

Chapter 1

Introduction: social capital and the development of women's football¹ players in South Australia

In the last two decades, the attention of researchers to social capital has grown to make it one of the most important sociological concepts across a varied range of disciplines, fields and subjects. Academics and policy-makers alike have produced a very large body of literature on social capital, discussing a wide range of theoretical perspectives, empirical evaluations and practical applications of the concept. Among others, governments in North America, Europe and Australia have adopted social capital as the foundation of social inclusion policies and legislation. Theorists of social capital have included in its qualities the ability to increase economic development, facilitate social co-operation, contribute to civic society, decrease social isolation, strengthen communities, enhance public health, and assist learning. While many remain sceptical about the actual power of social capital, warning against the temptation of overemphasising its role in the numerous social processes to which it is associated, the social capital debate remains current and the literature on its applications continues to grow.

Among the many areas of research on social capital, one of the most recent is its relationship with sport and leisure. In particular, research on social capital and sport has focussed on the value of sport as a forum for the creation and accumulation of social capital. The central idea motivating research in this field has been that, since sport favours social interaction and voluntary association, it facilitates the formation of those connections based on trust and reciprocity that help people to act collectively and/or access resources generally falling under the banner of social capital. In turn, social capital created and accumulated through participation in sport can be useful for a wide array of purposes, at both the personal and the community or regional levels, ranging from social support to economic development. In short, whilst involvement with sport can also produce socially undesirable effects such as

¹ In this thesis, football is intended as Association Football. Despite being also known as 'soccer' in countries where other football codes are popular, in Australia its official name has been recently changed to 'football' with the re-naming of its chief national institution from Soccer Australia to Football Federation Australia (FFA). Football Federation Australia (FFA) is an association affiliated to the world governing body of Association Football (FIFA).

marginalisation and violence, through the creation of social capital it can contribute to the functioning of society and the strengthening of communities.

However, the relationship between social capital and sport is more complex and wide reaching than that. The body of knowledge concerned with it is only recent and quite limited, and several aspects of this relationship still need to be explored. In particular, while the concern of researchers tends to lie with how sport can contribute to social capital, the dynamics by which social capital can contribute to sport deserve further attention. In these terms, the interest of researchers focussed primarily on how social capital may affect participation in sport and on the connection between social capital, social exclusion and general involvement with sport and recreation activities. Nonetheless, little is known about if and how social capital can contribute to progress in sport and the accomplishment of sporting results, and particularly for 'serious' sports practiced at the highest levels (i.e. beyond the recreation/leisure value of general sport participation). This includes, for example, the enhancement of competition or development outcomes (e.g. winning trophies or enhancing the quality of teams and athletes), the management of sport organisations, the growth of sport participation in particular regions, and the links between sporting communities and wider local communities.

It is undeniable that in advanced economies as well as in developing countries sport is often of considerable concern to both governments and the people alike. All over the world, children dream of becoming sport stars representing their countries in international competitions. Particular sports (i.e. those that offer the possibility of lucrative careers, such as football), especially in developing countries, are often seen as one of the few chances that young people may have to escape poverty. People from all socio-economic backgrounds dedicate significant time and energy to following the efforts of their favourite teams or athletes. Whole communities and towns come together to support their own sport heroes. Important sporting events, particularly those global spectacles the most obvious examples of which are the Olympic Games and the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) World Cup, obtain impressive financial investments and international news value. Not surprisingly, governments compete fiercely for the opportunity to host such events. In general, regardless of whether particular individuals may be passionate or

not about any given sport, team or athlete, sport matters.

In Australia, as in many other countries, sport organisations (e.g. local, state, national federations and associations) and government agencies place significant effort in assisting the growth and the development of sports. It is not an overstatement to say that it is generally perceived as important how the various Australian teams and athletes fare in international competitions. For example, in 2008 the Australian Federal Government committed an extra 32 million dollars in funding to assist the national football federation (FFA) in the development of men's and women's football in Australia (Ellis, 2008). Furthermore, each state has its own government-funded Institute of Sport dedicated to the development of the most promising local elite athletes in a variety of sports, and modelled on the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in Canberra. The AIS combines top-level coaching with "*world-class facilities and cutting-edge sports science and sports medicine services*" and it is considered the "*world's best practice model for high performance athlete development*" (Australian Sports Commission, 2009). Broadly speaking, the aim of the state-based Institutes of Sport is to identify and develop athletes for elite competitions and for selection in national teams. In South Australia, for example, the coaches, sport scientists and sport psychologists of the Adelaide-based South Australian Sports Institute (SASI) produced over 100 athletes for various national teams in 2009 (South Australian Sports Institute, 2009). The top Australian athletes, who represent the country in the most prestigious international events, typically move on to the AIS.

The production of Australian athletes is aided by research in sport studies and sport sciences that provide important information to sport organisations on strategies to facilitate athletes' development. On the other hand, the social fabric of the communities of peers and other social networks to which athletes belong during the phase of their sporting development is frequently overlooked. While it is generally accepted that the social environment in which athletes live and the relationships they share with peers and coaches can affect their development, the mechanisms that enable athletes and sport organisations to benefit from social relationships deserve more attention. In particular, current research does not engage with the concept of social capital, which it is instead suited to explain the accruing of resources or

liabilities that can facilitate or undermine the athletes' technical development. Social capital here is defined as the ability of individuals and groups to gain resources by means of membership in social networks.

The key research objective of this study is to explore the relationship between social capital and the development of elite sport players. The central hypothesis is that social capital can play an important role in facilitating or undermining the technical development of players and their career opportunities. This research takes women's football as a case study to explore how social capital arising from social networks encompassing players, their immediate social environments, and the South Australian system of players' production, can affect positively and/or negatively the players' opportunities to reach the highest level in their sport. The aim of the study is to provide examples of how social capital accruing to both players and women's football organisations (e.g. clubs and governing bodies) can ultimately affect the state output of elite players. Elite players are defined as those who are part of state teams, national league teams and/or high-level state development programs² (i.e. those who are pursuing their career pathway beyond the club level and that have opportunities to reach the national teams). The thesis is concerned with the effects of social capital (i.e. whether it affects development or not), its sources (i.e. the relationships in which it resides) and the resources that social capital makes available to people or groups and that can affect the careers of players (e.g. knowledge, financial resources). The development of players is gauged by their ability to 'take the next step' in their sporting careers and access the upper level at which women's football is played, from playing at school to reaching the national teams. In short, this study is about the influence of social capital in the passage of players from the bottom to the top of South Australian women's football and the prospects for local players to reach the national teams.

