

*When I was first in the national and in the state teams, I was a younger player with a lot of older players. Now [...] [players] can develop through the state teams with their friends, so they obviously have different types of social networks [...]. They [...] have good social networks [...], so that when they do reach the higher level they've already got those basic networks available to them. [...] If you have more programs set in place for the junior players, then they can have obviously more people to learn from, whether they'd be their team mates, whether they'd be other coaches [...] and then you can keep those networks (Black, 2008, pers. comm.).*

### **7.1.1 Bonds within state squads**

Social relationships within state squads can help players to maintain or increase motivation, self-confidence, technical knowledge and skills. They can provide constructive environments for effective mentorship, and a precious source of moral support. However, they can also provide occasions for loss of focus, marginalisation of particular players, and induce loss of motivation. Importantly, at higher levels (e.g. SASI squad) players tend to focus on the realistic possibility to compete for national



selection, and they are less vulnerable to distractions provided by the presence of friends in their squad. At the SASI and National League levels, for instance, the most important implication of negative social capital refers to marginalisation. Instead, distractions provided by social bonds can be an important factor of underachievement for younger and less advanced players (e.g. state development squads).

One of the principal benefits of social relationships within state squads is the possibility to create ‘technical’ social capital by means of constructive bonds among high-quality players, which can help them to learn from each other (Alagich, 2008, pers. comm.; Carter, 2007, pers. comm.; McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.; Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.). Alagich (2008, pers. comm.), for example, is convinced that training and playing on a regular basis with other top-quality players has the power to stimulate learning within squads. He explains that in squads with an emphasis on succeeding, and especially when the average level of players is already high (as in the case of state squads), athletes are attracted by better quality players. Such a dynamic is deemed an important foundation for further improvement.

In state squads, however, often players interact exclusively with same-age peers. If age-exclusive state squads can help players to relate more comfortably to their team mates and to establish social bonds, they preclude the development of social relationships with more experienced athletes that could provide precious ‘technical’ social capital. This motivates the policy of incorporating older players with little probability of making the national team (due to the fact that national coaches tend to prefer young players) in the SASI squad to act as mentors for the young promising ones. *“We have got some older players who we kept in the squad to provide role models for the younger players [...]. If we have no role models for them to look to, [...] it wouldn’t be a beneficial environment for development”* (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.).

However, the simple presence of good or experienced players in a given state squad is not enough to create ‘technical’ social capital. On-field relationships can favour the transfer of knowledge and skills between players only provided that the mentored players possess the necessary drive to succeed and a great deal of self-discipline

(Alagich, 2008, pers. comm.; Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.). Moreover, players must be able to build solid relationships with their mentors to be able to access the knowledge that they could pass on. Swaffer (2008, pers. comm.) explains that, while there is no need for players to share experiences outside the football environment (e.g. dining together), it is very important that they spend sufficient time together on the field and that there is sufficient affinity among them to trust each other and develop a real ‘technical’ relationship. *“I think that mentors can be incredibly valuable, [...] if you have access to that person on a regular basis and you are actually working with them. [...] You can learn from them [...] on the field; you can speak to each other [...]”* (Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.).

Notably, the attempt to build ‘technical’ social capital through dynamics of mentorship can also imply a negative aspect. As experienced, *“popular”* players can help to increase the technical standard of other players, they can also contribute to lower it. This is particularly observable when players chosen as mentors maintain a disruptive attitude towards work ethics (especially at training) and spoil the spirit of sacrifice of the younger ones, which is a delicate and important ingredient of sporting success (Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.).

In addition to ‘technical’ social capital, bonds within state squads can affect the psychological circumstances in which players attempt to undertake the step towards national women’s football. Maintaining focus for extended periods while meeting significant physical demands is a key factor of consistent performance at a very high level, and can take a significant toll on the players’ psychological stability. All the interviewed players who reached the national level agree that social relationships within state squads can help players to fulfil their potential by providing resources of self-confidence and motivation. Black (2008, pers. comm.), for instance, asserts that when positive social bonds exist between state squads’ fellow players: *“you can push each other, [...] you obviously have more of an understanding with those players”*.

As confirmed by the great majority of interviewees, motivation is one of the key factors of success for players at the state level and beyond. It can be affected by self-confidence, and it can be maintained and developed through positive relationships with coaching staff, fellow team members and the surrounding environment. While,

arguably, top-quality state players already possess satisfactory levels of self-drive (Alagich, 2008, pers. comm.), this can be reinforced by moral support and constant encouragement of caring coaches and fellow players that contribute to maintain and increase their self-confidence. On the other hand, low levels of self-confidence due to particularly difficult events (on or off the field), such as injuries or lack of consideration of the coaching staff, can dramatically reduce the ability of players to push themselves to achieve their goals. National player Stacey Day (2008, pers. comm.), for example, maintains that it is very important for high-level players to have at least one person within their football environment to whom they can turn when they lack confidence or motivation or when they need advice.

Also the experience of national team's veteran Sharon Black (2008, pers. comm.) suggests that bonds among top-quality players at the state level, particularly when sharing the same goals, can facilitate their 'next step' to the national system by helping them to maintain motivation and focus. Sharon was first selected in the senior national team as a teenager, before the creation of the SASI program in 1995. Her first experience at the national level, however, was brief. She was soon dropped from the team, and, until the SASI program was created, she did not return to the top level. She maintains that the main problem was a rapid loss of motivation and her inability to regain her self-drive.

*When I got dropped from the national team I probably [...] lacked motivation. Obviously, it is difficult if there are only two or three players from South Australia in the national team. It's difficult to keep up the motivation. [...] Having to go out and train in the off-season as an elite athlete [...] I didn't have that drive* (Black, 2008, pers. comm.).

Importantly, although she was not the sole South Australian player in the national team at the time, Sharon lacked a readily accessible 'technical network' to share her experience back in Adelaide. She explains that the creation of the SASI program proved very important for her, as the new social network provided her with the necessary motivation to push herself to perform at the highest level. Sharon became involved with the SASI program soon after its creation, and achieved a new selection in the national team. This time, she maintained her position with the Matildas and

went on to play 56 international games, including the 1999 World Cup and the 2000 Olympic Games.

In contrast to Black, Scalzi (2007, pers. comm.) provides an example of how social dynamics within state squads can decrease the motivation of some players. Sandra Scalzi is recognised locally as one of the most talented players in South Australia. In 2008, she played for Adelaide United in the inaugural national W-League and achieved considerable personal success. However, she was never selected for national teams, and had only a brief experience with the SASI program. In 2007, she quit the program after little more than one year of part-time participation, mostly due to loss of motivation induced by a feeling of not belonging with the core group of players and the SASI coaching staff. In particular, Sandra points out that the relationships between SASI players were characterised by excessive competition, and therefore were not facilitating the acquisition of knowledge from fellow players (i.e. 'technical' social capital).

*It's like they are there to learn, but...completely against each other. [...] You can get a 'star player' who comes out, and none of the girls would like her because she is a threat to their position. [...] They are in their own little world...everything revolves around their program [...]. It's more like an individual effort than a team. [...] This probably does not affect relationships off the field, but on the field, it affects relationships [...], you don't shine off each other. [...] When you think you know best, you think you can do whatever, instead of actually listen to what your peers have to say and taking that in...as constructive criticism, rather than say [...] "you don't know, what do you know? I'm better than you" (Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.).*

Moreover, the highly competitive nature of the environment and an exclusive focus on career achievement became causes of psychological stress (“*People taking the fun out of things...can be very draining*”) and significantly reduced Sandra’s ability to enjoy her football while meeting the demanding standards of the program. The consequent loss of motivation was then reinforced by the lack of an ideal relationship with her coach, which ultimately decreased Sandra’s self-confidence. While she developed a good relationship with an assistant coach, the lack of emotional support

that she generally perceived in the squad (“*an extra push would be nice*”) combined with other factors (i.e. time consumption, lack of financial return, and poor moral support from family and acquaintances outside the SASI program) to undermine her will to succeed.

