AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE U.S. KABADDI TEAM:
IDENTITIES, TRANSITIONS, AND GLOBALIZED SPORT

By

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To my family, for sharing with me the love of sport, education, and adventure. I love you all.
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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE U.S. KABADDI TEAM:
IDENTITIES, TRANSITIONS, AND GLOBALIZED SPORT

By

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At the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup in Ahmedabad, India, thirteen American men became the first U.S. representatives to compete in this elite tournament. The unlikely story of their recruitment, training, and participation in the event is a unique and rich source of data regarding international athletics. Through oral history methods, this study preserves the experiences of six African American members of the inaugural men’s square-style U.S. Kabaddi Team, and uses data derived from their interviews to examine the impact of identity intersectionality and globalization on athlete transitions into new sports. The study’s narrative analysis of these interviews suggests that both the complex intersection of participants’ racial, national, and athletic identities, and the active globalization of an indigenous game, affected the participants’ transition experiences into the sport of kabaddi in a variety of ways.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In October of 2016, thirteen American men represented the United States in the Kabaddi World Cup in Ahmedabad, India. In July of 2016, those thirteen men had no idea that the sport of kabaddi existed. They were former athletes from familiar American sports, living their respective lives in new ways: some as entrepreneurs, accountants, and musicians (Khawaja, 2016; Neumann, 2016). An opportunity to join a new kind of team came to them from mutual acquaintance Celestine Jones after her meeting with International Kabaddi Federation (IKF) representatives (Khawaja, 2016). The men put their lives on hold to train in Jacksonville, Florida. After a mere month of preparation, the fledgling U.S. Kabaddi Team traveled halfway around the world to India, where kabaddi has been played for thousands of years and remains one of the country’s most popular sports. These men competed against the best kabaddi teams in the world, from eleven other nations, in a televised event that received over 80 million viewers in the first week (Laghate, 2016). The Americans were described as “overwhelmed newcomers” experiencing a “baptism by fire,” referring to their more-experienced competition composed of many professional kabaddi athletes (Khawaja, 2016; Neumann, 2016). Most members of the U.S. team had played sports in the past, some even at the collegiate or semi-pro level (Khawaja, 2016; Neumann, 2016). Team member Dillyon Banks told Deadspin, “For me, it’s like a second chance… After that college level, you never think you’re gonna go out there with another professional sport… Now, something else just fell in my lap” (Khawaja, 2016, p. 7). The experiences of these former athletes’ transitions into a new sport, and the impact of the exceptional circumstances on the identities of the American kabaddi players, warranted scholarly inquiry.
Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this study are multiple, and include both archival and analytical purpose. The ancillary objective of this project is the preservation of a story: the U.S Kabaddi team’s conception and participation at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup. The data collected from player interviews will serve as an official record about this phenomenon from those who experienced it. Preserving this distinctive and intriguing story provides future value for academic and casual readers alike. It is important to preserve unique events such as these for the expansion of data about sport - in this case in the areas of knowledge about kabaddi, indigenous sports, and the globalization of sport. Yet it has also been noted by scholars that sport histories - particularly oral histories about sport - have a unique ability to connect to readers outside academia (Cahn, 1994). There is value in conducting research that can be appreciated as both professional and popular scholarship because data, history, and information should be accessible to and serve the interests of more than just a small academic subset of society (Cahn, 1994).

The primary purpose of the study is to examine the transition experiences of these former athletes into a new sport. This also involves investigating the impact of participating in the Kabaddi World Cup on the American players’ athletic, national, and racial identities. Of particular interest is how this experience has affected the athletic, national, and racial identities of the participants, and how the participants navigated these intersections of identity. Legendary boxer Cassius Clay, later known as Muhammad Ali, competed for the United States in 1960 Summer Olympic Games in Rome. When asked about racial injustice in America at the time, Clay said, “Oh, yeah, we’ve got some problems… But get this straight - it's still the best country in the world” (Maraniss, 2008). While not yet as volatile as the 1960’s regarding race relations in the United States, there has been significant unrest in recent years spurring movements such as Black Lives Matter into being. Twelve of the thirteen USA Kabaddi Team members who
competed in India were African American (Khawaja, 2016). The current study explores how the participants navigated intersections of identification as both athletes and Americans along with their own racial identities amidst a contentious racial climate. This study also investigates the applicability of established globalization theories to the experience of the U.S. Kabaddi Team at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup - theories regarding the homogenization of sport, such the Americanization of indigenous games, and how globalization of sport is connected to the athletes’ transition experiences (Klein, 1991). Player testimonies about involvement in this new iteration of the indigenous Indian sport provide an excellent opportunity to collect relevant data about concrete examples of how sport globalization and the complex intersections of racial, national, and athletic identities can impact athlete transition into new sports.

**Research Questions**

The phenomena of interest are the creation of the U.S. Kabaddi Team, and its involvement in the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup. The research goals of this study are to explore sport-related transition in athletes through several means. The current study investigates how the interaction between national, racial, and athletic identities affects the entry of former athletes into new sports. It will also seek to determine whether the current globalization of kabaddi had any affect on the athletes’ transition experiences. These goals are reflected in the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How did the U.S. athletes navigate intersections of racial, national, and athletic identities during this experience?

Research Question 2: How were the U.S. athletes’ transitions into a new sport affected by their national, racial, and athletic identities?

Research Question 3: Did participating in an indigenous sport that is actively undergoing globalization affect the U.S. athletes’ transition experiences?
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction to Kabaddi

Throughout history, different regional iterations of Kabaddi were known by different names and played with some variance in rules (Mittal, 2015). The PKL and the Kabaddi World Cup use a common set of modernized rules. The object of the game is for one’s team to score more points than the opposing team. The game is played on a matted rectangular court with dimensions of ten meters width and thirteen meters length, and is divided by a “mid line” that separates the rectangle evenly into sides of five meters by six-and-a-half meters, as depicted in Figure 1 (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016).

Teams can have twelve active players during a match: up to seven on the court at a time with five substitutes (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016). Each team starts the game with seven players on their respective side of the court (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016). One team at a time will send one member across the mid line to the opposing team’s side. Gameplay revolves around each team exchanging these “raid” attempts (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016). Points can be earned by either the raiding player that is invading the other team’s space, or by defending team. The player that enters the opponents’ side must continuously chant the word “kabaddi” to demonstrate that he is exhaling breath throughout the entirety of his raid, which can last for up to thirty seconds (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016). This chanting is referred to as the “cant,” and is a rule that originally served as a sort of play clock to keep the exchange of raids moving (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016). Taking a breath before returning to his side results in a point for the opposing team.

While in the opposing team’s side of the court, the raider will attempt first to put a foot across the “baulk line,” which is positioned 3.75 meters away and parallel to the mid line (“2016
Failing to cross this line during a raid will result in the raider being declared out, and forcing his team to play with one less player until they earn his entry back into the game. After the raider crosses the baulk line, he can attempt to physically touch a member of the other team. If the raider can return any portion of his body back across the mid line to his own side after touching an opponent, he is rewarded well. His team will earn the number of points equal to the number of opposing players he touched, and will also earn the reentry of an equivalent number of his own teammates who have been declared out. Any defending players on the opposing team who were touched on a successful raid are declared out (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016). A raider can also earn a bonus point if he plants one foot between the “bonus” line and the edge of the court, while keeping his other foot in the air, and is able to return to his own side successfully against at least six defenders (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016). However, if during a raid the defending team manages to tackle or force the raider entirely out of play before he is able to reach the mid line, then he is declared out, and the defending team earns a point and the reentry of one of their own players (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016).

If a raider crosses the baulk line and is able to return to his side, but fails to earn a bonus point or a tag point during his raid, this is considered an empty raid and no points are awarded to either team. Teams are not allowed to have three consecutive empty raids; if the last two raids have been empty, the third is considered a “do-or-die” raid in which the raider must earn a point in some fashion, or be declared out and reward the defending team with a point (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016). Defending teams can earn an extra point for a “super tackle” if they can tackle a raider with only three defenders or less (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016). If one team manages to get all of the opposing team’s players out at once, they are awarded an “all-
out” and receive two extra points, and the opposing team returns all seven players back to the court (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016).

World Cup kabaddi matches have two twenty-minute periods with a five-minute halftime in between (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Rules”, 2016). In 2016, twelve countries sent teams to compete in the Kabaddi World Cup, resulting in two groups of six teams. Each team played every other team in their group, and the two teams with the best records from each group advanced to the semifinals. In the third ever Kabaddi World Cup, host country India won the final match over Iran on October 22, 2016 by a score of thirty-eight to twenty-nine; India defeated Iran in the final matches of both the 2004 and 2007 Kabaddi World Cups as well (“2016 Kabaddi World Cup Standings”, 2016).

**History of Kabaddi**

The word kabaddi has been tentatively translated to mean, “to begin living” (Pande, 1982). Perhaps it is the central role of breathing, or not breathing, that gave the sport its name; it clearly links the sport to yoga’s pranayama, “breath of life” techniques (Alter, 2000). The sport is thought to have some origin related to the Charkravyuhna battle formation described in the Hindu epic Mahabharata, where warriors encircled their opponents in an endless spiral allowing no escape (Mittal, 2015). Kabaddi is commonly reported to be 4000 years old, dating to India’s Vedic Age between 1500 and 500 B.C (Neumann, 2016; Sen, 2015; Sharma, 2010), and is so engrained in the cultural history of the Indian subcontinent that Buddhist writings describe kabaddi being played by the Buddha himself, Siddhartha Gautama (Sharma, 2010). For proof of its intrinsic nature in Indian culture, look to the reports of kabaddi being played by migrant communities of Indian expatriates in unlikely lands such as Trinidad and the West Indies (Jha, 1973).
The first reported information about the modernization and regulation of kabaddi comes from the early twentieth century, when middle-class Indians began organizing competitions in the Maharashtram area (Alter, 2000). According to Pande (1982), a newly motivated affection for kabaddi was spurred during this time due in part to Mahatma Gandhi’s Swadeshi campaign, which urged Indians to reject western cultural influences in favor of indigenous Indian cultural identity. The first reported attempt to standardize the rules of kabaddi came in 1923, and the first set of rules was officially published after revision in 1928 following the first officially recorded Kabaddi tournament (Arlott, 1975). However, regional variance in rules has endured even into modern times, where two styles of play still remain: circle-style kabaddi, and square-style kabaddi, the latter of which is of most relevance to the current study. Kabaddi was introduced to the Indian Olympic Games in 1938, later known as the National Games (Alter, 2000). The Amateur Kabaddi Federation of India was founded in 1950 and this group established what would become the most official and long-standing set of rules of play (Alter, 2000).