The key research questions of this thesis are:

- Can social capital affect the development, and facilitate or undermine the

² The number of these programs can vary each year, however they are generally structured as: 'state development squads' (open to junior players identified as potential state players); 'state teams' (junior teams representing South Australia at annual national tournaments); 'SASI program' (aimed at a restricted number of players – mostly junior – identified as potential national players); and 'national league' (senior South Australian team competing in a national league).

career of South Australian elite women's football players?

- In what ways does social capital work to influence the development of players?
- What type of social networks can favour accumulation of social capital that can affect the development of players?
- Is social capital especially important, positively and/or negatively, for any particular step in the career of South Australian players?
- Is social capital especially important for particular categories of individuals or groups within the South Australian women's football community?

These key research questions are addressed using mixed quantitative and qualitative research methods, although qualitative methods were used to gather most of the information. The study is structured around three fundamental steps in the career of South Australian players. These are the passages from school to club football; from club to state football; and from state teams to national teams. Each passage from one level to another is considered individually in the light of the social networks that can facilitate access to resources or liabilities that in turn can help or hinder it.

The study area is the South Australian women's football region, defined as the places where formal women's football institutions exist. In these terms, the South Australian women's football region includes two distinct sub-regions: the Adelaide metropolitan region and the Mount Gambier region. These are the only areas where formal women's football leagues exist, and where the sport is played beyond the school level (i.e. in clubs). Moreover, these are the only areas that are active in the production of elite players. Figure 1.1 shows the two women's football regions that make up the study area.

The Adelaide region (also referred to as SAWSA region, from the name of its governing body – SAWSA: South Australian Women's Soccer Association) is the main women's football region in the state (Fig. 1.1). It covers nineteen³ Local Government Areas (LGAs) in and around metropolitan Adelaide with a women's

³ The LGAs comprising the Adelaide women's football region are: Adelaide, Adelaide Hills, Barossa, Burnside, Campbelltown, Charles Sturt, Holdfast Bay, Gawler, Marion, Mitcham, Mount Barker, Norwood-Payneham-St. Peters, Onkaparinga, Playford, Port Adelaide-Enfield, Prospect, Salisbury, Tea Tree Gully, Unley, Walkerville, and West Torrens.

football club competing in the local formal leagues, and it is home to over 70 per cent of South Australia's population (approximately 1,080,000 people) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). It contains 35 women's football clubs (South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2008b) and it caters for both junior and senior age groups. In the Adelaide region, the leagues are organised in four junior age groups – Under 11, Under 13, Under 15, and Under 17 – and six senior (open age) categories – Division 4 (lowest), Division 3, Division 2, Division 1, Premier Reserve, and Premier League (highest) (South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2008a). There are a little over 1,000 registered players in the Adelaide region (Rosso, 2009b).

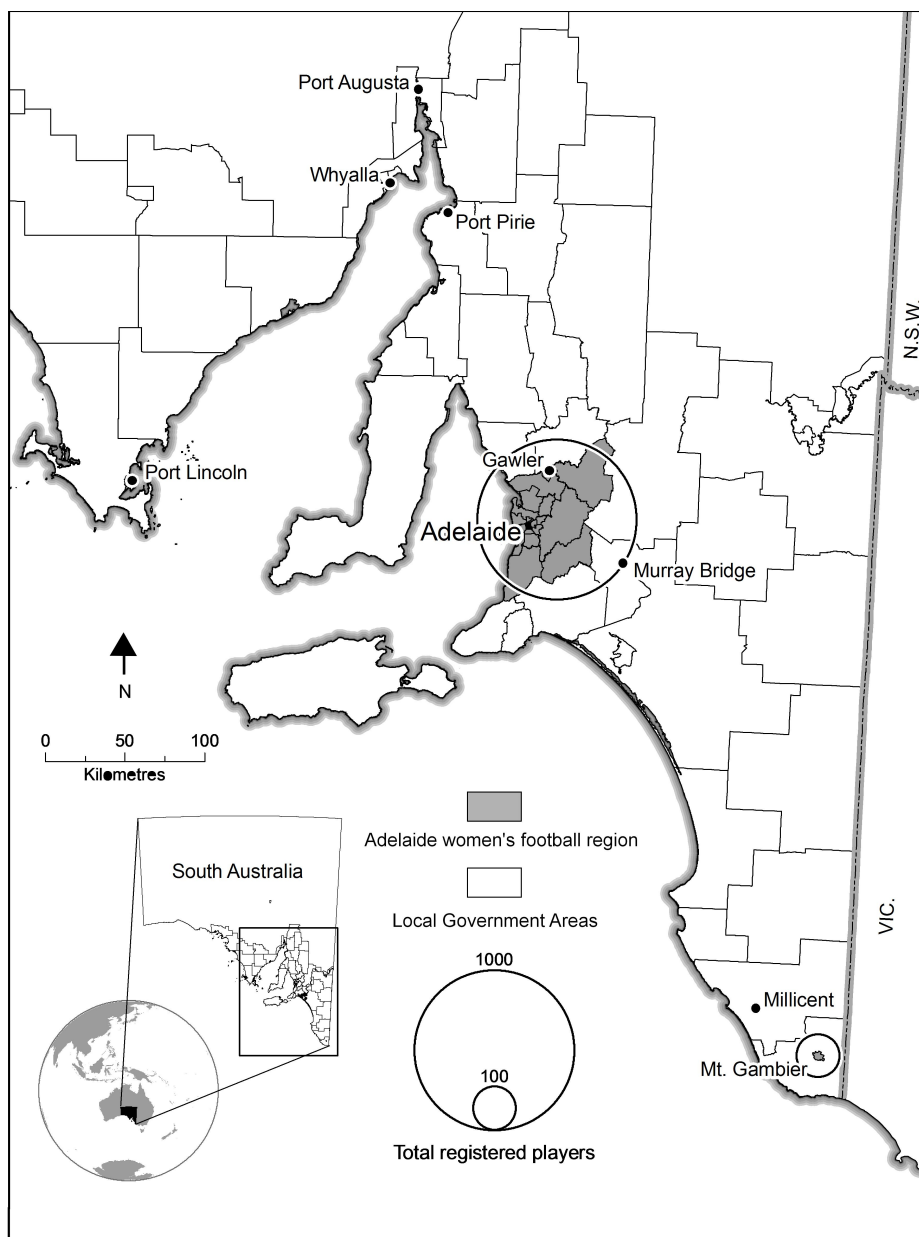


Figure 1.1: South Australian women's football regions

The Mount Gambier region (also referred to as SEWFA region from the name of its governing body – SEWFA: South East Women’s Football Association) is much smaller and is limited to the rural areas surrounding Mount Gambier (approximately 23,500 people) and Millicent (approximately 5,000 people) in the south east of the state (Fig. 1.1) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). It accounts for eight clubs and it offers only a Junior (Under 14) and a Senior (open age) division (Western Border Soccer Association, 2008). According to Mr. Stuart Birch, president of SEWFA, there are only around 140 registered players in the Mount Gambier region (2007, pers. comm.).