*I wasn't enjoying it that much...I felt pressured [...] by the coaches, by the girls that played there [...]. When Russell was assistant coach, he was quite caring, [...] got out of his way and phoned me, to see if there was anything he could do, and told me he sees me as a potential player [...]. Probably it has to do with a lot of things [...] maybe it's a confidence issue. But I think that if at SASI the coach saw something in me [...], I didn't feel like I was approached properly [...]. OK, I have to maybe put myself out [...], but I don't really have that confidence to do it. And with family not really caring, whether you play whether you don't play [...]. It's motivation, I suppose (Scalzi, 2007, pers. comm.).*

Poor relationships involving players within the state system can reduce their opportunities to ‘take the next step’ also in relation to career sponsorship. To this extent, relationships between players and coaches can be particularly important. For instance, poor relationships with their players can reduce the willingness of coaches to sponsor them with higher-level colleagues, or can simply preclude the coaches’ ability to dedicate enough time to players in order to learn about their potentials. Alagich (2008, pers. comm.) highlights that players who endure adverse relationships with their coaches risk failing to obtain satisfactory results from training, and that, at times, high-quality players can be overlooked by coaches who become inclined not to invest in them due to the bias of poor personal relationships.

Other negative implications of bonds within state squads include loss of focus and marginalisation. According to Carter (2007, pers. comm) and Black (2008, pers. comm.), the same bonds that foster enthusiasm can also shift the attention of state players to social dynamics rather than their development programs.

*[...] Sometimes players [...] start coming to those programs not to develop as players, but mainly to interact with their friends. [...] That can be evident, in just looking at some development squads or state teams: we had situations where*

*players have been selected [...] but their main interest has been to go away [to the Youth National Championship] and be part of that group rather than the playing side of it (Carter, 2007, pers. comm.).*

While loss of focus tends to occur mostly within state development squads and the younger age state teams (e.g. Under 14, Under 15) it can also be relevant to more advanced squads such as the SASI squad (Day, 2008, pers. comm.). In the most advanced squads, however, the main concern related to social dynamics is marginalisation. This can be particularly true for newcomers, especially if they do not hold bonds with any existing ‘popular’ player (see section 6.2.1). Day (2008, pers. comm.) underlines that being marginalised by fellow players (cliques) is the worst aspect of social bonds within state squads, and can produce significant emotional distress and negative effects on football performance.

### **7.1.2 Bonds within national squads**

The ability of players who reach the national level to build new useful relationships can influence their opportunities for success in their new environments. As it is for players who for the first time are selected into state squads (see section 6.2.1), those who reach the national squads face the challenge of quickly becoming familiar with a new and more competitive environment, meeting increasingly demanding technical and physical expectations, and locating themselves into unfamiliar (and generally pre-existing) social networks. Social capital among national squad members can help to maintain the players’ self-confidence and to provide access to technical advice and moral support, especially in periods of particular difficulties (e.g. injuries). On the other hand, while the more professional environment reduces the importance of social bonds as excuses for loss of focus compared to club and state systems, tight relationships among players can contribute to the exclusion of newcomers or ‘unpopular’ athletes.

In national squads, the role of social relationships is arguably less important than at lower levels for the performance of players. Day (2008, pers. comm.), for example, points out that the seriousness of players increases with the level at which they play, and that the importance of their social relationships within national squads decreases significantly, particularly in relation to their negative effects as a source of

distraction. In national squads, no one approaches training lightly, risking to compromise her chances to maintain her position or to impress the coaches: *“You are basically there to do a job [...] we are talking about possible selection for the World Cup qualifiers, so, [...] once you go into camp, it’s business”* (Day, 2008, pers. comm.).

Nevertheless, the ability of players to relate to other team members (including coaches) with whom they may share special bonds can still provide a precious advantage when facing particularly difficult events. This is especially true in relation to the maintenance of adequate levels of self-confidence. In the highly competitive and technically advanced environment of the national squads, the relative importance of the players’ self-belief as a factor of career success is even greater than at lower levels (i.e. state system) (Swaffer, 2008, pers. comm.). Self-confidence can have both positive and adverse effects on the motivation of players and their ability to perform free from ‘psychological burdens’ of insecurity or precariousness. For example, the trust that Kristyn Swaffer (2008, pers. comm.) developed with members of the national squads has helped her maintain the confidence and drive necessary to consolidate her passage to the national level, after being temporarily excluded from the Under 19 squad in her early career. In particular, she refers to her relationships with two coaches who showed her significant moral support and repeatedly encouraged her to persevere to prove herself at the top level.

Constructive social relationships within national squads can become important for the performance and success of players, especially those having their first experience with the national squads. In this light, pre-existing bonds with other players (e.g. with fellow national players from South Australia) can play a significant role as vehicles of self-confidence and motivation. For instance, in her first experience with the Young Matildas, Stacey Day could count on trusted acquaintances from her career with the SASI program (i.e. Emma Wirkus, another South Australian national player, and Kevin McCormack, the SASI head coach who at the time held a position of national assistant coach). Stacey feels confident that she could approach internationally experienced Wirkus or McCormack in search of support, both emotional and technical, if she experienced problems with her national involvement. *“If something [...] was happening to me [...] the fact that I could talk to another*

*player, and that could have possibly have happened to her [...]. Yeah, it just made things a lot easier”*(Day, 2008, pers. comm.).

Building on Day’s experience, players who engage with national squads often bring along an array of useful personal connections developed in previous sporting experiences, usually within their state-based Intensive Training Centres’ (ITC) programs (e.g. SASI program). At times, other players become able to share these useful bonds by means of new relationships established with the bonds’ holders. *“When Kevin was the assistant coach, if the girls didn’t feel they could go to Alen Stajcic, who was the coach...I’d say: “If you don’t feel comfortable, go speak to him...speak to Kevin [...] and they did””* (Day, 2008, pers. comm.).

On the other hand, players who do not establish social relationships within their squads, or do not hold pre-existing bonds, can experience difficulties that ultimately can affect their self-confidence. This is a risk especially for South Australian players who normally share fewer pre-existing acquaintances within national squads compared to players from traditionally more productive states (i.e. Queensland and New South Wales) (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.). For instance, the inclusion of only two South Australians in the Young Matildas squad (total twenty-three) participating in the 2009 Asian Football Confederation’s Championships, and dominated by fifteen players who played in New South Wales in 2008 (Football Federation Australia, 2009d), is reasonably indicative of the current general trend of selection. According to Swaffer (2008, pers. comm.), close-knit sub groups based on states of origin can lead to the formation of *“cliques”* within national squads, creating significant difficulties for newcomers. She also explains that, occasionally, strong relationships between national players can become the vehicle for the spread of negative attitudes through entire groups, and further reinforce undesirable mentalities. While this may not affect the performance of those players, it can reduce the levels of comfort of newcomers and alter the balance of social relationships within squads.