The sport’s formal introduction to the rest of the world came via its presentation as a demonstration sport at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games (Craig, 2002). Advocates of spreading kabaddi beyond Indian borders began making strides towards this goal with the formation of the Asian Amateur Kabaddi Federation in 1978 between India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka (Kabaddi, 1987), and eventually the sport was introduced to the Asian games in 1990 (Sen, 2015). In recent years the Indian TV network Star Sports, a subsidiary of 21st Century Fox, founded the Pro Kabaddi League. Star Sports shares the responsibility of running the Kabaddi World Cup with the International Kabaddi Federation (IKF), founded in 2004, which now serves as the governing body for the sport (Li et al., 2012).
History of the Pro Kabaddi League and Kabaddi World Cup

The first square-style Kabaddi World Cup was held in 2004 in Mumbai featuring twelve teams, including Japan, Iran, Bangladesh, the United Kingdom and South Korea, and India, among others (Sengupta, 2016). In 2007, the Kabaddi World Cup was held in Panvel and sixteen countries sent teams, with new additions such as the West Indies, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan (Sengupta, 2016). Circle-style kabaddi also has an international tournament called “World Cup Kabaddi,” and is hosted by the government of the Punjab district of India (World Cup Kabaddi). They have hosted three such competitions in 2010, 2014, and 2016. The circle-style kabaddi communities are considered to be grassroots operations at this point (Khawaja, 2016) – very little information about this specific competition exists outside of Wikipedia or the competition’s website. Punjabi immigrants in particular seem to have taken this circle-style version of game with them as they have relocated globally. Further detailed in the forthcoming section about kabaddi in the United States, there have been other international kabaddi competitions in various locations hosted by various local organizations, but these have all featured outdoor circle-style kabaddi, and none have operated on the grand scale or received the public interest of the Star Sports square-style of kabaddi tournaments. (Izzo, 2015; O’Brien, 2005; Orozco, 1996; Wharton, 1995)

The 2016 Kabaddi World Cup of interest to this study is also of great interest to many fans, consistent with the recent boon in India’s professional sport industry that orginiated in cricket arenas in 2008 with the massive commercial success of the Indian Premier League (IPL) (Khawaja, 2016; Indian, n.d.). The International Premier Tennis League, the Indian Super League of soccer, and the Pro Kabaddi League are all Indian associations that have since been modeled after the IPL (Khawaja, 2016; Davies, 2014). Star Sports has sought to cast the ancient sport of kabaddi in a different light so as to endear it to the middle classes – essentially to make it
a more palatable and interesting television event. To accomplish this, the PKL and Kabaddi World Cup embraced the smaller faster square-style of play, and brought some flash to the experience with loud music, bright lights, Bollywood ownership, and lots of funding (Lakshmi, 2014). The PKL held its first season in 2014, and has held three more seasons in a span of two years (Pro n.d.). 2016 was the first year with two PKL seasons, which was made possible due to a relatively short schedule that takes about three months to complete (Pro, n.d.). The PKL also held its first women’s league between three teams in 2016 (Pro, n.d.). There are eight men’s franchise teams in the PKL, located in various Indian cities (Pro, n.d.). The most expensive PKL players earned contracts of over $70,000 when their rights were auctioned during the 2016 offseason, and the minimum contract for a pro kabaddi athlete was about $5,000. (PTI). The most expensive player, defender Mohit Chhillar, was quoted as saying that he has no intentions to quit his normal job, which gives him unpaid leave during the PKL seasons (PTI). All of the players on India’s world cup roster play in the PKL, and Kenya, Iran, and South Korea also have PKL professionals on their world cup teams.

A rejuvenated emphasis from IKF officials to increase the sport’s global recognition is reportedly what spurred the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup into being, which is the first such tournament in almost ten years (Patwardhan, 2016). The difference in the latest tournament compared to prior versions was the influence of the Star Sports’ Network in the design, marketing, and distribution of the PKL, which has helped to establish a ravenous audience of Indian kabaddi fans. Critics have expressed suspicion about the inherent quality and motive of the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup, noting that many of the countries that were invited lacked an established foundation of kabaddi enthusiasts necessary to produce a competitive team. Thus, the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup was described by some as an experiment in promoting the
international relevance of the sport as opposed to hosting a tournament of truly successful teams (Patwardhan, 2016). Indian team captain Anup Kumar was quoted as saying, “Yes, not all the teams here are competitive… But the World Cup might be a first step towards making the game global” (Patwardhan, 2016). Kenya, Argentina, Poland, Japan, and Bangladesh are all described as having established kabaddi federations, but South Korea has the only “organized setup” aside from the major kabaddi-loving countries of Iran and India (Patwardhan, 2016). The players on the Australian team were as new to the sport as the Americans, with only a few weeks to train before traveling to India for competition (Patwardhan, 2016). While the competitive balance was certainly lacking, the impact this event had on the global promotion of kabaddi could be important for the sport’s future popularity. The tournament didn’t receive major coverage in the U.S., but both ESPN and Deadspin each wrote a story about the American team, which is more focus than kabaddi has ever received from these American sport-focused media outlets (Neumann, 2016; Khawaja, 2016). The 2016 Kabaddi World Cup was successful in terms of exhibiting the characteristics of a major sporting event, at least compared to the standards imposed by other popular international tournaments. The attention the tournament has received is due largely to funding and stimulation of viewer interest from Star Sports. The tournament ran for two weeks, unlike of the four-day editions in 2004 and 2007 (Patwardhan, 2016). Major corporations like Coca-Cola and Amazon sponsored the competition, and these companies were rewarded by the attention of more than 80 million viewers in the first week of games (Laghate, 2016).

**History of Kabaddi in the United States**

It is difficult to determine the origins of kabaddi’s introduction in the United States. Published records of people playing kabaddi in America date to the 1980’s (Dubin, 1987), but based on newspaper reports, it is likely that Punjabi immigrants had been playing the sport
recreationally in the U.S. for years before that. The earliest accounts of organized kabaddi competitions in America begin in 1995: The Los Angeles Times reported on a tournament called the Kabaddi USA Cup, which was hosted in Hayward, California, and featured teams from England, Pakistan, India, and Canada (Wharton, 1995). The article has some notes about an international circuit of competition being fairly well established, citing a competition in Vancouver earlier in 1995 that drew ten thousand spectators (Wharton, 1995). The article also mentions that the U.S. team was recruiting players around the mid-1980’s, although it is unknown how long this international circuit of circle-style kabaddi was in existence and what governing body organized it (Wharton, 1995). A tournament called the Kabaddi Gold Cup was held in Fresno, California is 1996 where the U.S. team, presumably the same one from the 1995 article, competed against teams from England, Pakistan, India, and Canada (Orozco, 1996). One report about a 2005 international kabaddi competition in Hayward, California claimed to it to be the first since 1997, and featured teams from India, Germany, the U.S., and Canada, among others (O’Brien, 2005). The Punjabi Sports Festival based near Chicago has a history going back to 1994 (Kummerer, 2000) and continues to host a circle-style kabaddi tournament as part of the festivities (Punjabi, n.d.). In 2015 the New York Times interviewed Renae McEvoy, a member of the USA Kabaddi Women’s Team (Izzo, 2015). In the article McEvoy discusses some of the aspects of circle-style kabaddi, and notes that most of the women’s players are based in New Jersey (Izzo, 2015). The article mentions a men’s U.S. team based in California, which can be presumed to also play the circular version of the sport (Izzo, 2015). The World Cup tournament that the U.S. women’s team attends is said to have been in existence since in 2010, which would align with the World Cup Kabaddi tournament hosted by the government of Punjab (Izzo, 2015).
The apparent existence of grassroots kabaddi communities and teams does bring into question the motives of officials seeking out potential athletes who have no familiarity with the sport, as was the case for the U.S. team that competed at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup. One possible reason is the differences in play between circle-style kabaddi and the version played in the PKL and Kabaddi World Cup. The maximum weight for PKL athletes is 190 pounds, which contributes to a faster and more athletic feel (Lakshmi, 2014). The athletes in the circle-style competitions have much more room to operate, as the playing area has a diameter of seventy feet, compared to a rectangle of just over forty feet (Izzo, 2015). Thus circle-style kabaddi often involves more heavyset players, as wrestling ability and strength take precedent to quickness (Wharton, 1995). It could also be hypothesized that there was a desire from Kabaddi World Cup officials for the United States to be represented by people without Indian heritage, thus simultaneously spreading the sport into new communities and presenting the sport as more widespread in non-Indian cultures.

As stated previously, all records of kabaddi being played in the United States, or being played by teams representing the United States, describe circle-style kabaddi competition. Thus, it can be tentatively assumed that the team of interest to this study, which competed at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup in India, was the first American team to compete in an international indoor square-style kabaddi tournament. It is very likely that the team of interest to this study is the first male American kabaddi team composed entirely of athletes with no Indian heritage. Most importantly, it can be verified that the team of interest to this study was the first American team to compete in a kabaddi competition hosted by the International Kabaddi Federation and Star Sports India and, whose modification of the sport has been integral in kabaddi’s flourishing popularity in recent years.
Issues in Globalization and Relation to Sport

Globalization is a sociological concept with a much grander scope than merely that which concerns sport and recreation. It is the theoretical premise of how increased connectivity has changed the world economically, politically, and culturally (Robertson, 1992; Wagg, Brick, Wheaton, & Caudwell, 2009). Advancements in technology have effectively shrunken the world; humans have developed immediate and simple forms of global communication, and the ability to travel great distances through superior forms of transportation has contributed to a greater sense of interconnectedness (Held, 1999). In modern society, there is little insulation from the influence of foreign cultures, even in the most remote communities. Thus, technology’s reduction of all functional distance has facilitated an increasingly global culture (Giddens, 1990). This could be considered an issue of “globality” – a companion concept to globalization conceived by Cohen and Kennedy (2007) to describe the, “development of a global way of thinking about and sharing experience” (Wagg et al., 2009, p. 95).