1.1 Study background

The research idea stems from my earlier work on cultural and geographical aspects of women’s football in South Australia (Rosso, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009b, 2010a) and my personal interest in the sport. For several years, I have been involved in the sport as a club and state women’s football coach. Having worked with many of the most recognised local elite players, I have extensive ‘hands on’ experience in the issue of players’ development with a view to preparing players for the next step in their careers. This has contributed to gaining an ‘insider understanding’ of dynamics of technical development that go beyond the simple connection between talent, practice and motivation (Williams & Reilly, 2000), and that have the potential to affect greatly the players’ chances of career success. I also have significant first-hand knowledge of the South Australian women’s football system and the people who make up the local women’s football community. Naturally, with first-hand perspective comes the risk of biased observation. I am aware of my social identity within the local women’s football community and my positionality (England, 1994; Nagar & Geiger, 2007; Rose, 1997; Sultana, 2007) with respect to the topic. Recognising issues of positionality, however, does not detract from the objectivity and ethical rigour of this research. Rather, in agreement with Peake and Trotz (1999, p. 33, in Sultana, 2007) a degree of subjectivity can strengthen a researcher’s commitment to base his/her research on relationships of mutual respect and recognition with his/her informants. With this in mind, a great deal of attention has been placed on methodological rigour and on techniques of verification and

validation of information such as triangulation (Patton, 1990) (see section 2.1.3).

1.1.1 Governance of South Australian women's football

This thesis is the result of a study conducted in South Australia between March 2007 and December 2009. In particular, data was gathered in 2007 and 2008 (see section 2.2). This period coincided with an important phase of restructuring of the South Australian football (both men's and women's) bureaucracy, and it is meaningful to cast some light on the complicated institutional web involved with the local sport. It is also important to note that the restructuring of South Australian football did not occur in isolation. Instead, it took place within the framework of a broader process of re-organisation and rationalisation of the whole structure of football in Australia that followed the independent inquiry (commissioned by the Australian government and published in 2003) into the management and governance of the sport known as the Crawford Report (Independent Soccer Review Committee, 2003). The basic aim of the inquiry was to understand what direction Australian football should take to increase its competitiveness at the international level (e.g. qualify for World Cup tournaments) and to boost domestic interest in the 'world game'.

Among other strategies, the Crawford Report recommended the re-organisation of the national football governing body, which was recreated as Football Federation Australia (FFA) to replace the allegedly mismanaged former national body Soccer Australia. Following the launch of the new national federation (FFA), each major football institution in the country was restructured as well. Currently, nine 'member federations' are responsible for implementing the FFA's strategic plans and guidelines in each state, territory or region of influence, comprising: Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Northern New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania (Football Federation Australia, 2009a). Each of these federations underwent a revision process including a name change after the Crawford Report.

The institutional structure of football changed significantly also at the local and regional levels. One of the recommendations of the Crawford Report implied that a single institution should be responsible to administer football in its state/region within the national structure of Football Federation Australia (FFA) (Football

Federation South Australia, 2008b). This included both the men's and the women's games. In South Australia, the South Australian Football Federation (FFSA – which was recreated from the former South Australian Soccer Federation – SASF – chief governing body of local men's football) became the only football body recognised by FFA. Importantly, belonging to the FFA's national structure ensures the institutional connections that are necessary to facilitate the career path of players from the local to the national scene, including aspiring to play for the national teams. For example, the national coaches (FFA) would recruit players based on their performance within their official state structure (FFSA). In short, while the official rules governing this principle are still somewhat loose in South Australia, if players, coaches and clubs want to take their football seriously (i.e. aspire to a sporting career that may eventuate with state and national representation) they have to belong with FFSA (Football Federation South Australia, 2008a). As a consequence, the numerous local and/or gendered associations that historically made up the South Australian football bureaucracy (Harlow, 2003a) had to merge with or affiliate to FFSA in order to be recognised by FFA⁴. While certain associations (i.e. local amateur associations) decided to remain independent and continue to run inexpensive and socially driven leagues, most (i.e. those that wanted to maintain links with national football) shifted under the influence of FFSA.

Although many of the changes that occurred in South Australia following the restructuring of FFSA are arguably mere bureaucratic exercises, women's football deserves more consideration. While most of the local (men's and boys') associations simply became affiliated to FFSA (i.e. maintained their name and continued to run their local competition while paying affiliation fees to FFSA), the state's women's football associations (i.e. SAWSA – South Australian Women's Soccer Association) could not retain its name and had to become an integral part of FFSA. This resulted from the decision of FFA to take a direct involvement in Australian women's football, and the attempt to integrate the women's game into the mainstream (men's) mechanism.

⁴ The previously independent associations that after 2008 affiliated to FFSA are: Adelaide Hills Junior Soccer Association; Broken Hill Soccer Association; Collegiate Soccer League; Futsal SA; Noarlunga & Districts Junior Soccer Association; North West Junior Soccer Association; Port Augusta Junior Soccer Association; Port Lincoln Soccer Association; Port Pirie Junior Soccer Association; Riverland Soccer Association; SA Master League; Western Border Soccer Association (which includes SEWFA); and Whyalla Soccer Association (Football Federation South Australia, 2010)

Until recently, women's football in South Australia was administered by two different associations that operated in two different regions (i.e. SAWSA – South Australian Women's Soccer Association – in the Adelaide region and SEWFA – South East Women's Football Association – in Mount Gambier) and shared no links, plans or responsibilities. SAWSA was the independent governing body of women's football in the Adelaide region since 1978, when the first official women's league was formed in South Australia, (Harlow, 2003b; Rosso, 2009b). Moreover, until the mid 2000s, the Adelaide metropolitan region largely coincided with the entire South Australian women's football system (i.e. it was the only place where women's football was played formally beyond the school level) (Rosso, 2006, 2008, 2009b, 2010a). SAWSA was directly linked to the national teams (FFA) and the South Australian Sports Institute (SASI) and, in conjunction with the latter, it was responsible for delivering the career path to facilitate the passage of local players to the national teams (South Australian Sports Institute, 2008; South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2006). This included the administration of the South Australian state teams and associated development programs. On the other hand, the role of the South Australian Sports Institute (SASI) was never related to the administration of the sport. SASI is an institute of the South Australian Government's Office for Recreation and Sport, within the framework of the Australian Sporting Commission and the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS). Consistent with the framework of the AIS, the role of SASI is to identify and offer special development programs to young South Australian athletes with a view to inclusion into national teams. SASI has its own women's football department, independent from FFSA/SAWSA (although often it co-operates with FFSA/SAWSA). The restructuring of South Australian football did not affect SASI or its role in relation to other institutions.