*[...] Cliques can be really bad, because it can make it difficult for people to fit into a team. [...] At a national level, you get these ‘state little cliques’ [...]. So, if you are from a state [...] where there’s only one of two from your team [...], that*



*can be really difficult to gel and feel a part of it. [...] Your confidence [...] can drop, and so you may not play as well [...]. That can affect your confidence. [...] New South Wales are a classic example of 'bad egg', but it hasn't affected their standard of play...it just affected the attitude of the person. They had some players in there that were just...nasty bitching people, but also anti-social behaviours. They thought that it's cool to go out and steal something at a shop or stuff like that, and that rubbed off a whole generation of players coming through from New South Wales. And these were Australian-level players. So...it didn't affect their play, but it certainly affected who they were as people.*

## **7.2 Cross-system networks**

Significant difficulties to identifying potential national players include the limited financial resources of the national system, the limited efficiency in communications across institutions, and the limited knowledge by state and regional coaches of the characteristics that national coaches seek in players (Sermanni, 2008, pers. comm.). Greater financial resources would increase the ability of national coaches to bring players together more often (i.e. in national camps) and monitor peripheral regions more closely. Social capital across systems, on the other hand, can increase the effectiveness of the flow of information between state and national systems. This form of 'communal' social capital (Collins, 2004) refers chiefly to coaching networks. Efficient cross-system networks can help national coaches to access information on local players ('know-who'); state coaches to access top-quality coaching knowledge and innovation ('know-how'); and state and local coaches to increase their understanding on the technical requirements of national coaches ('know-what'). In this light, the effects of cross-system social capital (i.e. fruitful communication) can also assist to overcome the shortcoming of funding to access and monitor players across wide regions.

Senior national coach Tom Sermanni (2008, pers. comm.) explains that coaching information is often difficult to disseminate across women's football systems. While national, state and local football institutions are connected by formal networks, 'know-how' is often spread by means of informal discussions among coaches. This is particularly true for personal views (e.g. on players) and alternative ways to approach

specific technical matters, which tend to be left out of formal official communication between institutions. In this sense, formal networks are important to lay the foundations of more resourceful informal ones. All interviewed coaches agree that informal consultation is the best way to exchange technical opinions and access coaching knowledge and innovation. Generally, coaches tend to approach problem-solving in slightly different ways, and their ability to exchange opinions and test their ideas with top level colleagues can determine their prospects of success (Buchanan, 2008, pers. comm.). Nevertheless, there are no significant permanent networks connecting national coaches and South Australian state, regional and local coaches, except the connection provided by a few 'gatekeepers' (Sermanni, 2008, pers. comm.).

'Gatekeepers', therefore, are the catalyst of innovative 'know-how' that may affect the ways in which development is pursued at the state level. Furthermore, their role is also important for the provision of 'know-who' to national coaches and the circulation of 'know-what' among state coaches. The extent and quality of coaching information flowing between state and national systems can affect the overall ability of South Australia to produce national players (e.g. local knowledge to develop them). It depends upon the effectiveness of the gatekeepers' connections with the national coaches on one hand, and state and regional coaches on the other. In South Australia, the main 'gatekeeper' between the state and the national systems is the Adelaide-based SASI coach Kevin McCormack (Sermanni, 2008, pers. comm.). McCormack is formally in charge of the SASI program, co-operates with SAWSA to run state development squads and state teams, and has been recently involved as an assistant coach with youth and senior national teams (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.). Other 'gatekeepers' include the SAWSA executive officer (i.e. Wendy Carter, formally in charge of all state teams and development squads) and the National League team's coaching staff (Adelaide United). However, these are not directly connected to the national coaching staff by any official relationship.

Social capital that can affect information flow critical to the development of local elite players into potential national players resides in contacts held by 'gatekeepers'. These include links with national coaches; state and regional coaches (i.e. state teams and all development squads); other sources of technical knowledge (e.g. coaches of

other sports); other ‘gatekeepers’; and the club system in general (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.). For example, networks between the SASI coach and local clubs can facilitate the involvement of high-quality club coaches with the state development programs (including the SASI squad). Similarly, trust and will to exchange resources for mutual benefit (i.e. social capital) between the SASI coach (‘national gatekeeper’) and SAWSA (in charge of state teams and development squads) can produce technical benefits for the state players (e.g. enhanced coaching knowledge). SASI currently helps in managing and appointing the personnel for the development squads (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.), and state development squads’ coach Black (2008, pers. comm.) asserts that the effectiveness of networks between state and national systems has increased in the last few years. In particular, coaching knowledge trickles down to state players through the connection provided by the SASI coach between the national coaching staff, the state teams’ and the state development squads’ coaches.

McCormack (2007, pers. comm.) explains that the SASI program is delivered with the help and support of both FFSA (which since 2008 has incorporated SAWSA) and Football Federation Australia (FFA). Within the national network provided by FFA, the SASI coach can interact with several top-quality colleagues, including other states’ Institutes of Sport coaches and the national coaches. Coaching relationships within this network, however, tend to be mostly formal, as there are few occasions for coaches from different states to meet in person throughout the year (especially due to limited financial resources provided by FFA). While it is certainly useful *“having someone to ring up for an opinion [...], which happens occasionally”*, the formal character of those relationships and the fact that the national coaches’ role is not to provide guidance for others maintain the top-down passage of ‘know-how’ somewhat limited (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.). Similarly, career sponsorship occurs in a formal manner, underpinned exclusively by the professional norms that frame the South Australian system as a ‘feeding’ pool for the national teams. The chance of players being considered at the national level principally because of social relationships among coaches appears negligible.

‘Know-how’ useful to increase the coaching quality available to South Australian state players can also derive from horizontal networks involving non-football

coaches. Networks between coaches of different sports are often important vehicles to share general coaching knowledge that ultimately contributes to the formation of all-round athletes (Buchanan, 2008, pers. comm.). In particular, McCormack (2007, pers. comm.) finds it very useful to work in the same building with many other high-level coaches at SASI, where coaches with different knowledge can meet informally (e.g. during pauses at work), share information and learn from each other's experiences.

While social networks can facilitate access to coaching 'know-how', their role can be even more significant for the exchange of 'know-who' and 'know-what'. This is partly because state coaches are, arguably, already in possession of sufficient 'know-how' for their task, and partly because the great differences in technical standards and expectations between state and national football make the relevance of 'national know-how' only limited for the state level (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.). On the other hand, the greater ability of national coaches to identify top-level players and the greater understanding by state coaches of their national counterparts' requirements would contribute to a greater system output of elite athletes (Sermanni, 2008, pers. comm.).

Coaching networks across systems are fundamental to help state and national coaches to work towards common goals. For example, more wide reaching cross-system coaching networks would facilitate the national coaches' task to identify and monitor local players as potential top-athletes. Personal links with state coaches would reduce the current reliance of national selectors on 'gatekeepers' to access 'know-who'. They would provide national coaches with alternative views on players under scrutiny (e.g. the SASI players) and offer direct information on others that may not necessarily be well known to 'gatekeepers'. This is especially true for non-metropolitan sub-systems, where often coaches are somewhat disconnected from 'gatekeepers' and, consequently, from the national system (Sermanni, 2008, pers. comm.).

A certain degree of disconnection from state systems and subordination to capital cities is one of the endemic difficulties of women's football in country Australia. This is no different in South Australia. Generally, players from non-metropolitan

sub-systems have to move to capital cities to enjoy greater opportunities to reach the national teams. While playing in capital cities (e.g. Adelaide) means to be located at the core of the state system, where state development programs are readily accessible and players can be noticed by state coaches and ‘gatekeepers’, country sub-systems (e.g. Mount Gambier) are largely peripheral.