A primary point in the theorizing of globalization revolves around the concept of homogenization: when one particular culture begins to dominate and overwhelm indigenous cultures through permeation and dilution (Wagg et al, 2009). For example, one trend that is argued to have spread via global homogenization is the concept of “sportification,” described as the change in cultural function of games from that of expression and play towards competition and organization (Sage, 2010, page 7). This can be traced historically to the dissemination of sporting culture from England into the British Empire leading up to the twentieth century (Sage, 2010). Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the seriousness of sport has ushered in an age of sport industry that has changed its social purpose in many ways, which become even more magnified through the effects of globalization (Smart, 2007).
A term related to the concept of homogenization is that of Americanization, used first by Alan Klein (1991) in regards to sport. It is a phrase that refers to the idea of American and western values and practices infiltrating and weakening the presence of indigenous practices around the world – in this case in the realm of sport. This isn’t to say that the most popular sports in the United States are sweeping the world by storm, but rather that the capitalist values of America and western society are influencing the role sports play in society and how sports are designed to function. Andrews and Ritzer describe the imperialist nature of capitalism as a compelling source of the homogenized globalization that promotes American principles - a phenomenon they term as “grobalization” (2007, p. 30). They also describe global sport institutions and participants as being characterized by specific forces such as corporatization – strategic management motivated by profit - and spectacularization – the priority of offering entertainment-centric events (Andrew & Ritzer, 2007). Theorists argue that the commercialization of sport as an entertainment industry through mass media has promoted an Americanized model of sport on the global stage, and subsequently has marginalized native sporting traditions as outdated or illegitimate (Walsh and Giulianotti, 2001; Rees et al., 1998). The prominence of sport, and particularly sport media, as a primary form of entertainment is not solely an American phenomenon. Certainly there are other nations and cultures that value sports in this way, such as those invested in heavily televised European soccer leagues. However, it is undeniable that the corporatization and spectacularization of sport have deep roots in a capitalist American society: one needs to look no further than the Super Bowl to see evidence of the ways in which American sport encourages these principles. Barbara J. Keys (2006) dates America’s overt and lasting influence on the spectacularization of international sport all the way back to the 1932 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles.
While homogenization remains a fundamental theory of globalization, theorists have offered a conceptual reevaluation. Maguire (1999) argues that global homogenization does exist, but its perceived impact may be a bit overestimated. He describes the relations between global and indigenous cultures as more heterogeneous than homogenous (Maguire, 1999). Rather than simply whitewashing local culture, globalization promotes the identification of local cultural differences, thus drawing out distinctions as opposed to instituting uniformity. Roland Robertson’s theory of “glocalization” (1995) explains this interplay between forces of homogeneity and heterogeneity within globalization. Because difference and diversity are desirable in the global marketplace, globalization actually encourages the distinctiveness of local cultures. Still, the interconnected nature of the world is inherently influencing all local cultures. Thus, the product of these forces is a unique glocal culture in each circumstance (Robertson, 1992; Ritzer, 2004). Veseth (2005) describes this as a process of assimilation, in which local cultures absorb global influences and reform their own cultural identities with incorporation of those global influences. Addressing the term Americanization, Sage (2010) argues that while Americanization is a visibly existent force, it is not a threat to conform the world into one single culture. Heterogeneous hybridization and assimilation of the global culture into local cultures is a better understanding of what takes place, referring to Robertson’s (1992) glocalization theory of “cultural borrowing” (Sage, 2010, p. 22).

It is rare that any single cultural phenomenon or tradition can be globally popular, regardless of the impact of homogenizing influences or how willing local cultures are to assimilate those influences. In sport this is evident in the extreme variety of different games beloved in various nations around the world, or in the apathy towards or rejection of games from other cultures, as was the case in the failure of NFL Europe (Dzikus, 2005). Eriksen (2007)
offers general criteria for a sport, or any cultural tradition, to become popular at a global level: these phenomena, “(i) require little culturally specific knowledge; (ii) have an emotional, sensory, or intellectual appeal which transcends local concerns; (iii) are effectively marketed transnationally” (Eriksen, 2007, page 47). In the case of sport, there is additional local devotion that impacts the ability for a culture to accept or spread new games. Maguire (2002) explains that globalization and subsequent glocalization can be disorienting for cultural communities, and the sports of that culture are often used as a touchstone for stabilization and identification, serving as an, “anchor of meaning” (page 367). Eriksen (2007) goes so far as to suggest that there are certain games that are so locally bound that they cannot be globalized, such as the Gaelic sports of Ireland; a concept that refutes the ideas of an inescapably glocal modern world.

The Kabaddi World Cup is a noteworthy case upon which to apply these theories of globalization in sport. Certainly the reported influence of the Star Sports television network on the Pro Kabaddi League and the Kabaddi World Cup suggests the corporatization and spectacularization of a sport that, until recently, had remained very indigenous in its play. The gesture of inviting teams composed of players without Indian heritage or any familiarity of indigenous forms of kabaddi raises questions about how capitalist imperial homogenization may be influencing the direction of these new kabaddi traditions. Yet, the ancient Indian-ness that is inherent in the game distinguishes it as a distinctive cultural phenomenon that could be becoming more glocal through these globalizing influences. The U.S. kabaddi players’ memories provide valuable information about the function and purpose of the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup, illuminating aspects of the tournament that support theoretical concepts regarding the globalization of sport. In addition, the current study determines whether or not the active globalization of kabaddi had an impact on the U.S. athletes’ transition into the sport.
Identity Formation and Intersectionality

The deeper description of specific identities is best prefaed with an explanation of identity creation at its core. Mennell (1994) describes the basic premise of identity formation as something that entails social construction: every person associates with a multitude of different categorical groups, and each group cooperatively develops a shared understanding of what defines the group. These communally constructed understandings are identities, and are inherently cultural because of their communal creation (Mennell, 1994). According to Mennell, identity construction occurs through the interchange of views, including concepts of tradition, commonalities, and a determination of who belongs (1994). It is this sense of belonging that is especially important in the conceptualization of both national identity and its relationship to sport, as well as that of racial identity. The relationship between a person’s separate identities forms his or her own sense of unique self; yet, people do not connect with each identity at equal levels. Rather, each identity holds a varying amount of prominence or centrality to different individuals depending on how a person attends to and nurtures a particular area of their identity through development of knowledge, skills, and social interaction in that area. This process is referred to as socialization (Coakley, 1993).

The relationship between ones’ separate identities is referred to as identity intersectionality, which is defined by Anthias (1998) as the overlapping of one’s identities as layers of a self-concept. Each of these layers is simultaneously active and informs the behavior and personality of a person (Anthias, 1998). For example, the participants of the current study are simultaneously African Americans, U.S. citizens, males, and members of the U.S. Kabaddi Team. Each identity is connected to the others, and a person experiences these identities concurrently rather than individually.
The terminology of “intersectionality” was first used by Crenshaw (1991) in her work regarding the plight of African American women as examples of intersecting oppressed identities. According to Pavlidis and Fullgar (2013), research about intersectionality has evolved from the feminist theorists, and has promoted primarily on the relationship of gender identity with identities like race and class. Intersectionality framework revolves around the intent to study how identities intersect at the micro-level within individuals and relate those intersections marea-level social phenomenon (Corlett & Mavin, 2013; Bowleg, 2012). This has most often been used to study oppression and power dynamics - less investigation has been conducted in other “axes of identity” (Corlett & Mavin, 2013; Pavlidis & Fullgar, 2013, p. 424), athleticism and leisure-interests falling among those areas where scholarly inquiry is lacking. This study aims to expand the body of knowledge on intersectionality of identities related to issues of sport management, specifically regarding the athletic identities of minority individuals competing on national teams. Studying the intersections of these identities may serve to broaden the scope of intersectionality as a theory and demonstrate its application to sport management research.

**National Identity**

The issue of national identity has become increasingly intertwined with international sporting competition as sport has earned a more prominent role in modern global society over the last century.. Anderson’s (1983) foundational explanation of a nation describes it as an imagined community that must be socially constructed through ideas of shared culture that promote belonging, such as prescribed geographic boundaries or a common language (Cronin and Mayall, 1998). Sport can serve this purpose in a variety of ways, through specific cultural attachment to a sport acting as an anchor of meaning, or through the opportunity to compare nations in a setting of international competition. Success in sport on the world stage can serve as representative success for an entire nation; in the words of Hobsbawm (1990), “the
imagined community of millions seem more real as a team of 11 named people” (page 193). The building of national identity occurs at macro levels because the idea of a nation is socially constructed, but it also exists in the individuals of that social grouping, including the 11 individuals representing the nation, in this case.

As the prominence of sport in society has grown, so has its role in the construction of national identity. Sport has become increasingly impactful due to the effects of globalization, which have contributed to the increase in international multi-sport competitions in recent years (Sage, 2010). In fact, issues of national identity and globalization are well entwined (Maguire and Tuck, 1998). As discussed previously, the homogenizing forces of global culture factor into the creation of national identity, as the groups of individuals that share national connections respond through assimilation and reconstruction of their national identity. The responsive refuge in symbols of nationalism is exhibited in sports through the singing of national anthems before games, or flag-themed uniforms (Maguire and Tuck, 1998). In essence, sport itself is a national symbol; it cannot build a nation on its own, but it serves as a vehicle or an instrument with which national identity can be constructed (D’Agati, 2011).

It is not without the influence of political purposes that patriotic displays are prevalent at sporting events (Maguire and Tuck, 1998). The influence of sport in developing national identity and promoting patriotism is especially obvious during international competitions, such as the Olympic games or the FIFA World Cup. Pride in a country’s ability to supposedly nurture elite athletes can rally many citizens to embrace their nationality with fervor. Countries commonly utilize and manipulate their athletes’ images and external identities for the political purposes of promoting national pride, as has been studied using many Soviet controlled nations in the late twentieth century (Dannen et al, 2009; Mertin, 2008) and Canada in the 1980’s (Jackson &
Ponic, 2001) as examples. This brings into focus the issue of power dynamics in the formation of identity - a topic that is essential to the understanding of racial identity in the context of nationalism.

**National and Racial Identities in Athletes**

It is important to notice who, within a group, is empowered to decide upon the characteristics that define said group’s identity; it is never an impartial system. Theorists argue that it is the elites of a society who enjoy a dominant role, and are able to project the “appropriate” national identity for its citizens, thereby instituting an identity that will protect their station as elites in the group (Barreto, 2001; D’Agati, 2011). This hegemonic process marginalizes those who don’t share identity with the elites on grounds other than nationality – these factors can include ethnicity, gender, class, race, among others. D’Agati (2011) describes these groups as “peripheries,” and the empowered elites as the “core” of a nation (p. 141).

In the United States, the identity of race has long been one that separates the group of privileged elites in power and the groups of minorities in periphery. Because white cultural preferences are projected upon the United States as the foundations of American identity, the cultural differences in and preferences of other racial groups are marginalized. Minority populations in many nations, including the United States, are marginalized in much more tangible ways than through the concept of identity; yet, identity plays a real role in why they are marginalized. For these reasons, one’s racial identity and one’s national identity must be mediated when they are not allowed to agree. The undertones of “us versus them” are inherent in the development of all identities, as a group must collectively determine who belongs and who is outside. This concept is described thoroughly in Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory, which points to the importance of individuals comparing in-group traits versus all other out-groups to determine in-group criteria for membership and self-identification. Barth (1969)
explains that defined boundaries of a group are more durable than qualified traits, essentially arguing that defining the traits that don’t belong is easier than identifying the traits that do.

International competition serves as an opportunity to test the metal of “us” against a “them” that is clearly outside the geographical boundaries of what defines “us” as a nation (Barth, 1969; D’Agati, 2011). Theoretically this could stimulate national identification or national pride within citizens, but does it affect the nation’s peripheral populations in the same way that it would the core (D’Agati, 2011)? Prior research suggests not. In the case of the United States, African Americans specifically have been found to express lower levels of national pride and national identity than other racial groups (Harlow & Dundes, 2004; Theiss-Morse, 2009). While this is certainly not a monolithic expression of all black attitudes, studies suggest that this can generally be applied to the relationship between African American racial identity and national identity in America.