In Mount Gambier, organised women's football was introduced only in 2003. Since then, the South East Women's Football Association (operating as a division of Western Border Soccer Association – WBSA – the local men's football institution) administered the local sport. While for a few years the Mount Gambier women's system was completely isolated from the rest of the state (i.e. Adelaide and SAWSA), in 2006 SEWFA established formal links with SAWSA and became

involved in the production of state players (see section 4.2.3).

As of the 1st of November 2008, SAWSA became an integral part of FFSA, de-registering as an association (Football Federation South Australia, 2008b). All programs and competitions that were traditionally managed by SAWSA were transferred to FFSA, which became the inclusive institution of local football, including women's football (Football Federation South Australia, 2008b). However, to run women's football, FFSA has maintained the former SAWSA women's football committee within its new structure (the former SAWSA committee is currently known as 'FFSA Women's Standing Committee'). Following the incorporation of the women's association (i.e. SAWSA) into the broad FFSA, no significant changes to existing programs were made. In other words, despite the new bureaucracy and associated terminology, the former SAWSA committee is expected to continue to run women's football in South Australia in the near future. In June 2008, also the governing body of football in Mount Gambier (i.e. WBSA, of which the Mount Gambier women's association – SEWFA – is part) became affiliated to FFSA. However, the latter was purely a bureaucratic implementation, since WBSA maintained its name and the responsibility of running local competitions (including women's football, through its women's section – SEWFA) in the Mount Gambier area as explained by Mr. John Mundy, FFSA Coaching & Development Manager (2008, pers. comm.).

To recapitulate, in the current administrative organisation of South Australian football (including women's) there is one 'umbrella' association (FFSA) that represents the national football institution (FFA) at the state level. This association (FFSA) administers both men's and women's systems throughout the state. Former independent associations (e.g. women's associations and country associations) are now incorporated into FFSA, in the form of either internal committees (e.g. divisions - SAWSA) or external associations controlled by FFSA (e.g. WBSA). Women's football is governed by FFSA through its internal Women's Standing Committee (former SAWSA) and the external regional association of Mount Gambier (WBSA), which has its own women's football division (SEWFA). However, despite the recent changes, the sport is still administered by the same people and committees. Because of this and because the current nomenclature is still provisional and vulnerable to

sudden change (e.g. in the FFSA 2008 Annual Report SAWSA is still referred to with its traditional name) (Football Federation South Australia, 2008a), in this study the FFSA Women’s Standing Committee will still be referred to as SAWSA and the Mount Gambier Women’s Football Federation will be referred to as SEWFA. This is also the official terminology in use at the time of data gathering, and referring to SAWSA as opposed to the FFSA Women’s Standing Committee (which did not exist when data was collected) reflects more accurately the contribution of those who participated into this study (i.e. the interviewees and questionnaire respondents – see Chapter 2). Table 1.1 summarises the roles of the institutions responsible for women’s football in South Australia.

Table 1.1: Institutions of women’s football in South Australia

Institution	Role
FFSA (Football Federation South Australia)	Official governing body of men’s and women’s football in South Australia in the national structure of FFA.
SAWSA (South Australian Women’s Soccer Association)	Defunct state women’s football association, now integral part of FFSA. Currently de-registered, it maintains its operations under the banner of FFSA Women’s Standing Committee. It is responsible for Adelaide-based leagues, state teams, and state development programs.
WBSA (Western Border Soccer Association)	Local governing body of men’s and women’s football in the Mount Gambier region affiliated to FFSA. It incorporates SEWFA, the local women’s football association.
SEWFA (South East Women’s Football Association)	Local association, part of WBSA, running women’s leagues in the Mount Gambier region. It also runs local state development programs in conjunction with SAWSA/FFSA.
SASI (South Australian Sports Institute)	Institute part of the South Australian Government’s Office for Recreation and Sport. Formally independent from FFSA, it offers special development programs for players identified as potential national athletes.

1.1.1.1 Main implications of recent restructuring

While the recent bureaucratic restructuring of women’s football in South Australia has not yet produced important changes in the day-to-day management of the sport

(the institutions that provided leadership under the former order have been re-badged under the direct control of FFSA but are still largely responsible for the administration of the sport), two implications deserve attention.

Firstly, the de-registration of SAWSA and its amalgamation into FFSA can be seen as an example of traditionalist male-dominated sport hierarchies trying to take control over the women's game (Hong & Mangan, 2003b). At the time of the amalgamation, SAWSA was an independent institution exclusively devoted to women's football, while FFSA (which currently encompasses both men's and women's football) was the men's federation. The argument here would be that football (and more in general, sport) is traditionally a "*male preserve*" (Pfister, 2003, p. 142) and that within mixed-gendered federations there will always be a stronger component of male domination. In other words, belonging to the same federation implies severe risks for the future direction of women's football, as the institution's male component will probably always relegate it to a secondary position within its priorities. This may also include funding. Within the same institution, women's football would have to compete with its male counterpart, and would probably suffer from cultural discrimination that would result in 'second class citizen' treatment. Consequently, it would be disadvantaged in terms of funding and quality of facilities and personnel assigned to it. More extreme arguments would also suggest that the whole restructuring of women's football in Australia (i.e. FFA directly administering the sport) is in fact an attempt of the dominant gender to exert control over a fast-growing women's sport to reaffirm its social domination. A similar point is put forward by Hjelm and Olofsson (2003, p. 199) who, in the framework of women's football in Sweden, attribute the incorporation of the women's game into the men's federation as an attempt to restrain women's football by making it "*invisible and subordinate*", and therefore maintain the male domination over the sport.

On the other hand, enthusiasts of the restructuring process would argue that women's football is much better off being co-ordinated by a single federation nationwide (i.e. FFA), which can 'bring everybody under one roof' and ensure that certain standards are met in every state. Moreover, being together with the men would ensure a higher level of experience and expertise in the governance of sport organisations, which

would result in enhanced professionalism in the management of women's football. Similar points of view are expressed by Fasting (2003) in her account of the progress of women's football in Norway, where effective management on behalf of a single body produced long term stability and ultimately world-class results on the football pitch. Other subsidiary arguments supporting the 'new course' would include that since women's football is part of the responsibilities of the world football governing body (FIFA) it would be anti-historical if in Australia it was not administered by the national organisation representing FIFA (i.e. FFA).