*[...] A big percentage of kids from the country, ultimately have to end up going to the cities. [...] It's very difficult. [...] When they're starting to get in...probably mid-teen at the latest, they probably need to leave the country to get into the cities. To get into a better level of competition, where they can be seen [...]. Every sport has a problem with kids from the country, in the sense of being able to identify them and actually select them. [...] You know, some of the states are slightly better resourced than other states [...], but [...] the main parts of the systems are all in the main cities. (Sermanni, 2008, pers. comm.).*

Apart from increasing the national coaches’ ‘know-who’, wider cross-system networks would help state and regional coaches to gain deeper appreciation of the qualities that national coaches seek in young players (‘know-what’). Again, while this applies to all areas, it is particularly relevant to regional sub-systems (i.e. Mount Gambier). In regional areas, the lack of proximity to state leaders and ‘gatekeepers’ poses important disadvantages (e.g. isolation) for coaches seeking to gain and maintain adequate focus on specific development targets addressing the needs of their national system’s colleagues. Moreover, the sporting culture typical of most country regions (that relegates football to a minor position) creates further difficulties for development coaches to discuss technical matters with adequately knowledgeable peers. The regional sub-systems’ general lack of ‘bridging’ social capital with the national system, particularly when exacerbated by relative isolation from the core of the state systems (where ‘gatekeepers’ are generally located), can be a significant obstacle for the circulation of ‘know-what’ and can pose serious risks for the sub-systems’ ability to produce elite players.

*What we need is a network...the key thing here is a network. [...] We are dependent [...] on the cities [...] identifying and recommending talents from the country. [...] Those country coaches need to have an idea of what kind of players*

*we are looking for. I know that it sounds strange, but [...] in the country areas in particular, the coach there quite often, not always, but quite often, doesn't have a great upbringing in the game. Doesn't see what kind of talent you need. [...] It's amazing the number of people, particularly in Australia, that is not a football Country, the people who don't know what a good player is (Sermanni, 2008, pers. comm.).*

### **7.3 Concluding remarks**

As in the passages to club and to state football, the step between state and national levels can be influenced both positively and negatively by personal and communal social capital (Collins, 2004). Social capital can influence success in the step between state and national football by facilitating players' and coaches' access to key resources including information, practical resources and career sponsorship, consistent with the model of Seibert et al (2001). In particular, social capital can be important to facilitate access to coaching knowledge ('know-how', 'know-who' and 'know-what'); to help players to maintain adequate self-confidence and motivation; and to favour effective mentorship ('technical' social capital).

Importantly, however, social capital influencing this top-level career step accrues almost exclusively from sport-related social networks, as opposed to relationships involving family members, wider local communities, and acquaintances not belonging to sporting communities. Relationships with family members and other acquaintances can still have minor impacts on the abilities of players to succeed, particularly in relation to motivation. However, the significance of this high-level career step ascribes particular importance to technical and specialised resources only available through connections with other actors involved in top-level sporting activities (in particular women's football).

Furthermore, at the top level of 'achievement' women's football (Bale, 2003), the considerable existing technical abilities, self-confidence, focus on career accomplishments and motivation of players overshadow the overall importance of social capital as a factor of development and success in comparison with lower levels (e.g. club system). This is especially true for personal social capital of players

(Collins, 2004), for general ‘bonding’ social capital (e.g. Putnam, 2000) within squads, and for negative effects of social capital (Portes, 1998), in particular as a possible source of distraction and excessive relaxation.

At the personal level, social capital can complement, enhance and reinforce the players’ confidence and motivation (particularly in difficult periods, for example when recovering from injury), increase the prospects of career sponsorship, and facilitate the formation of ‘technical’ social capital. On the other hand, it can exacerbate psychological stress, contribute to loss of confidence, favour marginalisation of particular players, and generally cause loss of motivation, which is one of the primary factors of success at the top level. These effects are observable within both state and national squads. An important consideration relates to pre-existing in-squad relationships that players may have when joining state or national squads. Sharing bonds with existing players or coaches (e.g. known through previous state squads or from club football) can be a significant advantage for newcomers in both state and national squads. It can help new players to ‘feel at home’ promptly and to avoid dedicating excessive psychological resources to ‘make friends’ as opposed to play football. In this sense, the significantly lower presence of South Australians in national teams compared to players from the most represented states (e.g. New South Wales) (McCormack, 2007, pers. comm.), can translate into greater vulnerability to social disadvantage and isolation for South Australian players at their first national experiences.

At the system level, social capital can be an important factor affecting the flow of coaching information between state and national systems. ‘Bridging’ social capital (e.g. Putnam, 2000) residing in personal connection between national and state coaches can favour the circulation of innovative coaching knowledge (‘know-how’) and increase the technical skills of state and regional coaches. It can also help national coaches to access and monitor talented state players by favouring access to information on local players (‘know-who’), and by assisting state and regional coaches to fully appreciate the technical requirements that their national counterparts seek in players (‘know-what’). While cross-system social capital can be accumulated through formal networks (i.e. professional relationships framed by official networks), the most useful coaching information circulates through informal relationships, and

include horizontal coaching networks between top-level coaches of different sports.

Since there are no formal networks (that could favour the development of fruitful informal relationships) between state and national coaches, except those provided by few 'gatekeepers' (e.g. the SASI head coach), their role is particularly important for the flow of information between systems. 'Gatekeepers' essentially control the flow of 'know-how' and 'know-what' from the national to the state system, and of 'know-who' from the state to the national coaches. Enhanced cross-system social capital could help national coaches to reduce their reliance on 'gatekeepers' to implement common coaching goals and practices across systems, and to circulate critical information. This would be particularly beneficial for country sub-systems (i.e. Mount Gambier) to overcome their inherent subordination to capital cities to establish connections with the national system.



## Chapter 8

### Conclusions

This research has developed the hypothesis that social capital can play an important part in affecting the technical development of South Australian women's football players, and has shown that it can either facilitate or undermine fundamental steps of the careers of 'achievement' athletes. In particular, social capital can create advantages or disadvantages for players progressing from school football to formal clubs; from clubs to state teams and special development programs; and from playing at the state level to being selected into national teams. The thesis contributes to the body of knowledge on social capital by offering a new perspective on the relationship between social capital and sport. It brings together theories of social capital as an outcome of participation in sport (Seippel, 2006); participation in sport as an outcome of social capital (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009b); social determinants of talent development in sport (Timson-Katchis & Jowett, 2005); and social capital as a factor of career success (Seibert et al., 2001). Moreover, it offers a conceptual framework for further research on social capital as a factor of athletes' development (Rosso, 2010b), establishing the purpose and the foundations for this new area of investigation.

This work also offers practical applications. While it is concerned only with women's football in South Australia, and its findings are specific to the context of this sport, this study's approach can be transferred to other sports with comparable characteristics in terms of aims, purposes, and structural organisation, both in Australia and overseas. This work is of interest to sporting organisations wishing to widen their approach to talent development. In particular, its results can find practical applications in policies to strengthen connections and increase the resourcefulness of relationships across and within sporting institutions in South Australia and in Australia. By incorporating social capital policies in their strategic planning, the institutions governing national, state, club and school women's football may be able to increase the availability of resources (including the circulation of information and innovation) throughout the South Australian women's football system and ultimately increase their ability to produce high-quality players.

This concluding chapter recapitulates the key concepts of the thesis and discusses the main implications of the thesis' findings. In doing so, it summarises and discusses the key positive and negative aspects of social capital as a factor of development in South Australian women's football; it highlights the main theoretical contributions of this research to the body of knowledge of social capital and sport; it comments on the major practical implications of this study; and it outlines possible avenues for further research.