**Athlete Identity and Transitions In and Out of Sport**

The primary focus of the current study is that of athletes’ transitions in and out of sport. Many members of the U.S. Kabaddi Team had participated in sport at some point in their lives, but had ceased to pursue athletics competitively prior to this new opportunity (Neumann, 2016). Scholarly examination of athlete transitions has largely focused on the departure out of sport. While transitions within sport and into sport have also been explored to some extent, researchers were originally spurred to this agenda as they recognized the need to provide better support and care for athletes exiting sporting careers (Hallden, 1965). Leaving a sport can present challenges and personal distress for individuals that have dedicated much of their lives to an athletic craft. The concept of identity again applies heavily in this context, specifically concerning how identification as an athlete affects one’s ability to transition.
Athletic identity has been defined as the prominence of the athlete role within a person’s collection of other identities, and it is fostered through the development of athletic ability and frequency of social interaction in sport settings (Daniels et al., 2005). The development and maintenance of athletic identity has been well researched. Brewer et al. conducted an important study on athlete identity in 1993, investigating the effects of strong self-identification as an athlete on different aspects of personality. Donnelly and Young (1988) contributed to the theorization of athlete identity by arguing that while the parameters of an identity are socially constructed, the undertaking of joining a new subculture, such as rock climbers or basketball players, requires a more “deliberate act of identity construction” (p. 223). Individuals joining a subculture model the behaviors, attitudes, attire, and cultural expressions they perceive as prerequisite for belonging to the subgroup they are identifying with in attempts to earn “membership” via confirmation of achieved subgroup identity from established members (Donnelly & Young, 1988). The further along in the stages of presocialization, recruitment, socialization, and acceptance the individual progresses, the more the individual is prescribed that identity from others and centralizes the role within his or her own self-concept (Donnelly & Young, 1988). Embedded in this research is the argument that attention must be paid to the wider social and cultural histories surrounding subjects of identity study (Donnelly & Young, 1998).

This theory has many easy examples in sport and recreation enthusiasts, but its application to the current study is one that is interesting to consider, given the fact that the members of the U.S. Kabaddi Team were inducted into the elite level of the sport without any introduction into a kabaddi subculture.

The relationships between racial identities and athletic identity, and between national identities and athletic identity, have both garnered the focus of athletic identity researchers in
recent years. African American athletes have received particular attention in regards to racial and athletic identity intersection, which is relevant to the parameters of the current study. Research from Harrison et al. (2011) indicated that African American males showed higher levels of athletic identity than did their Caucasian American teammates, and that they valued sport at much higher levels. Bimper and Harrison (2011) subsequently hypothesized that African Americans athletes are being induced into having more central athletic identities than racial identities, and that perhaps the identification of oneself as an athlete has become socially communicated as inherent in the African American racial identity. In regard to the relationship between national and athletic identity in athletes, Hodler (2009) contributes some exploratory research to the growing body of knowledge in a study about national identity in U.S. Olympic swimmers. These athletes reported intense feelings of pride when competing in red, white, and blue attire, some stating that, “because you are wearing the United States cap . . . you represent everything that the flag means” (Hodler, 2009, p. 52). However, there were also reports of a differentiation between “athletic patriotism and political patriotism,” (Hodler, 2009, p. 56) defining political patriotism as something felt before and after competition in a community of people from around the world, and athletic patriotism as something felt during competition when the pride for the U.S. team was more relevant than the pride for the nation. This study suggests an increased athletic identity in U.S. athletes who participate in the Olympics, as the swimmers described having, “both confidence and incentive to ‘let everyone else know what the U.S. can do’ ” (Hodler, 2009, p. 56) because of the country’s history of success in their sport.

In relating these themes of athlete identity to the issue of transition, studies suggest that athletes who thoroughly identify with their athletic role and invest much of their personal and professional efforts into sport can encounter extremely challenging transitions away from sport.
(Brewer, 1993; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Again, this is not representative of all athletes’ experiences, but the trend has been conspicuous enough to encourage significant scholarly inquiry. Most research indicates that individuals with prominent athletic identities may have sacrificed the development of other identities during their loves, because achievement in sport requires dedication at the mental and social levels as well as the physical level (Gordon and Lavallee, 2004). Thus, athletes can encounter internal crises in understanding what makes them unique or identifiable as people when sport is no longer accessible to them (Lavallee, 2005; Webb et al., 1998). Athletes who struggle with transition away from sport have been shown to lose a good portion of their athlete identity upon exit, which is detrimental not only because it leaves a void in their self-conceptualization, but also because they may have lost their primary support structure in leaving their team or sporting community (Lavallee et al., 1997).

The body of knowledge regarding other types of transitional periods within sport is smaller than that of the transition out of sport. Bruner et al. (2008) conducted a study on hockey players transitioning to the elite levels of junior hockey in Canada, and found that positivity from coaches is important to successful transition of these athletes because of the many challenges change presents to athletes, both in the sport setting and in their personal lives. Supporting and encouraging the athlete can assuage issues of self-confidence, lack of playing time, and even settling into new living arrangements (Bruner et al., 2008). These findings suggest the reliance of athletes on their sport as both a support structure and as a potential cause of personal distress, which aligns with the issues of athlete identification supplanting other forms of identity as foremost in the self-concept of athletes. Falls and Wilson (2012) suggest that as professional athletes have become more migratory in response to global dispersion of sport, issues of geographical transition are more prevalent in the transition processes of athletes. Falls and
Wilson (2012) also found that for girls who traveled to distant universities on soccer scholarships, the connection with teammates who shared their athletic identity served as an important support structure for their ability to deal with challenges of transition.

Several studies have been conducted treating major competitions, such as the Olympic Games, as a transition period for athletes, which is of particular relevance to the current study due to the sport-specific magnitude and international nature of the Kabaddi World Cup. Wylleman et al. (2012) found that athletes who competed in the Olympic Games reported progressively greater identification as athletes before, during, and after competition. Schinke et al. (2014) proposed a model of six progressive “meta-transitions” that occur during the Olympic Games transition process: entering the training program, competing in major tournaments, qualifying for the Olympics, preparation for the Olympics, competing at the Olympics, and the post-Olympic period. While this meta-transition model was designed for application to the Olympic experience, it is interesting to consider in the context of the U.S. Kabaddi Team’s preparation for competition in their culminating international tournament. It is likely that the athletes experienced something similar to these meta-transitions prior to 2016 Kabaddi World Cup.

Schlossberg (1981), a chief transition scholar, explains that beginnings and ending are difficult because they change fundamental parts of life; “roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions,” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 159) are all different after life’s transition points. Schlossberg’s (2011) transition model encourages those dealing with a transition to first identify several attributes about the transition: whether the transition was expected or unexpected, how severely it has changed one’s roles and relationships, how far along one is in the transition process, and the availability of resources to make the transition successful. On this final point,
Schlossberg (2011) offers a sub-model to identify certain areas that can impact one’s ability to transition successfully, including: the preexisting stress of a person’s current situation unrelated to the transition, a person’s coping skills, the support a person will have during the transition, and strategies to address the situation. Application of this model has been proven useful in analyzing transition in athletes (Parker, 1994; Swain, 1991) and thus will be considered in the analysis of the current study as well.

**Summary**

The current study explored sport-related transition from several directions. A primary approach was to examine how the interaction between national, racial, and athletic identities affects the transition of former athletes into new sports. While research does exist examining the relationship between each of these identities in pairs, there remains a need to consider these theories concurrently, and a need to apply them to the sport management context of athlete transition. Investigating these identity elements should provide further insight into the experience of African American athletes representing the United States in international competition, and will expand the body of knowledge regarding the intersectionality of athletic, national, and racial identities in minority individuals, and their transition experiences in sport. The study also seeks to determine whether or not the actively occurring globalization of kabaddi had an impact on the U.S. athletes’ transition into the sport, and if so, how it challenged or aided their transition experiences. There have been some initial research forays regarding globalization and transition in international athletes, but globalization has yet to be applied to the reentry of former athletes into new sports. This study intends to utilize the unique circumstances of the U.S. Kabaddi Team’s swift progression, from learning of the sport’s existence to competing internationally, in order to study the effects of sport globalization on athlete transition into new sport.
Figure 2-1. Kabaddi Court
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

Introduction to Oral History and its Suitability

Oral history is a qualitative research method featuring interviews as means of data collection. The consistency of its definition suffers somewhat from the use of different terminology describing what is essentially the same method in many different research designs (Yow, 2005). In a most basic description of common oral history practice in the social sciences, the researcher conducts semi-structured interviews with participants, using a prepared interview guide and an audio or video recording device (Yow, 2005). These interview recordings are then transcribed and analyzed by the researcher, who contextualizes the data in historical and social settings, and applies the data to preexisting theory (Hesse-Biber, 2016).

What distinguishes oral history as a method is that it is ideal for the study of processes (Hesse-Biber, 2016). Oral history allows the researcher to collect data about the complex processes that have led an individual to his or her current state, and thus the data collected about the current state becomes more meaningfully contextualized in the social and cultural history (Hesse-Biber, 2016). Thus, unlike standard qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews, oral history’s purpose is to, “link micro- and macrophenomena” (Hesse-Biber, 2016, p. 153). In the social sciences, the method can be used to address theoretical assumptions about a population through specific narrative evidence, while at the same time preserving participants’ perspective and positioning within that broader context (Yow, 2005).

For these reasons, oral history has been selected as the appropriate method for the purpose of the current study. This purpose is to study former athletes’ transitions into a new sport - a process that is complex in nature, and is affected by elements that require additional attention, such as identity formation and mediation. The study intended to focus on a specific population of
former athletes and their experiences surrounding a specific event, providing a real example of where theory might apply, so as to connect individual understandings with broader themes. To achieve a holistic grasp of these athletes’ transition experiences, and to apply a unique story to greater sport theory, the researcher turns to oral history methodology.

Sport studies scholars have encouraged colleagues to cultivate the acceptance and use of oral history methods (Adams, 2012; Cahn 1994; Skillen & Osborne, 2015;), arguing that, “the recording and analysis of oral interpretations of the past – are… immensely rewarding undertakings when investigating sport and physical culture” (Adams, 2012, p. 8). This project served to continue the exemplification of oral history’s value as a method in the study of sport.

**Qualitative Foundations**

Oral History is a method that is rooted in qualitative research design. As the preeminent scholar of research methods John W. Creswell (2009) explains, the qualitative approach is, “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 5). The verbs “exploring and understanding” are a key difference between the goals of qualitative research and those of quantitative research, which instead attempts to test, measure, and support or disprove hypotheses (Creswell, 2009). The importance of meaning, and particularly each individual’s prescribed meanings, is a social-constructivist opinion of epistemology that pairs well with the current study’s assumptions about identity formation (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, qualitative methods as a whole have been specifically cited as appropriate for the study of identity intersectionality, because of the unique identity experience of each individual, and the importance of extracting meaning from these identity intersections (Parent et al., 2013; Shields, 2008).