The second important implication of this bureaucratic 'new course' concerns the overall sporting value placed on women's football in South Australia (and in Australia). While in 1978 SAWSA was created with a very local focus and the simple aim to "*provide opportunities for girls and women to participate in football*" (Football Federation South Australia, 2008a, p. 10), after over three decades South Australian women's football is increasingly connected with global football and concerned with the production of top-quality players (Rosso, 2008, 2009b, 2010a). Following Rosso (2010a), since the mid 1990s South Australian women's football has become increasingly 'serious' in terms of the focus on the achievement of results that characterises it. Whilst most players still participate for recreational and social purposes, in recent years the sport became increasingly characterised by elements that Bale (2003) and Guttman (1978) attribute to 'achievement' sports, as opposed to recreational sports (see section 3.2.1). 'Achievement' sports are characterised by a strong focus on the production (or achievement) of formal sporting results, such as success in prestigious competitions or the production of elite players. They are also usually typified by somewhat complex systems of governance, often making use of planning and mass communication tools to re-iterate their principles and functions (often within wider contexts – e.g. the international sporting scene).

The sporting achievement that South Australian women's football has been increasingly concerned with since the mid 1990s relates to the production of elite players to feed the national teams (Rosso, 2008, 2010a). For example, in the last fifteen years SAWSA implemented a series of strategies to lift the profile of the local sport and to provide a career development path for those players who are determined to pursue success at the highest level (e.g. national team). At the same time,

SAWSA, SASI, and recently SEWFA, have run increasingly numerous special development programs for young talented players. The elements that best summarise the characteristics of South Australian women's football as an 'achievement' sport are its commitment to produce players for the national teams; the emergence of women's football 'sportsapes' (Bale, 2003; Rosso, 2009b, 2010a); and the consolidation of the South Australian women's football system in a wider formal framework (i.e. national) that connects it with global football.

While South Australian women's football was an 'achievement' sport before the recent bureaucratic restructuring (Rosso, 2008, 2009b, 2010a), the fact that currently it is the direct responsibility of FFSA reinforces its 'achievement' character. The direction taken by FFA to recognise only one football body in each state effectively creates a net divide between those who play seriously ('achievement') and those who do not. As testified by the FFSA 2008 Annual Report, being involved with football outside the framework of FFA/FFSA prevents players and coaches from accessing national pathways, state teams and development programs, and generally moving forward (Football Federation South Australia, 2008a). These opportunities are instead provided to South Australian women's football players. Even if the whole South Australian women's football community is not involved with 'achievement' football, the sport itself retains a definite 'achievement' dimension that the direct connection with FFSA has arguably strengthened.

1.1.2 'Taking the next step'

Women's football in South Australia is an amateur sport, played at school, club and state levels. Since its beginnings in 1978, it has grown remarkably in participation, number of clubs and values associated with the sport (Rosso, 2010a), and since the mid 1990s it is in its 'achievement' phase (Rosso, 2009b). Among others, three factors that contributed to the development of local women's football into an 'achievement' sport are: the internationalisation of women's football competitions in the 1990s; the national demand for high quality players; and the involvement of the Federal and State Governments in the provision of resources to develop local talented players.

The growth of local women's football is not a surprising trend. In the last decade, the

sport has been considered the fastest growing sport in the world (Hong & Mangan, 2003b) For example, between 2000 and 2006, the number of registered women's football players has grown 54 per cent to over four million worldwide, making up about 10 per cent of the total registered players across both genders (Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 2007b). In Australia, the participation of women in football is even more significant. For instance, the number of registered female players grew over sixteen per cent between 2004 and 2006, and currently women make up approximately twenty per cent of the players registered with associations under the umbrella of FFA (Football Federation Australia, 2007).

Moreover, football continues to increase in popularity all over the world across genders, including in countries such as Australia traditionally orientated towards other sports (Kuntz, 2007). In Australia, it has grown to become the most popular football code in terms of generalised (i.e. not necessarily organised/competitive) participation (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009a). Furthermore, while the popularity of other codes is often strongly associated with the areas in which people live (e.g. Rugby League tends to be especially popular in Queensland and New South Wales), *“football is recognised by many to be the first sport in Australia to establish a truly national competition”* (Australian Government - Department of the Environment Water Heritage and the Arts, 2008). In the past few years, the national interest in the sport grew so dramatically that for the first time Australia bid to host the FIFA World Cup (Football Federation Australia, 2009b). Reasons for the rise of football's popularity in Australia include the men's national team participation into the 2006 FIFA World Cup; their qualification for the 2010 FIFA World Cup; and the launch in 2005 of a new national A-League (or 'trans-Tasman', as it includes a team from New Zealand). This was particularly aimed at overcoming old rivalries embodied by local ethnic clubs (O'Hara, 1994) and increasing the local profile and profitability of the ever-growing 'world game' (Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 2007b).

The increasing popularity of the domestic men's game has arguably contributed to a steady growth of the women's game too. More to this point, in their attempt to appeal to the widest possible population and promote general interest in the game, the Australian football institutions did not forget to target women. This matched the

Federal Government's renewed interest in the game and its commitment to portray an image to which attention to minorities is central. Recognising that "*women's sport in Australia has been stuck in a cycle of poor media exposure for some time, leading to less and less media coverage, shrinking sponsorship and fewer remuneration opportunities*" (Ellis, 2008, press conference, 28 July), in 2008 the Government provided sixteen million dollars to FFA to help establish a women's high profile league and to support the women's national teams (Ellis, 2008). In this spirit, and with the support of important financial sponsors, in 2008 FFA launched the women's national Westfield W-League, based around the existing A-League teams and televised live on national television (Football Federation Australia, 2009a).

The W-League replaced the ill-funded National Summer League (in which the various states' Institutes of Sports faced each other over a short period each summer) and contributed to lift the profile of the women's game nationally. It became the highest level at which players can play below the national teams and it provided new opportunities (adding to playing for state teams or being part of Institute of Sports' special squads – e.g. SASI) for local players to be seen at a national scale. In South Australia, the Adelaide-based team (Adelaide United) boasts players from both the local and interstate leagues, and embodies the 'achievement' dimension of local women's football (see section 4.2.3).