## **8.1 Summary of findings**

The key research objective of this thesis was the exploration of the dynamics whereby social capital affects the development of South Australian elite women's football players. Elite players are those who embody the 'achievement' level of South Australian women's football and pursue their career path with the aim to 'take the next step' within the state and national systems (Rosso, 2010b). Among the career steps of women's football players, three have been considered in this research as the fundamental ones for the fulfilment of the 'achievement' career pathway (see section 1.1.2). These are the passages from school to club football; from local clubs to state squads; and from state to national squads (Fig. 1.2).

In this thesis, social capital has been defined as the ability to gain resources by means of participation in social networks (see section 1.2.1). Embedded in social networks including players and their social environments, women's football organisations and their members, and the whole South Australian women's football system, social capital accrues to individuals and, by extension, groups. It creates both advantages and disadvantages for network members, increasing or reducing access to resources available within networks accruing to both players and other important figures critical to their development (e.g. coaches). Although it is not the fundamental element of development for players, social capital can combine with other 'push' and 'pull' factors to increase or diminish the effect of personal and/or environmental factors of development. These factors include: natural abilities, self-confidence, psychological stability, self-drive, passion, attitude towards learning, positive learning environments, moral support, encouragement, access to good advice,

coaching, innovation, knowledge, facilities, financial and logistic resources. In other words, the ability of elite players to ‘take the next step’ in ‘achievement’ women’s football depends upon a series of characteristics (e.g. motivation) of the players themselves and of the South Australian women’s football system (e.g. coaching knowledge), the positive and/or negative effects of which can be intensified by the action of social capital.

Social capital affecting the ability of ‘achievement’ players to advance from the bottom to the top of the South Australian women’s football systems can be accumulated through several types of social networks. Such networks are more or less important in relation to the career step under consideration. For example, certain networks are more important for young players moving from school to club football than for experienced players trying to make it in the national teams and *vice versa*. Nevertheless, among the complex social web that makes up the South Australian women’s football community, this study identified a typology of networks that are particularly important for the development of players. These include: bonds and networks encompassing families and local communities; virtual social networks; bonds within local clubs; networks connecting the clubs with each other and with the sport’s governing bodies; bonds within state squads and the state system; networks across different football systems and institutions; and bonds within national squads and the national system. All these types of social network can serve to accumulate social capital and in turn facilitate or undermine the players’ abilities to undertake football career steps on one hand, and, on the other, the relevant sport institutions’ ability to provide the necessary framework (e.g. well prepared coaches) in which development occurs. The next two sections will recapitulate both positive and negative effects of social capital on the development of South Australian women’s football players.

### **8.1.1 Positive effects of social capital**

Social capital definitely has the potential to contribute positively to the career of South Australian women’s football players. At the players’ personal level, it does so by complementing and intensifying the effect of some pre-existent factors of development (e.g. motivation), by countering the lack of them, and by mediating the negative effects of other barriers to development (e.g. long distances). At the system

level, it favours the introduction and spread of information and innovation, the establishment of co-operative links between governing bodies of different regions (e.g. Adelaide and Mount Gambier) and/or different systems (e.g. club and school systems), the positive effects of career sponsorship, and the ease of accessing infrastructure. Social capital helps players by providing direct access to psychological, technical, and practical resources. It facilitates moral support and encouragement, mentoring and role modelling, information flow, and the sharing of physical resources. In turn, those resources contribute to the players' self-confidence, motivation, passion for the game, and feeling of being accepted and appreciated by their fellow players and coaches. They also increase the players' opportunities to participate in positive learning environments, refine their technical skills and knowledge of the game, be seen or considered by coaches or representatives of top-level squads, and access financial and logistic resources.

An important positive aspect of social capital for the careers of women's football players is its capacity to facilitate access to practical resources. A first example refers to gaining access to playing facilities and it is relevant to both clubs and governing bodies. To this extent, networks between members of clubs, associations, and members of wider local communities are significant. In particular, social capital across different sporting clubs and/or organisations can be especially useful and lead to sharing existing facilities (for example, see section 5.2.3). Other vital practical resources for the success of players are financial and logistic resources. Participating in organised sports generally requires financial expenditure. Whilst women's football is not the most expensive sport to engage with, players need to have access to enough money to buy minimum equipment (e.g. boots, socks, shorts, shin pads), to pay the registration fees for their clubs and other squads they may be involved with, and to travel to training sessions and games. Moreover, players involved with their clubs and other state-run squads, such as the state teams or the SASI squads, typically travel for football three to six times per week. Importantly, young players are often dependent on their families for financial and logistic resources, and social capital residing in their family bonds can often prove very important especially for them to participate in women's football (see sections 5.1.1 and 6.3). Family networks, however, are not the only ones useful to access practical resources. Social capital residing in networks within local communities can also facilitate access to monetary

resources and transportation, and mitigate the negative effect that location and distance have on player production. With all the principal state-run squads and programs being held in and around central Adelaide, locational disadvantage can couple with socio-economic disadvantage and pose serious barriers to the ability of a significant proportion of potential 'achievement' players to pursue a career in women's football (Rosso, 2008, 2009b). To this end, social capital can relieve pressure on households by making available carpooling and fundraising opportunities, and be especially important for socio-economically disadvantaged players who cannot count on financial and/or other practical help from their families. The importance of social capital in relation to location and distance was particularly evident in Mount Gambier. There, barriers such as distance from the core of the South Australian women's football region and the small scale of the local women's football sub-system combine with existing social capital within the wider local community to compel the local women's football community to 'come together' and support local elite athletes. In this case, the location and scale of the Mount Gambier women's football region, otherwise seen as disadvantages for local players wanting to pursue elite sporting careers, become the basis for the creation of a partial advantage in the form of social capital. The same dynamic is also the driver behind local initiatives to bring the local women's football community together on game days, to reinforce social bonds and essentially create social capital (see sections 5.2.3 and 6.3). Interestingly, this dynamic was not observed in Adelaide, where the need to create social capital within local women's football communities to overcome locational disadvantage is generally less critical than in Mount Gambier.

One of the most important positive effects of social capital relates to the increase of self-confidence, passion for the game and motivation. This occurs principally from moral support obtained through personal networks of players with their family members, other friends and acquaintances, and members of the women's football community, in particular fellow players and coaches. Depending on the players' career phases, the usefulness of different types of social networks varies. However, social capital contributes to the passion, self-confidence and motivation of players throughout their careers. At the lower levels, (school or junior club levels), the role of family members and other friends or acquaintances, including school teachers and school coaches, is very important for young players who may not have yet cemented

their relationships within the women's football community. For example, this 'push' factor can make the difference for young players facing the prospect of trialling for a club or for state development programs for the first time (see section 5.1). On the other hand, established players trying to succeed at the state or national levels benefit especially from support and encouragement closely related to their football experience. This typically comes from team mates or other players with whom strong bonds exist, veteran players who underwent similar experiences, or coaches who can add a technical dimension to their words of encouragement. Importantly, encouragement and support are particularly valuable for those players who cannot count on the constant support of close friends or family, and in case of intervening obstacles such as long periods of sickness, serious injuries, negative performances, and perceived lack of attention or recognition from coaches (for example, see sections 6.2 and 7.1).