Another defining characteristic of qualitative research is its inductive approach, which begins with a narrow scope and broadens through application to theory and context (Creswell,
2009). It is generally understood in most qualitative methods that the researcher makes some assumptions about potential findings; it is impossible to argue that a researcher who is interested in studying a phenomenon has no assumptions about what he or she may find (Yow, 2005). Sometimes social scientists must select certain aspects of phenomena to be studied, and thus make assumptions about what theory will be applicable to the phenomena (Yow, 2005). In the case of the current study, there is a wealth of information that could be wrought from the players about their experience and their motives about promoting kabaddi in the United States. However, the oral histories collected are at least partially slanted towards the research interests of the study.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of qualitative research to accept for those with positivist epistemologies is its inherent subjectivity. In quantitative methods, objectivity is emphasized so as to avoid influencing the results of the investigation. The argument that legitimatizes qualitative research is that subjectivity’s effect on results isn’t always detrimental. In fact, considering how subjectivity affects data can be a valuable practice for understanding the processes that people use to prescribe meaning to the past and present (Yow, 2005). The foundational oral history theorist Portelli (1991) showed that even the honest misremembering of facts could be an important aspect of how people collectively prescribe meaning to suit a community’s needs. As Abrams (2010) describes so well, “It is precisely that interplay between what we remember, how we remember and why we remember” (p. 81) that is essential in the analysis of narrative qualitative data.

**Memory Theory**

The essential premise of memory in the context of this study is that it is constructed, rather than pulled from a metaphorical file cabinet in the brain. In the aforementioned case of Portelli’s (1991) work, this is done socially as an entire community misremembered the date of someone’s death so that it fit with a more useful narrative in their minds. Collective memory is a
very important aspect to consider when theorizing memory, but it is better to start in the conceptualization of individual memory.

Psychologists have hypothesized that just as different parts of the human brain deal with different senses and types of cognitive tasks, different parts of the brain must be used collectively when remembering (Abrams, 2010; Yow, 2005). Something cues a memory – a smell, a picture, or an interview question, for example – and the brain begins to recall bits and pieces of the memory from the different parts of the brain that deal with senses, emotions, visual images, and so on (Abrams, 2010). It could be said that “remembering” is the re-connecting of a memory’s different members. The pieces are then organized and connected to create a memory through imagination. This is not to say that the experience was imagined, but rather that the fragments of a memory are what inform the visualization within one’s imagination, which is the only mental process humans have to visualize something they are not currently observing (Abrams, 2010). This is why memory is described as being constructed.

Each person’s construction of memory fragments will be different than someone else’s, because that person’s past experiences will influence what pieces of reality they subconsciously encode (Abrams, 2010; Yow, 2005). The memory will even be different for an individual every time he or she remembers it, because memories are subject to influence from the context in which they are being remembered (Abrams, 2010). This relates to the concept of collective memory, as first proposed by Maurice Halbwachs (1950), who argued that memory is always influenced by language and social frameworks, which are the tools of a society, and thus memories are always situated in a setting of constant social influence (Abrams, 2010). In addition, Halbwachs (1950) thought that because memories’ primary purpose is a means by which to connect and relate to other people, common or shared memories will persist and
memories that are different will not (Abrams, 2010). This created conceptual problems of how the very first memories were possibly conceived without social framework to inform them, and thus the concept of popular memory evolved as a median between individual and collective memory (Abrams, 2010). The position of popular memory theory, which is applied in the current study, is that collective memory can never be completely universal, and that human beings will never be unanimously in agreement about a memory. (Abrams, 2010). However, there are hegemonic influences on the process in which people generate and share individual memory, and there is a struggle between individual and collective memory similar to the struggle for identity of marginalized peoples as described in the literature review (Abrams, 2010). When analyzing oral history it is important to consider the historical and social contexts in which someone experienced a phenomenon, and the historical and social contexts in which they are remembering it.

**Sample**

The target population for the current study consists of African-American members of the U.S. Kabaddi Team who were formerly involved in athletics prior to joining the team. According to Markula and Silk (2011), this target contains attributes of both homogenous and criterion sampling strategies. The intent is to explore attributes of a singular subgroup, yet there are criteria for participation even within the subgroup. The action of contacting the athletes is related more to snowball sampling strategy (Markula & Silk, 2011); several participants were contacted to gauge their interest in participating in the study in December of 2016, and these players subsequently connected the researcher to more team members. Because the study’s ancillary purpose is archival in nature, the ultimate sampling goal was straightforward: to collect data from as many members of the team as possible, the maximum being thirteen participants. For the primary analytical purposes of the study, it was anticipated that data collected from four to eight
participants that meet the sampling criteria would be sufficient for analysis. This was partially dependent upon the length of interviews, which could potentially range from thirty minutes to upwards of two hours. Ritchie (2014) suggests setting a desired amount of interview hours as opposed to a number of participants. The target number for this study was six to ten interview hours to provide enough data for analysis. The researcher successfully recorded interviews with six members of the team who fit the sampling criteria, compiling over seven hours of interview data. The participants are profiled in the analysis chapter.

**Data Collection: Interviews**

I contacted the confirmed participants through email or phone calls to schedule interviews during March and April of 2017. I was as accommodating as possible regarding interview times so as to begin building rapport and earning the trust of participants, which is central to increasing the comfort of the participants, and by association the depth and quality of the information they share (Yow, 2005). I attempted to situate interviews in settings that were quiet, to promote the quality of the recordings, but first and foremost allowed participants to select settings that they found most comfortable and convenient. The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program (SPOHP) at the University of Florida provided digital recording equipment for the study.

At the interview site, I began by re-familiarizing each participant with the purpose of the study, and explained the purpose of the SPOHP Deed of Gift form and the Informed Consent form for the current study (see Appendix A; Appendix B). Participants were advised that the interview could be stopped at any time per their request, and if at any point following the interview they wanted of their testimony redacted, that section will be dismissed from the SPOHP archives and the current study’s records without debate. The interviews were then
conducted using a prepared interview guide (see Appendix C) and recorded using the digital recording equipment.

The interview guide served as a general plan for each interview and ensured that data relevant to the research goals of the study was collected, as well as the narrative history of the U.S. Kabaddi Team’s formation and experience at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup. The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed I to depart from the interview guide when further explanation or clarification was valuable, or when unanticipated information deserved further exploration (Yow, 2005). Before beginning the interview guide, I gathered as much information as possible about the participants, the event, and the phenomena of interest so as to best understand what details needed to be collected (Oral, 2009; Ritchie, 2015).

The interview guide for the current study was developed by first considering the study’s research questions and establishing important topics that need to be addressed to provide relevant data. Questions were developed to elicit data about these identified topics with intent towards neutral, non-leading wording. When designing the interview guide, I used Yow’s (2005) and Ritchie’s (2015) explanations of beginning with broad questions when introducing a new topic of questioning, thus allowing the narrator to follow “his or her own thought processes or paths of association” (Yow, 2005, p. 77), perhaps introducing a new perspective about the topic that I may not have considered. Afterwards, specific questions within the genre of the initial broad question served to fill in the necessary information that may have not been mentioned by the narrator. Next, consideration was given to the general order in which topics should be discussed. Yow (2005) recommends beginning with the least provocative questions first, suggesting a focus on childhood and early life, so as to allow the narrator to become comfortable in their reflection.
When beginning the interview guide with questions about childhood, it is logical to proceed from there in a chronological order of topics (Yow, 2005).

The interview guide features primarily open-ended questions and is organized in a general chronological line of questioning. It includes questions about the participant’s life and prior experience in sport, with some specific attention to the exit from sport. It also includes questions about how the participant became involved with the U.S. Kabaddi Team and the experience of reentry to training and competition in a new sport. Other questions address the study’s theoretical concerns related to transition, and about the participants’ perceptions of themselves as athletes at different points in life. A line of questioning is included to gather information about the potential effects of globalization on kabaddi in the Kabaddi World Cup setting. Questions about the participants’ feelings towards national pride, patriotism, and being African American representatives of the United States in international competition are interspersed throughout the interview guide.

After an interview was completed, the recordings were removed from the digital recording device and stored in the SPOHP archives. I transcribed interviews according to SPOHP guidelines, and the transcriptions are stored in the SPOHP archives. These interview transcriptions were be used as the source of data for analysis. This data collection process was based on the recommendations of the Oral History Association’s “Principles and Best Practices” (2009), Donald A. Ritchie’s (2015) text Doing Oral History, and Valerie Raleigh Yow’s (2005) text Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

**Narrative Analysis**

Oral history is a narrative method at its core. While part of oral history’s purpose is to preserve history and human experience, oral history interviews are also excellent sources of data for critical analysis. Stories produced through in-depth interviews are increasingly seen as rich,
rounded, and valid sources of data, with particular use in sport studies (Smith & Sparkles, 2012; Stride, Fitzgerald, & Allison, 2017). A narrative analysis of these stories provides the researchers with the, “ability to reveal the complexity of people’s subjective worlds and the temporal, emotional, and contextual quality of their lives” (Smith & Sparkles, 2012, p. 81).

Important elements of narrative analysis include its, “iterative” (Smith & Sparkles, 2012, p. 87) process, meaning that the analysis and data collection inform each other as they are conducted in concert. The writing process constitutes a large part of the analytical process in narrative analysis, and the iterative nature of the research means that analysis that has already been written can be reformed by newly acquired data throughout. (Smith & Sparkles, 2012). Writing is to be conducted, “continuously and creatively throughout the research,” (Smith & Sparkles, 2012, p. 87).

The current study followed these guidelines, and specifically those of the “holistic analysis of content” (Smith & Sparkles, 2012, p. 89) as a narrative analytical strategy, as originally proposed by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber (1998). This strategy involves a six-step process, beginning with researcher immersion in the data in search of themes and patterns (Smith & Sparkles, 2012, p. 89). Initial impressions about the data were then documented, and relevant themes were identified. I interpreted the themes and their implications and relation to theory (Smith & Sparkles, 2012). These themes were tracked throughout the narrative construction, noting their interaction with each other, and the contexts, actors, and feelings associated with each theme (Smith & Sparkles, 2012). A final important consideration of the narrative analysis process is the need for the researcher to remain reflexive about his own role in the construction of the analysis, and how his perceptions and predispositions can influence the
narrative that evolves. To accomplish this, a researcher-reflection section is included at the end of the analysis chapter.

In the current study, I engaged in narrative analysis to reflect the complex qualitative nature of the data collected through oral history interviews. The final form of the analysis is a narrative describing the experience of the U.S. Kabaddi Team’s formation and participation in the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup. It focused specifically on the identity intersections and transition of the participants, as well as globalization and its effect on athlete transition. The narrative is supported by quotes of the participants’ testimonies, so as to give insight to the reader as to how I reached this analysis, and to situate the story in the voices of those who experienced it.

**Oral History Best Practices: Validity, Ethics, and Historical Value**

The best practices for oral history as described by experts (Abrams, 2015; Oral, 2009; Ritchie, 2015; Yow, 2005) serve a variety of different purposes: they function to promote validity, assuage ethical concerns, and improve historical value regarding oral history research. Many of the decisions relating to these practices have been described in prior sections, but the principles that informed those decisions are further detailed here.

The primary concerns regarding validity in oral history are caused by the subjectivity of the researcher and the researcher’s intimate role in the collection of data. This is understood as inherent in the interview process, as the researcher unavoidably affects the answers through interaction with the narrator (Abrams, 2015). Oral historians have taken ownership over the, “intersubjectivity” (Abrams, 2015, p. 58) of the discipline, and it is recognized now as an important part of understanding how people create meaning, as opposed to being an exercise based merely on hard fact-finding. The researcher has a responsibility to be reflexive in his or her impression of the data, taking into account how his or her involvement played a part in how the stories were told by the narrator (Abrams, 2015). Certainly the analysis of these narratives is
also a deeply subjective process, and while it has been shown that this is an acceptable aspect of the method, it should be acknowledged that it is an interpretation of findings from the researcher’s perspective (Abrams, 2015). This is the purpose for including the reflexivity section at the end of the analysis chapter of the current study.