It is important to notice that the focus on players' production that epitomises the 'achievement' phase of South Australian women's football does not relate to the whole South Australian women's football system (see section 4.2). Whilst all competitions are *per se* challenging in sporting terms, most clubs competing in the lower leagues are mostly concerned with generalised participation and social outcomes, not placing much emphasis on the development of young players (or not having the necessary resources to do so). Furthermore, all South Australian clubs are run by volunteers who often do not have the technical knowledge, time and/or other resources to successfully engage with 'achievement' objectives. This is especially evident in Mount Gambier, where women's football is still relatively a new sport, clubs and players are only few, and the first development program aimed at potential state players was introduced as late as 2006. Even in Adelaide, only a few clubs are actively involved with 'achievement' women's football and produce players for state

teams and special development programs on a regular basis. In Adelaide, most ‘achievement’ players come from a restricted number of Premier League⁵ clubs, which have sound junior systems and generally invest a great deal of time and resources in the technical development of their players. For example, five Premier League clubs produced 41 of the 64 South Australian state teams’ players in 2008, and only seven clubs produced players for the more competitive Under 15 and Under 17 age groups (the most ‘senior’ age groups and the ones where potential national players are most likely to be identified from) (Football Federation South Australia, 2008a). Nevertheless, the ‘achievement’ character of local women’s football is definitely observable in the structure of the South Australian women’s football system (see section 4.2) and the initiatives of the state institutions aimed at facilitating the career pathway of players designed by FFA, SAWSA and SASI (South Australian Sport Institute, 2008; South Australian Women's Soccer Association, 2008a).

The most defining aspect of ‘achievement’ women’s football in South Australia is the idea of ‘taking the next step’ in the players’ footballing careers. The South Australian system is structured to favour the engagement of young club players with special development programs run by the state institutions (i.e. FFSA/SAWSA, SEWFA, and SASI). Typically, players are identified by state representatives during the regular club competitions and/or end-of-season carnivals, and encouraged to participate in state development squads over summer. State development squads are for players from Under 12 to Under 17 age groups. These are open to all players registered with FFSA and selection occurs by means of trials. The state development squads then provide the pool of players from which the state teams are selected. The state teams participate in national tournaments in July and provide the most direct opportunity for local players to be identified by national scouts. Players who return to South Australia as ‘identified’ are introduced into the SASI programs, alongside other local players already ‘ear tagged’ as potential future national players by the SASI head coach. The SASI programs belong with the AIS (Australian Institute of Sport) framework and deliver free-of-charge intensive specialised training over one year or longer to athletes with serious potential to become national players. Figure

⁵ The Premier League is the top club competition in South Australia.

1.2 shows the typical career progression of South Australian players who reach the national level.

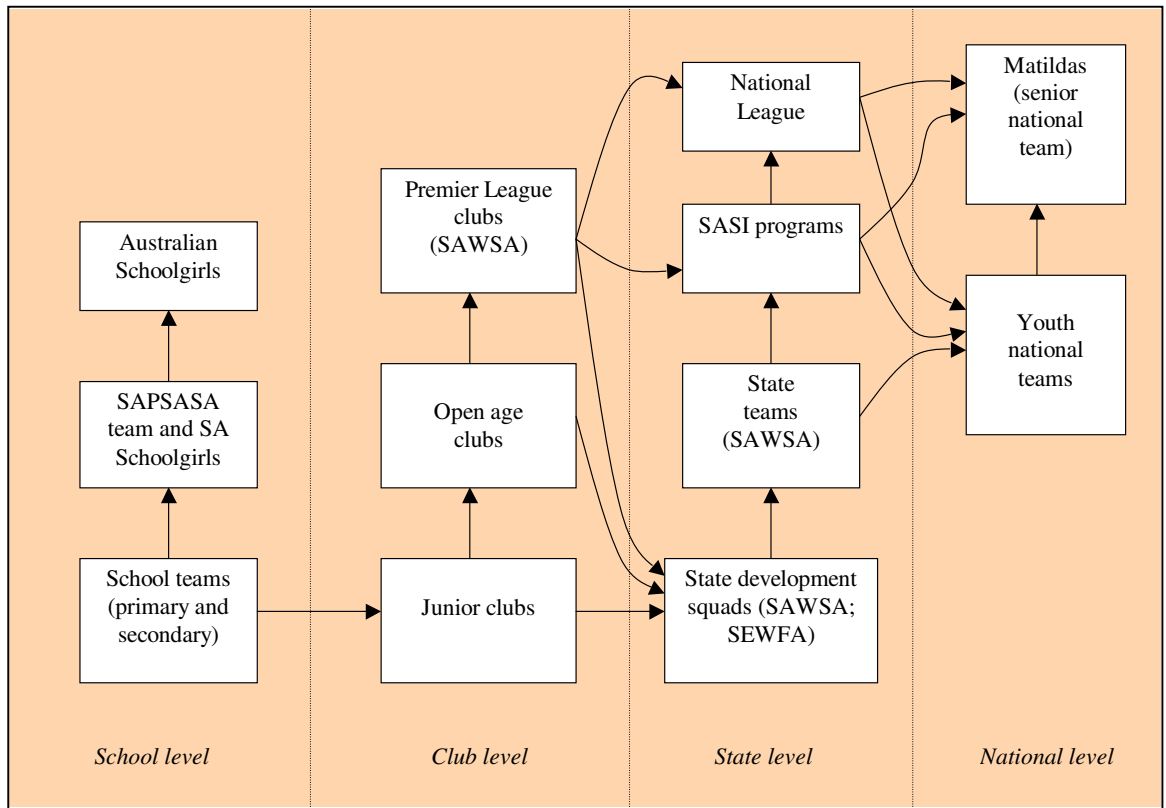


Figure 1.2: Typical career pathway of South Australian elite women’s football players

The players’ career pathway typically starts in school, where they play informally, participate in school tournaments (often playing with boys) and can make the school-based state teams (i.e. SAPSASA team – South Australian Primary School Amateur Sport Association – or SA Schoolgirls – the secondary school state team). The next step is playing for local clubs, developing through their junior ranks, and reaching the highest club level (Premier League). While playing for clubs, players are selected for state teams (all state teams are junior teams – in recent years state teams were Under 14, Under 15, and Under 17), for elite development programs (e.g. SASI – junior and senior) and/or the national league team (i.e. Adelaide United - senior), from where they have the opportunity to be identified by national scouts (see section 4.2.3 for more details on state teams and development squads).

In both Mount Gambier and Adelaide, ‘taking the next step’ involves preparing players to move to the top of their football system, and possibly into the one above

(e.g. national system). In other words, it generally means moving from one system to another, defined both as travelling (e.g. to central Adelaide for state teams' training) and as a mental and environmental shift (e.g. joining a local squad or program). However, while Adelaide-based 'achievement' minded players are advantaged by the location of state venues and programs within their metropolitan area (Rosso, 2009a), Mount Gambier players who aspire to play at the state level and above have to undertake a further step. They need to move to or undertake regular trips to Adelaide (approximately 450 kilometres) where the state teams and the development programs that can facilitate their passage to the national level are located. The only state program in Mount Gambier is the SEWFA Regional Development Squad, which provides a basic first step for local players aiming at preparing them to trial for the Adelaide-based state programs. In this sense, for Mount Gambier players 'taking the next step' to 'achievement' football is significantly more complicated than for Adelaide players.