Motivation, which in turn is affected by self-confidence and passion, is one of the key aspects to the development of talent, and among the factors that can influence it is the quality of the experience that players associate with the work (e.g. training) necessary to develop their talent (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993). An important factor that can help players gain and maintain motivation to train is the passion they have for the sport, which can be directly affected by social capital. For more advanced players, this generally relates to the quality of their training environment, which can be enhanced by social capital residing in networks within clubs and/or squads. Social capital created through bonds among fellow players, coaches and other volunteers directly involved with the players' football experiences contributes to the creation of positive training environments. In such positive-minded groups, players feel free to express themselves and experiment with new solutions, concepts and techniques, are encouraged to ask others for help and to offer their help to others, discuss football matters with others, push one another to overcome challenges, and suffer less from pressure associated with performance. As a result, players enjoy the hardship associated with their sporting activity, maintain passion for the game, have the opportunity to increase their self-confidence, and in turn maintain high motivation to succeed (for example, see section 6.2.1).

For younger players, instead, social capital useful to create and maintain passion and

motivation arises especially from bonds within their family and/or close groups of friends (including school). To this extent, the combination of social capital with cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is particularly important to transfer the passion for football from family members or close friends to young girls who, consequently, find themselves highly motivated to join formal clubs and/or development squads. For example, coming from a ‘football family’ or from a local community that regards football as an important sport, is an important factor motivating young players to engage with the sport (see section 5.1). Notably, family social capital (Winter, 2000) in relation to cultural capital is especially important for those players coming from communities strongly dominated by non-football sporting cultures like, for example, Mount Gambier. If young girls growing up in communities that regard football as a significant aspect of their sporting cultural background are, arguably, inclined to play the sport at some stage of their childhood, girls from communities strongly orientated towards other sports are then more likely to take on other mainstream sports. Children from urban local communities (i.e. Adelaide) with strong presences of European migrants are inevitably exposed to football and may need less encouragement from their families or friends to engage with it. Conversely, the families’ football culture of young Mount Gambier girls needs to be intense enough to overcome social pressure pointing them towards other more conventional sports such as, for example, netball (see section 5.2.3).

Another key aspect of talent development relates to the capability of players to refine their football knowledge and their technical skills, and the capacity of the sporting systems to facilitate this process. At the personal level, social capital helps players to gain access to technical knowledge from experienced individuals who may or may not be part of the women’s football community. This can occur at any stage of the players’ careers. For example, players often need to work on their skills beyond their squads’ training schedules, and social capital can help them to find adequate training partners, such as friends, fellow players or even football coaches. Through social capital, players can gain access to a variety of technical resources, ranging from the opinion of other people not directly involved in women’s football (e.g. a family member) to the willingness of proficient coaches or players to mentor and advise them (for example, see section 6.1.1.1). For instance, some players acquire considerable technical skills even before joining formal clubs by playing football

with older siblings or friends at school or in informal settings (see section 5.1.1). A particularly useful set of relationships, to this extent, are the links between players and their coaches, who can lead to the availability of coaches to dedicate extra time outside training hours to particular players (see section 6.1.2.1). Others include relationships with more experienced or proficient players that can favour the creation of ‘technical’ social capital and result in transfer of specialised information and proficiency (see section 6.1.1.1).

Social capital also facilitates the accumulation of technical proficiency through networks linking different systems and different governing institutions. Communal social capital (Collins, 2004) across school, club, state and national systems (see Fig. 4.1) is important in facilitating the flow of information and innovation between systems. This refers especially, but not exclusively, to coaching information and knowledge. In particular, ‘bridging’ networks across systems facilitate the introduction of information and innovation in a system, whilst intra-system bonds favour the spread of that information throughout that system. Bridging and bonding social capital across and within systems (Tonts, 2005) play an important role in the introduction and circulation of ‘know-how’, ‘know-who’ and ‘know-what’ types of information. ‘Know-how’ refers to organisational and administrative knowledge (e.g. best practices to run associations, clubs, competitions) and to coaching knowledge and innovation; ‘know-who’ refers in particular to information available to coaches on local players (e.g. who they are, what they can do); and ‘know-what’ refers to understanding of requirements of coaches from upper levels in terms of players’ development. Cross-system social capital assists state and national coaches and organisations to gain access to players across wide regions; club coaches to recruit promising school players; coaches of all levels to gain access to innovative information and coaching practices; and women’s football governing bodies to set up functional programs and pathways to assist players in their career development (see sections 6.1.1, 6.1.1.2, 6.2.2, 7.2).

### **8.1.2 Negative consequences of social capital**

While social capital can contribute to the career of women’s football players in numerous positive ways, it can also produce a range of negative outcomes that can undermine the opportunities of players to succeed. Negative consequences of social



capital accrue from both personal and communal networks, and can affect individuals, small groups of players (e.g. within squads), and larger groups of players, coaches, administrators and other volunteers part of the women's football community. The main negative consequences of social capital for the development of players are: frustration of passion, interest and self-confidence of players that in turn undermines their motivation; marginalisation and even exclusion of certain individuals; loss of focus due to excessive social relaxation and/or distraction; reproduction of negative attitudes as a consequence of negative role modelling; reproduction and exacerbation of feelings of isolation of particular groups within the women's football community; social pressure on athletes to play sports other than football; and over-reliance on a few individuals within women's football systems or other groups (clubs, associations). While different aspects are more or less relevant to different career steps, negative effects of social capital can undermine development at any stage of the players' career pathway (Fig. 1.2).

As social capital can be important for players to increase and maintain motivation, it can also play a significant role in undermining it. This can occur in many circumstances and at any stage of the players' career. An interesting example relates to the players' loss of interest and/or passion for the game or for the environment in which they train and play. This can be the consequence of social capital residing in networks with people (and peers in particular) belonging or not with the women's football community. For example, young players become vulnerable to loss of passion for their sport in place of new interests shared with family members, acquaintances and friends outside the women's football sphere, in particular when these are not supportive of their engagement with football. This case is particularly relevant to the early stages of a player's career. However, even advanced players suffer from loss of passion and motivation when their close relationships (e.g. family members) are vehicles of indifference or criticism (for example, see section 6.3). Another instance involves players losing passion for women's football due to a perceived sense of generalised negativity around them and their football environment. This can occur when strong bonds existing between players and other women's football community members (especially other players) facilitate the reproduction and exacerbation of tensions and/or problems pertaining to the sport. In this case, social capital leads to pessimism and discourages players from striving to

progress in their careers. Examples of this dynamic include clubs (and/or sub-groups within clubs) that perceive themselves as neglected by the women's football governing bodies and, consequently, do not encourage their players to engage with state-run squads (see section 6.1.1). A particularly effective category of networks favouring the creation of negative social capital comprises virtual social networks. These refer especially to the virtual community that contributes to the online women's football forum FootballNews (FootballNews, 2008b), which offers the opportunity for disappointed individuals to vent their frustrations anonymously and attack other members of the women's football community. It is common, for example, for this online forum to be used to openly criticise and undermine women's football governing institutions, state coaches, and other figures with critical decision-making authority within the South Australian women's football system. If these virtual forums present the positive attribute to foster community cohesiveness, they also become vehicles for widespread defeatism and loss of faith in the women's football system, and can drive vulnerable individuals (either players or coaches and volunteers) to lose passion for the sport and ultimately motivation (see section 6.1.1.1).

Also social capital accruing to wider local communities and/or wider sporting communities can pose barriers to the development of women's football players. In particular, significant social pressure to the detriment of athletes can derive from social capital accruing to relatively close-knit communities with marked preferences for sports other than women's football. This is exacerbated if family members or close acquaintances of players are part of those sporting communities. For instance, Mount Gambier players are subjected to a noticeable degree of social pressure to play sports other than football (e.g. netball or field hockey) resulting from social capital accruing to Mount Gambier's general sporting community. At times, they are discouraged from playing football by their own family and close friends. While this dynamic can help cement and strengthen the self-identity of the local women's football community, it can also lead to feelings of non-acceptance in local players, cause loss of motivation, and induce them to quit women's football (see sections 5.1.1, 5.1.2 and 5.2.3).