While the intimate involvement of the researcher in oral history is inherent and even valuable in many ways, what is more important is that the narrators’ perceptions are allowed to be expressed in a way that retains as much of their own agency as possible (Yow, 2005). It is their experiences and understandings that are the focus of the research. Thus, the researcher must attempt to word his or her questions in ways that allow the narrators to share his or her perspectives from an unobstructed and unhindered position. In the words of the Oral History Association (2009), the researcher should, “encourage narrators to respond to questions in their own style and language and to address issues that reflect their concerns,” (p. 8). Yow (2005) elaborates on this principle by discouraging asking questions that are obviously confusing, unnecessarily specific, condescending, that use overly emotive wording, or that suggest a “correct” desired response. Beginning with broad, neutrally worded questions allows the narrator to expound on his or her own thoughts and memories regarding the subject, which is the primary objective of the oral history method (Yow, 2005). A secondary objective of oral history is to produce sources of primary data for use by the public and by future historians and scholars. For this reason, the Oral History Association (2009) describes the following as a best practice of the method: “Interviewers should attempt to extend the inquiry beyond the specific focus of the project to create as complete a record as possible for the benefit of others” (p. 9). These principles were applied to the interview guide, as is outlined in the data collection section.
Finally, as is the case in nearly all research initiatives featuring human subjects, there are ethical concerns that must be attended to in oral history in order to protect participants. The intended use of the research and topics of discussion should be clearly explained to the narrator so that he or she may decide what they are willing to share (Yow, 2005). In the same vein, researchers should make available to narrators the option of redacting any information that may be harmful to the narrator or to others if it were released (Yow, 2005). The researcher should also be clear with the narrators about the archival procedures of the study, so that they are aware of where their information is stored (Oral, 2009). This was accomplished in the current study through the SPOHP Deed of Gift form, which provided the narrators with an opportunity to fully consider their interview as a donation of intellectual property, and through the Informed Consent Form, which explains the purpose of the study in detail. As the researcher sits in a position of power in the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, care must be taken to allow the narrator to maintain control over his or her testimony. These considerations for the current study are outlined in the data collection section.
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS

Introduction to Findings

Many themes arose from the interviews with the six participants that directly speak to the research questions of the study, and through those themes, the story is explored in finer detail. These themes are supported by corresponding quotes from player interviews, following the introduction of the interviewees’ experience of this truly unique phenomenon.

The U.S. Kabaddi Team that ran onto the mat in Ahmedabad, India in October of 2016 is a testimony to incredible circumstance and the embrace of opportunity. Their story begins in Oregon, where partners Celestine (Celeste) Jones and Kevin Caldwell were acquainted with Mohinder Sidhu, a representative of the International Kabaddi Federation. Mohinder, as the players know him, sought to field a team from the United States to compete at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup, and was able to secure the aid of Caldwell and Jones in this endeavor. An initial attempt to build a team in Oregon was unsuccessful, so Jones turned her efforts towards establishing a new basecamp in her hometown of Jacksonville, Florida, drawing on her network of Floridian connections. Slowly, a few at a time, future players began to accept Celeste’s invitation to, “go to India for free and play this sport,” (Bacon, 2017). Many of the men who joined the team were connected to Celeste through Florida A&M University.

The team began training in Jacksonville as August turned to September, barely a month before the Kabaddi World Cup began. None of the players had ever heard of the sport of kabaddi before – the sport they were about to play at its highest level, against teams composed of professional kabaddi athletes and managed by established kabaddi federations. The IKF sent a coach from India to Jacksonville to prepare the players as much as possible in the few weeks they had. Known by the players as Coach Rana, he took control of training and instituted two-a-
day practice sessions on a vacant baseball diamond, the only space made available to the team. The IKF had hoped for the Americans to spend several weeks prior to the tournament in training India with access to better kabaddi resources, but travel was unable to be arranged until a few days before the tournament began.

The team flew commercially from Jacksonville to Ahmedabad, with stops in New York and Qatar along the way. Upon exiting the airport in Ahmedabad, players were met by hundreds of people clamoring for pictures and autographs. The team realized that they had somehow achieved instant celebrity status in India despite being completely unknown to the world before their arrival. They were provided a security detail, who only worked with, “Bollywood and the biggest kabaddi players” (Harding, 2017), and were forbidden from wandering from their five-star hotel without an escort for fear of being mobbed by kabaddi-crazed citizens. After a whirlwind of nervous weigh-ins and team photo shoots, the team played their first match only a few days after arriving in Ahmedabad. It was their first game on a real kabaddi mat. They played the Iranian team that would eventually face India in the tournament final, generally understood as the second best team in the world. Despite great excitement and confidence, the Americans were thoroughly handled, and would continue to lose each of their five matches during the two-week stay. The U.S. Kabaddi Team dealt with serious injuries, management disputes, and unyielding defeat during their time in India. Yet, the interviewees all agree that it was an incredible experience they’ll cherish forever.

Participants

Six members of the team that met the current study’s sampling criteria were interviewed as participants in this oral history endeavor: Troy Bacon, (henceforth referred to as Kushim Rey, his preferred nickname), Paul Dykes, Twaney Harding, Jamil Lovett-Harvey, Denmar McKie, and David Ritchey.
Kushim Rey was born and raised in Jacksonville, Florida. He played college football at Alabama State University, but was forced to retire from the sport after tearing one of his quadriceps. After having to give up football, he began to pursue musical avenues as a hip-hop artist and producer. Rey was one of the first people to join the team, and remembers, Celestine Jones, she was actually a childhood friend of mine growing up in the church. She made a Facebook post saying, ‘Who wants to go to India for free and play this sport?’ And I clicked ‘like’ you know what I mean? ‘Yeah what’s up, I’m tryna go to India.’ And then she told me more about the sport . . . typed it up on instant messenger and told me to start researching it. And then that’s when I really start drawing into it. This was about mid-to-late August at this point… (Bacon, 2017)

Rey was elected captain of the team, and continues to serve in this capacity from his home in Jacksonville. He also co-founded the National Kabaddi Federation (NKF) to govern square-style kabaddi in the United States, and serves as the chief facilitator of events for the U.S. Kabaddi Team through his chairman role with the NKF.

Paul Dykes spent his childhood in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where he played golf and ran track for his high school. Dykes would go on to attend Georgia Tech University in Atlanta, Georgia, and afterwards work on Wall Street as an investment banker, where he met teammate Twaney Harding. Dykes joined the team just after leaving his job in New York via invitation from Harding. Harding is also Dykes’ business partner in Haywire Weekend, a startup travel company catering to young professionals. Because he and Harding were in the process of planning their company’s next trip to St. Lucia, Dykes explained, “we knew that we had to be in the same location. If he went to India, I knew I had to be there too” (Dykes, 2017).

Twaney Harding was born in Miami, Florida, and moved to nearby Miramar at a young age, where he played basketball, football, and tennis in high school. Harding attended Florida A&M University and then moved to New York to become an investment banker. Both he and
Dykes grew disenfranchised with the lifestyle that came with the Wall Street career, which led to their entrepreneurial career changes. Harding had relocated to Miami and was concluding various consulting contracts when he noticed one of his friends’ Instagram post about going to India.

He said he’s going to India in thirty days . . . . So I was like, ‘There’s no way. He doesn’t have a passport, and how would he get this visa this quickly?’ So I screen-shotted his Instagram post, I sent it to Martez, I said, ‘How are you going to India?’ He said, ‘Don’t ask me no questions. Contact Celeste.’ And he just dropped her number. This is the team manager, the individual that was in charge of us. So I was like, ‘What? That’s what you want me to do?’ . . . . So I text Celeste, and she was like, ‘Wow, this is just the person I wanted to contact!’ ‘Cause me Celeste, we were cool in college as well. We were both in B.I. school – business and industry at Florida A&M. (Harding, 2017)

Harding was one of the first team members in Jacksonville. He and Dykes have enjoyed the continued success of Haywire Weekend since returning from India, and hope to be involved in establishing the National Kabaddi Federation as a respected organization from the business side of operations.

Jamil Lovett-Harvey was born in Jacksonville, Florida. He played football through high school, and then attended Florida A&M University where he came to know some of the other players who traveled to India. “I got a call from one of my good friends from college, Bismark, and he said ‘Can you come play kabaddi?’ and I’m like ‘What is that? (Lovett-Harvey, 2017)” Lovett-Harvey was one of the last players to join the team, but was able to put his entrepreneurial herbal smoothie enterprise on hold to fly to India for the tournament. Lovett-Harvey is the only participant who was still involved in an organized sport at the time of his kabaddi induction: he has played semi-pro football in Jacksonville for several teams, and had an Arena League Football tryout in May of 2017. However, he continues to participate in U.S. Kabaddi Team practices and would be excited to play kabaddi professionally if given the opportunity.
David Ritchey was born and raised in Miami, Florida where he played soccer from the age of seven through high school. He joined the marching band at Florida A&M while attending Florida State University in Tallahassee. Ritchey was first introduced to the kabaddi opportunity at an art festival in Tallahassee.

Our friend Denmar, Pharoh D, he mentioned it out of excitement, and being the opportunist that I am I was like, ‘How can I get on with that?’ He said that it had to do something with martial arts and agility and stuff so – I’m also a martial artist, I do Wing Chun Kung Fu, so I was like. ‘Man, that sounds like something I could be a part of.’ He said it had to do with tactics, I love playing chess, so it seemed like something right up my alley. (Ritchey, 2017)

Ritchey had to put his musical and tattoo art careers on hiatus during his time with the U.S. Kabaddi Team. He plans to play again when needed, and potentially coach as the sport grows in America.

Denmar McKie was born in Jamaica, and moved to Miami, Florida at the age of eight. Basketball was his favorite sport as a child, and he has continued to play recreationally as an adult in addition to practicing yoga and distance running. McKie’s invitation came during a yoga class.

So I was doing the yoga thing, and I guess you could say I keep my life open for adventure and it was just random as a leaf falling from a tree man. It was just like, text message: ‘Do you want to go to India?’ No kabaddi, nothing. And it was the captain. You guys probably know Kushim, Kush. And he was, ‘Do you wanna go to India?’ ‘Cause we got the music connection going on. And I’m like, ‘Yeah I want to go to India!’ (McKie, 2017)

McKie is pursing a career in music as a rap artist, and continues to practice with the U.S. Kabaddi Team as well.

Intersections of Identity

The process of arbitrating ones’ many areas of identity is a lifelong undertaking. Transition periods can serve as catalysts, spurring the need for negotiation between various
identities, as was the case for the participants in this study. Of particular interest to the current study is the intersection of their athletic, national, and racial identities. Participating in this international sporting experience did impact the participants’ athletic, national, and racial identities, and the cooperation or conflict between these identities in turn impacted their transition into the sport.