1.2 Conceptual framework and approach

The players' opportunities to 'take the next step' are influenced by factors that go well beyond sheer technical considerations. To this point, it is useful to think about the movement of players between different women's football systems as being affected by both 'push' and 'pull' factors. This concept relates to migration theory (Ravenstein, 1885, 1889) and is derived from the work of Lee (1966). In assessing the factors affecting migration, Lee (1966) considers aspects associated with the areas of origin ('push' factors) and destination ('pull' factors) of migrants, intervening obstacles, and other personal factors. Dorigo and Tobler (1983) embrace the notion of 'push' and 'pull' factors, but include also the deterrent of distance as an additional factor of migration. The purpose of this work is not to discuss mathematical models of migration (Dorigo & Tobler, 1983) or to engage with migration theory (Lee, 1966; Ravenstein, 1885, 1889), however it is useful to draw a parallel between migration flows and the flows of players between women's football systems. As patterns of migration are influenced by 'push-pull' factors that go beyond simple assumptions of poverty (Lee, 1966), flows of players between local (school and club), state and national systems relate to 'push-pull' factors that go beyond technical considerations such as the mere ability of players.

The ability of players to develop and ‘take the next step’ can depend upon personal and external or environmental factors. The first category includes self-drive, passion, emotional stability and self-confidence, while the second includes access to good-quality coaching, advice, knowledge and facilities, positive learning environments, moral support and encouragement, the influence of role models, and access to financial, logistic and other resources (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Timson-Katchis & Jowett, 2005; Williams & Reilly, 2000). These factors of development, in turn, are affected by a combination of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors encompassing the players’ personal sphere (both in football and private – e.g. family – terms), the system of origin (e.g. the state system) and the system of destination (e.g. the national system). These include events, circumstances, and social connections that can help or prevent players from gaining necessary technical, physical and psychological strengths, increasing their football knowledge, maintaining high motivation and focus, increasing/maintaining their self-confidence, accessing financial and logistic resources, and overcoming intervening obstacles such as distance, injuries, unfavourable coaching decisions, or negative life phases. Among these ‘pull’ and ‘push’ factors, there is social capital accruing to both individuals and/or groups, including players, coaches, clubs, and institutions.

Although it is clear that social relationships can influence the development of talent – for example, relationships between athletes, coaches and parents can have important impacts on the way athletes live their sport experiences (Timson-Katchis & Jowett, 2005) – the concept of social capital does not explicitly appear among the traditional factors affecting the development of athletes (see sections 3.2.3. and 3.3). The hypothesis of this work, instead, is that social capital can affect the development of women’s football players and a sport system’s production of elite players. In particular, social capital can affect those outcomes as it can increase or decrease the ability of sport systems to ‘pull’ and/or ‘push’ players, and the ability of individuals to access and/or make use of resources that can help them in ‘taking the next step’. On one hand, it can affect access to resources accruing directly to players (e.g. access to personal advice), and on the other, resources accruing to whole sport institutions or even systems (e.g. effective means to acquire, share and/or disseminate information).

The following example describes a hypothetical instance in which social capital would facilitate the engagement of school players with formal clubs. It all starts with fruitful social connections that facilitate the exchange of some sort of useful resources between people, in this case information. By belonging to the same social network, a school coach and a club coach could exchange useful information to 'push' and/or 'pull' school players towards the club level. For example, they could share coaching knowledge that would increase the quality of school training sessions. In this case, social capital would help school teachers/coaches to increase training quality standards that in turn would help school players to learn better skills and prepare them to attend club trials ('push' factor). The two coaches could also share information (e.g. name, parents' names, telephone number, abilities) about potentially interesting school players. In this case, social capital would help a club to identify and access young players who show particular potential ('pull' factor). At the same time, social capital accruing directly to young players from their personal social networks (e.g. within the family) could ensure that they access transportation to reach the club and that they receive adequate moral support to boost their confidence and motivation.

In this work, the role of social capital as a factor of development for women's football players is considered in the light of the social capital theory of career success (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Although social capital can only complement existing characteristics of individuals and groups, it is an important factor of career success (see section 3.1.7.5). The work of Seibert et al. (2001) substantiates the popular notions that 'knowing the right people' can facilitate career achievements. Through the integration of three apparently contrasting social capital theories, they note that social capital residing in social contacts affects career success in the form of three 'network benefits': access to information; access to other resources; and career sponsorship. Social contacts carry a component of 'usefulness' according to the benefit that they can produce, while the quantity of social contacts that may occur among a networks' members is determined by the networks' structures. In women's football terms, access to information includes good quality coaching, mentoring, and, more generally, knowledge. Other resources include moral support, positive learning environments, and financial, logistic, and general practical resources (e.g. sporting

facilities and equipment). Finally, career sponsorship refers to the influence of players' acquaintances on individuals and institutions important for their career pathway.

1.2.1 Conceptualisation of social capital

This research has its roots in the field of the relationship between social capital and sport (see section 3.3), and it is concerned with the role of social capital in facilitating or undermining the development of elite women's football players in South Australia. Importantly, social capital is an abstract and multidimensional notion, the empirical worth of which is problematic due to fundamental difficulties in providing credible measurements and encompassing temporal dimensions to it (Giorgas, 2007b) (see section 3.1.6). This work does not attempt to quantify social capital at any given level of investigation. Instead, it is concerned with the largely qualitative exploration of the dynamics by which social capital can affect the development of women's football players.

To avoid confusion, it is meaningful to note that while the thesis explores the relationship between sport and social capital, it is not about social capital as an outcome of sporting activity (e.g. the generation of social capital through participation in sport) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009b; Seippel, 2006; Tonts, 2005). Contrarily, it considers sporting activity, and more specifically the production of results (i.e. elite players), as a possible outcome of social capital. Furthermore, while the following areas of research have contributed to inspire the perspective on social capital adopted here, and while it is possible to identify links between this work and most of those fields, this thesis is not specifically concerned with any of them. For example, this thesis is not concerned with social capital as a strategy of community building (Bryson & Mowbray, 2005; Chaskin, Goerge, Skyles, & Guiltinan, 2006). It is not about community strength (Western, Stimson, Baum, & Van Gellicum, 2005), communitarianism (Jarvie, 2003, 2006b), or social exclusion (Arthurson & Jacobs, 2004; Collins, 2003). It is not about public health (Baum & Palmer, 2002; Baum et al., 2007). It is not about civic engagement (Putnam, 1995). It is not about democracy (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993) or generalised trust (Fukuyama, 1995, in Bullen and Onyx 2000, p. 24). The thesis is not concerned with empirical measures of social capital aimed at the establishment of a hierarchy of

‘social capital rich’ and ‘social capital poor’ areas or clubs. It does not treat social capital as an always positive entity (Putnam, 1995; Putnam et al., 1993). The relationship between social capital and sport is explored to understand the effect of social capital on elite South Australian women’s football, not to discuss how sport may affect the general well being of communities.