While social capital among players can help them to motivate each other and to

maintain high self-confidence, it can also reduce the motivation of players who share strong bonds both on and off the football pitch. This is a critical point, since South Australian elite women's football players typically see fellow club and/or state players socially outside the sport environment, and often they establish strong relationships among each other. Typical examples of this process involve friendships among club and state players becoming sources of distraction and loss of focus within the sporting environment, particularly during training sessions (see sections 6.1.2.1 and 7.1.1). This dynamic is especially relevant to younger players at the club level and it is still observable among experienced players and in state squads. Its importance tends to decrease with the progression of the athletes' careers and it was not detected in reference to players involved with the national system. Instead, social capital can undermine the success of players even in top elite squads when it leads to the reproduction of negative attitude and work ethics. This refers to negative role modelling and to examples of popular players influencing younger ones to adopt undesirable behavioural patterns such as drinking or stealing that create and reinforce detrimental group mentalities (see sections 6.2.1 and 7.1.2).

One of the most critical negative effects of social capital highlighted in this thesis refers to the lack of acceptance and/or marginalisation of certain individuals, such as new players within a squad. This is the principal downside of social capital as indicated by the interviewed players, and it can occur at any level and at any stage of the players' career. It can affect irreparably the players' self-confidence and motivation, in addition to posing significant barriers to technical benefits deriving from the possibility to accumulate 'technical' social capital. Typically, this dynamic can be observed in close-knit groups of players within squads ('cliques') as well as in entire squads. It leads to unsupportive behaviour, mockery, undermining and exclusion of individuals who are perceived as 'unpopular' or 'dangerous' for leading members of the dominating group. Often, it occurs to the detriment of players who are not particularly 'popular' off the football field, of shy or reserved individuals, of talented young players who are seen as rivals by more established ones, and generally of newcomers without pre-existing social connections within the squad that they are joining (see, for example, sections 6.1.2.1, 6.2.1 and 7.1.1).

A last negative aspect of social capital refers to the over-reliance on a few

individuals for the maintenance of the networks themselves typical of the South Australian women's football system. The structure of networks across systems and institutions ascribes great importance to a few 'gatekeepers' (typically in charge of state-run squads and development programs), who tend to become irreplaceable for the very functioning of the networks and the movement of players between football systems. Their position within the networks (as connecting points between different systems) makes them extremely important for the flow of information and other resources across systems, and for the accumulation of further communal social capital between systems and institutions (see sections 6.2.2 and 7.2).

## **8.2 Theoretical and practical implications**

This thesis' contribution to knowledge on social capital and sport has both theoretical and practical implications. On one hand, it contributes to literature on applications of social capital (see section 3.1.7), sport studies (see section 3.2) and in particular to the field of social capital and sport (see section 3.3). On the other, it offers valuable indications to sporting clubs and governing institutions on social processes that can complement existing strategies of athletes' development.

### **8.2.1 Main theoretical implications**

The principal theoretical contribution of this thesis refers to the use of the concept of social capital in the framework of talent development in sport (see section 3.2.3) and regional production of athletes (Rosso, 2008, 2009b, 2010a). In itself, this contributes to literature on applications of social capital by adding a further analytical and theoretical use of the concept to this already rich body of knowledge. In particular, social capital was conceptualised as an element assisting or hindering the technical development of elite athletes and the progress of their sporting careers. This addresses a specific theoretical gap in the literature of social capital and sport, which otherwise tends to concentrate on how sport favours the accumulation of social capital (Jarvie, 2006a; Seippel, 2006), on the relationship between sport and social exclusion/inclusion, or on how social capital contributes to participation in generalised sport and/or recreation and leisure activities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009b; Glover & Hemingway, 2005). This work, instead, builds on existing knowledge on social capital and sport and links it with theories of social capital affecting career success (Seibert et al., 2001) and economic development

(Woolcock, 1998; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000) to understand its implications for regional production of ‘achievement’ athletes (Rosso, 2009b).

The concept of social capital as it is used in this thesis adds theoretical strength to the discourse of talent development and identification in sport. In particular, it finds its theoretical niche in the analysis of environmental (i.e. non-technical) components of athletes’ development, including the quality of learning environments, the socio-economic environments in which athletes develop, the quality of their relationships with coaches, and their ability to gain access to training facilities (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993; Timson-Katchis & Jowett, 2005; Williams & Reilly, 2000). Social capital provides a new dimension to arguments on innate qualities of athletes and attributes gained through practice (Helsen et al., 2000; Hoare & Warr, 2000), offering a further analytical context to consider factors that can increase the effectiveness of the first and facilitate the acquisition of the second. Importantly, it also assists the theorisation of negative effects that social relationships can have on the development of athletes. The findings of this thesis generally reinforce social capital theories of career success (Seibert et al., 2001) and negative social capital (Portes, 1998; Portes & Landolt, 1996). On one side, the thesis’ findings recognise social capital’s role in assisting talent development by facilitating access to information, practical resources and career sponsorship (Seibert et al., 2001). On the other, they highlight negative processes associated with social capital in line with those theorised by Portes (1998) and Portes and Landolt (Portes & Landolt, 1996) and summarised in section 3.1.4.

The most significant contribution to the field of social capital and sport, however, refers to the implications of social capital as a resource accruing to groups, institutions and sporting systems as well as individuals (e.g. Field, 2003). In this sense, social capital provides a wider theoretical framework for talent identification and development in sport, drawing attention to social networks across and within whole sporting systems and to resources that those networks can make available to sporting clubs, regional leaders and governing bodies. It provides an important base for the theorisation of processes affecting advancements in athletes’ production at the system and/or regional levels. In particular, in line with social capital theories of economic development (Beer et al., 2003; Granovetter, 1995, 2005), both concepts of

‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital help to link athletes’ production and the quality of information accessible throughout sporting systems.

The focus on ‘achievement’ sport (Bale, 2003) is a further contribution to the field, since current literature on social capital and sport refers primarily to sport as general physical and/or leisure activities (see section 3.3). Instead, the findings of this thesis show that the concept of social capital is perfectly suited to explain dynamics leading to success in top-level sports as well as participation in generalised or recreational sport. Furthermore, this work establishes a theoretical link between the fields of social capital and sport and sport geography (see section 3.2.1). The principal characteristics of this study connecting social capital and sport geography are: the regional scope of the analysis; the conceptualisation of the South Australian women’s football region as a dynamic stage made up by different systems, institutions, sporting communities, aims and purposes (see chapter 4); and the focus on players’ production in terms of system and regional output.

### **8.2.2 Main practical considerations**

The thesis has also several practical implications. First, its findings are transferable. While the study is on women’s football in South Australia, and its findings are best suited to inform the relevant local sport institutions and clubs, the dynamics described in chapters 5, 6 and 7 can be applicable also to other sports, gendered or not, in Australia and overseas. While the examples provided here are typical of a local and sport-specific reality, the underlying processes by which social capital can affect the development of athletes could be observed in other case studies presenting similar characteristics in terms of aims, purposes, and structural organisation of the sport in question, and generally comparable socio-economic and geographical characteristics of the region. In a way similar to analogous studies on the effects of social capital on, for example, public health (see section 3.1.7.2) or learning and education (see section 3.1.7.3), other studies on social capital and development in sport can be informed by the analytical framework and the general findings of this work.