Most of the participants played sports at an organized level at some point during their childhood or young adulthood. However, there were a variety of different impressions regarding the prominence that athletic identity held in their lives prior to their joining of the U.S Kabaddi Team. Rey, a former college football player, believed, “that’s what people knew me for” (Bacon, 2017). For Lovett-Harvey, a time without sports, “doesn’t even register” (Lovett-Harvey, 2017) Despite a lack of organized training, being competitive in sports was important to McKie growing up,

Would I have considered myself an athlete? Yes. Would you have considered me an athlete? Maybe not. . . .Whenever I would play pickup games, always felt like I could get into that zone that I felt they were in. So I just always felt like I just never had the training growing up. But did I think I could do it? Yeah, I thought a lot of things. (McKie, 2017)

In contrast, being an athlete had always been less prominent to others personal identification. For both Dykes and Harding, the concept of being an “athlete” meant more than they were willing to credit their past selves. Harding explained,

I mean, I’m not going to say athlete but I considered myself an individual that knew how to play sports, and I used my intelligence to will me through a lot of the sporting activities I played. . . . But I did play a lot of sports, but I don’t I think I was like, an athlete. (Harding, 2017)

Studying the difficulty of participants’ transition out of sport also allows an approximation of their levels of former athletic identity in retrospective analysis. This confirmed a varied importance of athletic identity between the participants prior to their exit from sport. For
example, David Ritchey explained that while he was very interested in soccer during his younger years, he considers it a relic of a different time in his life. When asked what was it like to give sports a break, Ritchey stated, “It was just a chapter in my life. In the way that I do stuff, things come and go. …it’s like a childhood upbringing pastime” (Ritchey, 2017). As someone who, in high school, began diversifying his interests to include musicianship, Ritchey’s exit from sport was relatively smooth. For Rey, who had committed himself fully to football, the transition out of sport left a greater void to be filled.

Um, it was life changing to say the very least. There was definitely a point where I was kind of looking around like, ‘I don’t have to go work out, I don’t have to wake up at five o’clock, I don’t have to go to practice. What am I gonna fill my - ’ . . . And that’s a full time job; it’s like quitting a full time job. So it was definitely eye opening. But from there I discovered other avenues of other ways I can express, I can get my creativity out and that’s why I really hopped into music. . . . I was very vulnerable at that point, and that’s where music kinda slid in. . . . It started off as a coping mechanism but then I grew to love it. (Bacon, 2017)

Rey’s testimony is consistent with findings of prior research regarding the challenging transitions out of sport for those who thoroughly identify as athletes, and perhaps explains why Rey connected this experience to the necessity of developing a different prominent identity through musicianship (Brewer, 1993; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Interestingly, Dykes also expressed a sense of loss after leaving sport, despite placing less importance on his role as an athlete during his earlier years.

I have always had a competitive spirit, so I like to win even if it’s just cards or playing any type of game. So I feel like that it was hard, but also I feel like sports brings a team environment and dynamic to your life that is hard to get from anywhere else. It’s almost like a natural high that you get from competitive team events, and that’s hard to recreate without sports. (Dykes, 2017)

The team camaraderie that Dykes missed to would prove to be a major factor in the transition of the participants into the sport of kabaddi, which is highlighted further in the forthcoming analysis of transition.
While participants remained varied in their levels of athletic identification after competing at the Kabaddi World Cup, for many their athletic identity was heightened at some level. Rey stated plainly,

Yeah, it definitely brought it back to the forefront of my mind. Like I said, I played recreationally, but just being an athlete as a part of my title now, like, I’m the captain of the United States Kabaddi Team. (Bacon, 2017)

For Lovett-Harvey, it was more about deciding which sport he wants to pursue most:

I’m kinda going through like a little balancing tip between the two because I have such a strong passion and desire for football but just being over in India and seeing it, like do I want to take the football route or do something that’s never been done before and the kabaddi route? So I think really the football training is going to translate over to kabaddi but, definitely given the opportunity I would definitely play professional kabaddi. Most definitely. (Lovett-Harvey, 2017)

The difference remained in whether or not players considered themselves athletes after their transition into elite sport, which relied largely on the different opinions of what defines an athlete. Dykes explained his struggle with the U.S. Kabaddi Team’s completely unique situation:

So, I tell people that I’m an international athlete and I say it a bit jokingly, ‘cause it just sounds funny. But I still don’t think I fully have grasped what we just did to be honest, and I don’t know when it’s gonna hit me. …But to answer your question, do I consider myself an athlete? I consider myself a competitive person, and I’m fit, but I still – I don’t know. It’s kinda hard to say I’m an athlete, because then I would be playing a professional sport for a living. That’s what I think an athlete does. (Dykes, 2017)

For Ritchey, the short-lived nature of the transition and the current lack of competition made it difficult to continue considering himself an athlete. When asked if he thought of himself as an athlete, Ritchey said:

Not really man, because we don’t practice consistently and the sport isn’t known enough, like we don’t have teams to compete against. Kenya’s traveling all the way from Africa to come play us – if it was more practice and like more localized – Tallahassee has no kabaddi teams, so man, that’s kinda like my alter ego pretty much. When it’s time to get on a match, get my calisthenics up, do some running, do some jump rope, get my agility up, look at some matches again and get back into it, I’m very adaptive when it comes to stuff like that. But on a consistent basis, I’m definitely not an athlete. . . . It was more so like, take out my old athlete hat,
my old boots out of the closet and put them back on, kinda like that – kinda like the super hero being called for duty after a long time, something like that. (Ritchey, 2017)

McKie also mentioned the lack of consistent play since the end of the tournament as something that affected his self-perception as an athlete. Yet, unlike Ritchey, McKie’s athletic identity remained prominent despite limited kabaddi play since returning from India.

So yeah, I feel more like an athlete definitely, ‘cause when I go out there and I run, like I said, this is crazy ‘cause it happened when I was twenty-eight years old and most people when they’re twenty eight, they’re not thinking, ‘Yeah, I’m about to go play some pro sports across the world real quick and come back guys.’ And I did that, and I pushed myself at age twenty-eight athletically more than I did any other time prior. And so, as of today, I feel more athletic and fit than I’ve ever been in my life. . . . I’m still a kabaddi player. I’m still part of Team U.S.A. Kabaddi, and just dealing with this everyday thing, still trying to be an ambassador to really create something or someway to facilitate that here in the states. (McKie, 2017)

For Harding, it was important to acknowledge that the way he was reintroduced to sport was unorthodox, especially as a competitor at the elite level, but that didn’t hinder his perception of himself as an athlete.

For me, an athlete is an individual that is playing a sport and getting paid for it over a long period of time, and – I wouldn’t want to disrespect people that have put in eighteen, twenty years into a certain craft and then I come out of nowhere and I get the opportunity to be on ESPN and they probably never even got to play professional basketball or professional baseball or something like that. And I know that they put in the time and effort into it. So on that level, I don’t want to disrespect them, but the truth of the matter is, and I’m only speaking facts. The facts are that I was playing and representing the United States in an international sport as an athlete, so the truth is, am I an athlete? Yes. That’s the truth. I just don’t want to disrespect anyone, but am I an athlete? One hundred percent. (Harding, 2017)

Athletic identities were prominent in four of the six participants, and for Harding, McKie, and Rey, that prominence was something that resulted directly from playing for the U.S. Kabaddi Team. Similarly, Wylleman et al. (2012) found increased athletic identification in Olympic athletes after competition at the Olympic games. Due to the significant differences between the current study’s participants and Olympic athletes in time committed to their sport, the two
circumstances are certainly distinct from each other. However, it can be confirmed that the majority of the participants in the current study professed to feel a greater sense of athletic identity at the time of their interviews than before competing in the Kabaddi World Cup.

Few of the athletes directly discussed the intersection between athletic and racial identities, but several themes did emerge from the interviews about this identity interaction. When asked to discuss his feelings about representing the United States on an international stage, Rey explained the personal difficulty of that position as someone who struggles with racial and political issues in the U.S. Part of his justification for representing America was the promotion of the African American cause – yet, he acknowledged the irony of promoting that cause through sport.

We representing our people and saying that, ‘Yo, we got something to say. Yo, we got something to bring to the table as well.’ And it’s funny that it had to be sports, because that’s what people look at us as. ‘Oh yeah, we know you can play football. Oh, we know you can sing and dance’ and stuff, when - let’s take that and twist it to something that would benefit us. (Bacon, 2017)

Dykes too discussed his feelings regarding the stereotype of African Americans as talented athletes, in the context of YouTube comments on the team’s videos.

Also it was kinda interesting to me too because I would look at the comments and things under our YouTube videos, and of course you have ignorant people also. So it’s funny being able to be an athlete and actually read comments about yourself and the team. . . . And I feel like at certain times, I was like, ‘All right, people think that we’re going to be good just because we’re black, and we’re athletic.’ Which is slightly true I could say to a certain extent, but at times I feel like people would play that card a tad bit too much, even in the comments. And it was like, ‘Wow, shouldn’t the team be better?’ And they were just inferring because they are black guys that we should be better, but they also don’t understand that it’s a huge learning curve, and also we were playing against professionals. (Dykes, 2017)

For Rey and Dykes, the reality of racial stereotypes regarding African Americans did interact with their purpose as athletes. It is interesting to consider the awareness of Rey and Dykes regarding the relationship between African American identity and athletic identity in comparison
to the findings of Bimper and Harrison (2011), in which the authors argue that athletic identity has been taught as central to the African American racial identity. The participants’ hinted at some cognitive dissonance in perpetuating the stereotype of black men as athletes – yet, neither fully rejected the concept. This was highlighted when Dykes said, “People think that we’re going to be good just because we’re black, and we’re athletic. Which is slightly true I could say to a certain extent” and when Rey proposed, “Let’s take that and twist it to something that would benefit us.” These statements display a conscious recognition of intersecting racial and athletic identities, as the participants considered others’ perceptions about them as black men and athletes.

The perception of black people on a wider scale was a topic of discussion for all of the participants. They each noted the importance of promoting the perception of African Americans through the opportunity that being an international athlete provided. Dykes explained this goal, particularly in regards to the perception of the Indian citizens:

It was in my head a lot of times too, that these could be the only black people that they ever see. So I was like, we have to be sure that they get the best impression of black people, because what you see online and on TV can’t always be accurate. So it was always in my head. If I was at Subway, if I was buying food, it would be the smallest things, always make sure to go above and beyond my way to make sure to know that we as Americans, we are grateful and happy to be here, and as black men too that we are happy and grateful to be here. (Dykes, 2017)

Rey also explained the value of an opportunity to improve the perception of African Americans, despite the cognitive dissonance of representing a country that has experienced rising racial tension in recent years.