The broad interdisciplinary use of social capital can lead to confusion with regards to its nature, applications, and approaches to it. While the whole body of literature reviewed contributed to informing the conceptualisation of social capital for the purpose of this thesis (see Chapter 3), this is inspired especially by the ‘resource’ approach (Woolcock, 2003) and by the view of social capital as a component of economic development (Woolcock, 1998; Woolcock, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000) (see sections 3.1.2 and 3.1.7.4).

In this work, social capital is treated as an actual resource that resides in social structures (i.e. social networks) and that can help to establish and/or maintain advantages for groups and/or individuals by being accumulated, exchanged, and invested in. It is embedded in networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2001) between the various actors of South Australian women’s football and, while it resides with individuals, it can benefit groups by extension and become a collective asset (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Consistent with Woolcock and Narayan (2000), a varied stock of social networks is seen as an advantage for individuals and groups in overcoming obstacles and vulnerabilities, and in gaining benefits from new opportunities. Moreover, the profitability of the networks depends on the resources that its members can bring to them. Following Bourdieu (1986), social capital can be purposely acquired and exchanged. Moreover, it often requires explicit investments (e.g. in time and/or sociability) to be acquired and/or maintained at desirable levels. Social capital, therefore, is also recognised to have costs (e.g. investments) as well as gains. Importantly, social capital can also be a potential liability as well as a potential advantage. The latter concept refers to the conceptualisation of negative social capital (see section 3.1.4), according to which social relationships can result in reduced individual freedom, excessive claims on certain network members, downward levelling pressures, and exclusion of outsiders (Portes, 1998; Portes & Landolt, 1996).

In accord with the remarks of several social capital critics (e.g. Portes, 1998; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000), this work considers social capital focussing on its sources rather than its consequences (e.g. trust, reciprocity, access to resources), and stresses the importance of a clear differentiation between the two in order to avoid tautology. The sources of social capital are the social networks and ties between individuals, clubs and institutions of South Australian women's football. The outcomes of social capital, instead, are the dynamics – reinforcement of trust, social norms, and purposive social interaction – originating from networks that make possible accessing resources. This work accounts also for different elements of social capital, in particular its 'bonding' and 'bridging' dimensions. However, while upholding that 'bonding' social capital occurs within denser networks and 'bridging' social capital accrues to people from different networks (Tonts, 2005), it recognises that they are in fact two expressions of the same concept, and that often outcomes of social capital depend upon the combination of both (Warde & Tampubolon, 2002).

In summary, in this work social capital is considered as a resource embedded in networks encompassing the South Australian women's football system and the individual spheres of its members, that can affect both positively or negatively the ability of players to pursue career success. Social capital resides in networks, but it is not the networks themselves. While social capital refers to the gain of benefits through social relationships, social networks alone do not necessarily imply the access to valuable resources. In other words, networks are not necessarily profitable. Social capital, instead, refers to the ability of networks to grant the access to resources of the networks' members. It refers to the profitability of networks. Social capital is, therefore, the ability to gain resources by means of membership in social networks.

1.3 Concluding remarks

This thesis explores the relationship between social capital and elite women's football in South Australia. The aim of the project is to understand if social capital plays a role in facilitating or undermining the development of elite South Australian women's football players. Elite players are those who play beyond the club level (i.e.

state level and above) and have opportunities to reach the national teams. The central hypothesis of this research is that social capital can affect the career of players in ways similar to how it affects the career of managers or other professional figures (Seibert et al., 2001). In particular, it can affect development factors residing with players, institutions, and the women's football system (e.g. the players' motivation; the players' self-confidence; the ability of the sport system to circulate knowledge; the ability of the sport system to reach out to players) by facilitating access to information, access to practical resources (e.g. logistic, financial), and career sponsorship. This study belongs with the body of knowledge of social capital and sport (see section 3.3), and is of concern to researchers and academics interested in social capital, sport studies, career success, and talent development, and to women's football (and generally, sport) organisations.

The role of social capital is explored in reference to networks encompassing the players and their social environments (e.g. families, schools and local communities); women's football clubs; women's football institutions; state squads; and national squads. The thesis is organised in eight chapters. This first chapter (introduction) has established the reasons for conducting this research. It has detailed the conceptual framework and the background of the study, identified its key research objectives, and formulated the study's key research questions and hypotheses. Chapter 2 describes the methodology of the study and discusses related methodological issues. It details the study's design, the steps that led to the definition of the field of investigation, and the process of data collection and analysis. The literature review presented in Chapter 3 establishes the theoretical framework of this research. It considers literature on social capital theory and its applications, literature on sport studies, and the relatively recent field of social capital and sport. It engages with issues of identification and interpretation of the concept of social capital for the purpose of this research, and it reviews key themes of social aspects of sports to identify theoretical gaps in the current literature. Chapter 4 sets the context of women's football in South Australia and defines the concepts of women's football communities and systems. It discusses different aspects of the South Australian women's football community and it considers factors that can facilitate inclusion in and exclusion from it. It also details the organisation of the South Australian women's football system and the development path that typically leads players to the

fulfilment of their careers. Chapter 5, 6 and 7 present and discuss the main findings of the study. Each of these chapters is dedicated to a specific career phase of South Australian women's football players. Chapter 5 explores the ways in which social capital can facilitate or hinder the passage from playing purely for recreational purposes (including at school) to joining a formal football club. It explores, in particular, social networks including the players and networks across clubs, women's football communities and wider local communities. Chapter 6 considers the passage from playing only for local clubs to being included into South Australian state teams and special state development programs. In particular, the chapter concentrates on resources and liabilities accruing from social bonds and networks including the players, their families and their local communities, the women's football clubs and the women's football governing bodies. Chapter 7 concentrates on the passage of elite South Australian state players to the national teams. In particular, it considers bonds within state squads and national squads, and networks across the national and the South Australian systems. Finally, Chapter 8 (conclusion) recapitulates and discusses the conclusions of the study and points to possible avenues for future research.