Another important point to consider, is that social capital is a relatively untapped resource from the point of view of policy-making in South Australian women’s

football. The study was not specifically developed to inform policy-makers or to draw practical conclusions on how sport organisations should operate. Nevertheless, it seems likely that clubs and sport governing bodies can improve the effectiveness of their development strategies by incorporating the concept of social capital in their relevant policies and guidelines. This is particularly true in reference to benefits that social capital can bring in terms of information flow, including ‘know-how’, ‘know-who’ and ‘know-what’ (see chapters 6 and 7). While clubs and institutions are generally aware that social environments can play a role in encouraging and motivating players, they may not appreciate the role of social capital in making available seemingly exclusive knowledge and innovation to members of extended social networks, particularly those connecting individuals and institutions across different systems.

Furthermore, social capital is often not something that ‘just happens’. To be created, it needs explicit investments in sociability (Bourdieu, 1986) that may in turn require explicit policy directions. Such investments would benefit all parties involved, but would be particularly important at the club level, where players spend the greatest part of their careers. Clubs would be more strongly connected with the state system, from which they could gain access to precious technical knowledge and increase the overall quality of the players’ experience at the club level. Currently, these investments lie with the willingness of the various members of the South Australian women’s football community, and generate returns in social capital only for a small proportion of actors involved. However, the lack of appreciation of possible returns does not encourage investments in social networks between clubs, state leaders and governing bodies. Given that all South Australian women’s football clubs are run entirely on a volunteer basis (with significant time and financial constraints), it is perhaps excessively optimistic to assume that clubs can be the driving force of new policy orientations aiming at the accumulation of social capital. Instead, incorporating social capital in strategic planning can be a wise course of action for the South Australian women’s football governing bodies, particularly FFSA. This implies reinforcing vertical networks between FFSA, local clubs and the national system on one hand, and horizontal networks with SASI on the other, with a specific view to favouring the flow of innovation and knowledge (particularly coaching knowledge) between the national, state, and club systems. It also implies working

towards strengthening horizontal networks between local clubs, local schools and the state's school sport associations (SAPSASA and SSSSA) to increase the ability of clubs to 'scout' potential undiscovered talent and facilitate the movement of players from school to club football (see chapter 5). Whilst this career step is the least institutionalised of all the fundamental ones in South Australian women's football, it is also the one the efficiency of which can be increased the most by social capital.

A last important point refers to location. For players suffering from severe locational disadvantage 'taking the next step' in their footballing careers is especially complicated. This refers to players living in outer lower socio-economic areas of the Adelaide region and especially to Mount Gambier players. While personal social capital and social capital within their local communities are key factors for the ability of those players to engage with the current structure of 'achievement' women's football (i.e. travelling to central Adelaide), strategic planning sensitive to issues of social capital at the institutional level can contribute significantly to their development within their own areas of residence. Again, this refers above all to information flow and introduction of knowledge (e.g. coaching knowledge) into those somewhat disconnected districts, and it can be best implemented if initiated by the principal South Australian governing body (FFSA). Social capital accruing from stronger networks between local clubs and state leaders/state institutions, and from broader bonds engaging local actors (especially coaches) with the 'achievement' dimension of women's football can bring two major benefits. It can help to improve current practices of development in those areas and, on the other hand, it can reduce the relative reliance on those few 'gatekeepers' (e.g. the Mount Gambier Regional Development Squad coach) on whom the state and national system depend heavily for the identification and development of local talent.

### **8.3 Concluding remarks**

The research concern of this thesis was to explore processes by which social capital can affect the development of South Australian women's football players. At this point, it is useful to address two concluding questions to sum up the contribution of this work and indicate possible areas for related future research. What do we know now that we did not know before? And, are there some areas for future research to



which this work may lead?

Social capital can definitely affect the development of South Australian women's football players, and it can either help or undermine their career as elite athletes. It does so by affecting both personal and communal factors of development that play a pivotal role in the players' opportunities to 'take the next step' in their sporting careers. Among these factors, the motivation and self-confidence of players; the players' ability to learn from coaches, fellow players and other mentors (including friends and family members); the players' ability to gain access to facilities, special development programs, and other practical resources (e.g. financial and logistic); and the sport systems' ability to gain access and circulate information (particularly coaching knowledge) effectively are especially important. A varied range of social networks can favour the accumulation of social capital with reference to the development of women's football players. Among these, the most significant include: personal networks of players with their family, other football players, fellow squad members (at the club, state and national levels), and their coaches; bonds within clubs; networks between clubs, their local communities and the South Australian women's football leaders (e.g. state and SASI coaches); networks between clubs and women's football governing institutions; and networks between women's football governing institutions across systems (e.g. national and state systems) and regions (e.g. Adelaide and Mount Gambier).

Social capital is important for all the three fundamental career steps considered in this research, both with positive and negative connotations. It is complicated to isolate specific processes and ascribe to them particular importance for one or another career step. Nonetheless, the higher the level (i.e. national level) and the lower the overall importance of social capital is for the success of players in comparison to other (mostly technical) factors. This is especially true for personal social capital (Collins, 2004). On the other hand, communal social capital across systems and institutions takes significance throughout the career of players given its capacity to facilitate the flow of information, and particularly coaching knowledge ('know-how', 'know-what' and 'know-who'). It is also difficult to isolate particular categories of groups or individuals within the South Australian women's football community for whom social capital is especially important. Generally, however, its

value is measurable with reference to the benefits that it brings, especially to disadvantaged people or institutions. In this light, social capital can become a key aspect for players living in unsupportive environments or experiencing particularly challenging situations including long-term injuries and sporting disappointments (e.g. being ‘dropped’ from the national team). It is also especially important to decrease the disadvantages posed by distance and the consequent increased need of financial/logistic resources (e.g. Mount Gambier players).

This thesis offers several paths for future research in the same field. Being the first study in its field of social capital and talent development in sport (to the best of my knowledge), it opens wide opportunities for similar case studies of other sports and locations. Any aspect of social capital affecting talent development as highlighted in this research (e.g. particular social network of players, influence of family or of local communities, institutional networks) can be used for specific in-depth studies of the same type. In particular, given the multicultural milieu in which sport is played in Australian cities, cultural and ethnic issues (see section 4.1.3.1) of exclusion from elite sports – including women’s football in South Australia – deserve additional attention. The same applies for research specifically focussed on social capital and issues facing elite (or potential elite) country athletes in Australia. Virtual communities and their role in generating social capital with reference to physical sporting communities are another innovative path for future research. Other research paths include different perspectives or approaches on social capital as a factor of athletes’ development, such as more quantitative approaches aimed at establishing hierarchies of processes by which social capital affects development and at quantifying the value of social capital compared to other development factors. Social network analysis approaches can also be employed to consider more in depth the role of network structure and location within the networks. Further interesting research can also take into consideration the general relationship between social capital and ‘achievement’ sports, and include themes common in the literature of social capital and sport (see section 3.3).

In conclusion, social capital is an important field to explore for those concerned with technical development in sport. It is certainly not an elixir of life or a philosopher’s stone that can turn average players into champions overnight. It is, however, a key

condition to help players, even those who are very talented, to face the variety of challenges that a top-level sporting career may imply. Similarly, its effects can make the difference between sporting systems that are or are not able to produce high-level athletes on a regular basis. The role of social capital as an element of athletes' development, therefore, can be seen as the one of motor oil in making engines run. It not only helps parts move smoothly, but it also helps prevent corrosion, improve sealing and mitigate the effect of extreme weather conditions.