That was also a kinda conundrum, or just a kinda oxymoron in my head because there’s the obvious things in the news pertaining to people of my complexion and my heritage or whatever. So I had some reservations on that of course, but then I really said, “This is a chance for me to represent the people who may not be represented in the way that I like.” I see African Americans on television or on the
radio, and they may not be representing what I view as African America or what we should be doing. So this is my chance to be that for somebody. I can be the captain of the team and speak highly and speak well, eloquently, and have good relationships with whoever I come in contact with. (Bacon, 2017)

Thoughts on racial identity were most often spurred from questions about representing the United States. The conflict between racial and national identity was a topical issue at the time of the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup, with police shootings and Colin Kaepernick’s kneeling national anthem protest fresh on the minds of many. The intersection of national and racial identities manifested clearly in the perceptions of the participants on their unique experience, and each participant shared powerful witnesses in this regard. Dykes and Lovett-Harvey held similar opinions concerning the value of projecting a positive image as black men representing the United States. For Lovett-Harvey, representing America meant representing for African Americans.

Just about everybody on the team had a sense of African pride—it’s definitely something we want to broadcast out to the world. To be able to represent the country, because this is our country, and we definitely want to have that sense of pride to people all throughout the world, so we definitely want to represent for our people. (Lovett-Harvey)

Dykes explained trying to make the most of an opportunity as representatives of what they considered “their” United States, despite the internal conflict about what the United States represents politically.

It was a mixture of emotions for me, because obviously black guys representing U.S.A., which is great also at the same time because I feel like, ‘Okay, people do need to see this,’ which is good. But this was around election time. . . . So it was a lot going on in the states. But I looked at it as a positive thing, to see young black guys doing something positive, so I feel like it was good for us. And I also know that everyone on the team, we may not support everything that happens in America, but it’s our country and we want to make it look as good as possible. At the very end of the day, we know that on our shirts it says U.S.A., and so that made me feel very very proud to be from America and be able to represent it, and say, “Hey, I am a black guy and U.S.A. is my country and I’m supporting her.” So it did feel good
one hundred percent, because people looked at us like America’s team because we were. (Dykes, 2017)

Throughout the interviews ran a common thread: that racial identity held a more prominent place than national identity in the self-conception of these international athletes. While participants did speak of national pride, it was almost always coupled with a level of racial qualification. This tracks with theory from D’Agati (2011), as African Americans have long been what he describes as a peripheral group in the United States, barred from the core group that dictates the nation’s cultural preferences. In one of the most poignant statements wrought from the research process, Rey said about representing the United States,

It was eye opening. Just what being the United States captain for anything, whether it had been soccer or cricket or kabaddi or basketball - I was the representation of America to those people, and that was kinda crazy ’cause I don’t know if America would have picked me. (Bacon, 2017)

Harding appreciated that there was still an idyllic impression of the United States in the eyes of Indian citizens, but found it hard to align with his experience as black man in America.

I thought it was really really cool that I guess they affiliate success, as well as they affiliate progress and opportunity, out of just seeing the red white and blue. But I do understand and I am cognizant that throughout the plight of - specifically I’ll speak about African Americans in this country, it’s been a very difficult plight and I can’t ignore that to an extent. (Harding, 2017)

In regards to national identity, the participants were averse to accepting a role as passive representatives of the United States. Many discussed their personal moral justifications for wearing the U.S. colors despite political dissatisfaction. In connection to Holder’s (2009) work on nationality, it could be said that the U.S. Kabaddi Team held some athletic patriotism as they were proud of themselves as the American team, but held less political patriotism. Rey would succinctly explain the team’s justification as United States’ representatives: “We said that we
represented the people of America, not necessarily the government structure of America.”

(Bacon, 2017) McKie echoed this sentiment, stating,

> So for me personally, it was more like I’m representing the people. The idea, the people of America . . . . I don’t represent for the government, and so that was just that. And even now, it’s like, yeah I played U.S.A. Kabaddi, but I’m like, ‘I don’t even want to wear my jersey.’ I’d rather wear another country’s jersey. (McKie, 2017)

Even Dykes, who professed national pride, was still forced to wrestle with representing America during a disappointing period.

> A lot of things go on in America that’s not fair, but at the same time I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else. So it was one of those weird things where it’s like, this is my country. Although I may not support everything that happens, I still love it. (Dykes, 2017)

In contrast, there was no conflict in the relationship between national and athletic identities in the participants’ experiences. Rather, it seemed that their national identity facilitated the intensification of athlete identification amongst the participants due to the celebrity status of the U.S. Kabaddi Team. Harding testified to the admiration and attention they received because of their nationality.

> I’m not trying to disrespect no other countries, but there wasn’t no team that was getting the love and praise that what we were getting. We played Iran, even after the game it looked like they had a lot of respect for us. Even when we were walking out, I think somebody said they saw Anup. This is the number one kabaddi player in the world, shaking all of our hands. And I’m not saying he’s not doing that for any of the other teams, but this is the U.S.A. we’re talking about. . . . Every team wanted to switch jerseys with us. And again, we weren’t like India, we weren’t Iran. We were U.S.A. We were O and six, and everybody wanted our jersey. It was insane. It was like some rock star status type stuff. . . . They would not let us even go out to the Subway that was like right around the corner, because they felt like we were so high profile at that point in time, the United States team, that they didn’t even want us outside of the hotel, period. (Harding, 2017)

While Harding was at the hospital, the doctors told him, “They all watched our games too. They said, ‘I don’t even watch India’s games. I watch U.S.A. games’” (Harding, 2017).

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participants’ racial heritage made them easily identifiable in a country with few people of African descent, the American team realized the significance of their nationality when the Kenyan team questioned why they needed to hide their official team gear. According to Harding, “The Kenyan team, we saw them at the mall right? They had their practice jerseys on. I was like, ‘They told us we can’t wear it.’ And they said, ‘What? Why?’” (Harding, 2017)

Yet, the racial identity of the participants did play a major role in their fame, as did their athletic and national identities, because they each contributed to the team’s distinct personality: a cast of unknown, unlikely athletes with an air of confidence, a close bond, and a unique cultural vibe. The team’s personality was influenced greatly by the convergence of participants’ athletic, racial, and national identities that were actively interacting and being negotiated through socialization during this transition period (Coakley, 1993). In the words of Harding, “Our team, we had a certain swagger and charisma to us, just like – whenever you see – you could feel us walking” (Harding, 2017). Dykes agreed: “We were different. People knew us. They knew there was something different about us” (Dykes, 2017). Rey detailed the public reaction to the team’s individuality.

Our character was definitely there, our personality was definitely there. We always got smiles from everybody just off of how charismatic and outgoing we are. They definitely appreciate it, ‘cause they were even saying that we were a contrast from the Indian team who was stone faced . . . . so the teams definitely wanted to be around us, and they saw that we - they appreciated the fact that we were picking the game up. And honestly, Sam no offense to you, but I’m pretty sure they expected a bunch of white boys when we came off the plane. And the fact that we were mostly – and most of us had locks too, so they were probably like, “Who are these guys?”

The blending of athletic, racial, and national identities was exemplified in the team’s distinct personality. They were a group of intelligent, dreadlocked artists and former Wall Street bankers, all who appreciated the importance of promoting a positive public image of African Americans. They were a group of politically discouraged citizens that still understood how their American
nationality, in many ways, made them the most important team competing at the Kabaddi World Cup. They were a group of former athletes experiencing a reinvigorated athletic identity as they were thrust into the highest level of competition kabaddi has to offer, and shouldered with celebrity status. The team’s personality reflects the intersection of those identities. They were inspired beginners, proud black men, and conflicted Americans, and each identity interlocked with the others. To establish the impact of this identity intersectionality on the participants’ transition experiences, the transition itself must be described and analyzed as well.

**Transition**

It was important to consider when analyzing the participants’ transition into the elite level of kabaddi that the entire process took place in a matter of just two months. While many of the theories about athlete transition are still applicable to the U.S. Kabaddi Team’s experience, the time restraint did alter the similarity to more standard experiences studied by transition scholars. For example, one of the most useful transition models for analyzing the current participants’ experiences is that of the meta-transitions of Olympians, as presented by Schinke et al. (2014). This model employs six meta-transitions: entering a training program for the target event, competing in major tournaments, qualifying for the target event, preparation for the target event, competing at the target event, and the post-event period. However, the members of the U.S. Kabaddi Team were inserted directly into the fourth stage of this process, preparing to compete at the highest level without any of the prior training or competition experience. Olympic-hopefuls practice their event for years. The members of the U.S. Kabaddi Team were tasked with competing in an event at that they had only learned the existence of a mere month before.

For the team to learn and grow in a sport to the point of being competitive at an elite level in a single month was an impossible task. Yet, the participants all spoke of their experience at the
Kabaddi World Cup as a relative success. In each of the three meta-transitions faced by the participants, success was a relative concept. To truly gauge the success of the participants’ transition, it was essential to identify important factors in the participants’ experiences and connect them to findings of prior research regarding athlete transition. After examining the transition itself, it was possible to consider the impact of identity intersectionality, and eventually the impact of globalization, on those important factors in the participants’ transition. To accomplish the first task, I used an adjusted version of the meta-transition Olympic model from Schinke et al. as a structural organization of the participants’ transition experiences. The adjusted meta-transition model separates the participants’ overarching experience into three meta-transitions: preparation for the Kabaddi World Cup, competing at the Kabaddi World Cup, and the post-World Cup period. Within each meta-transition, the challenges and helpful resources as described by the participants were compared to findings from various transition scholars.

The first meta-transition consisted of the team’s training and preparation for the tournament. In consideration of Scholssberg’s (2011) elements of a transition, it can be assumed that while the opportunity may have arisen unexpectedly, by accepting the invitation to join the team, each participant was aware of the transition they were entering into. Yet, many of the participants discussed the sacrifices they made to seize the opportunity. Ritchey explained,

I had to tell my band to hold it down for me. I’m blessed to have a super cool guitarist and a super dope vocalist and basically they had to hold it down for the time while I was gone, for like at least a month. I’m also a tattoo artist so I had to cut off my clients - it was a big sacrifice to go pretty much. (Ritchey, 2017)

At first, McKie tried to commute to Jacksonville from Tallahassee because of work, but the time commitment was too great. He ended up leaving the job for a few months.

Yeah, I didn’t know how I was gonna do this, because we had to train, so at first, it was like, okay, I drove over there and I drove back. And so I tried to get as much
time as possible. . . . But I was just like, “Well, look. I’m going to India.” And I was like, “Dang, how am I gonna tell them this? I have a responsibility.” (McKie, 2017)

Lovett-Harvey had outside pressure not to join the team. “I knew I just had to listen to that voice inside me because my family was like ‘Oh you shouldn’t do it.’ It sounded too good to be true” (Lovett-Harvey, 2017)

These sacrifices are part of what bonded the team so closely. The teammates served as each other’s support structure throughout the overarching experience, but the bond was forged during the early stages of training together on a baseball infield in the Florida summer heat. Explained by Rey,

It was funny because, just looking at the situation that we all just about kinda volunteered for it, just like, “This is really happening huh? She really got people to come?” People were at various – I remember the very first practice, we ran three miles, and we were all, by the end of that, even myself, I was kinda huffing and puffing by the end. It was maybe four or five people with us at the beginning and we just looked around at each other, was like, “So this is it huh? This is life for the next couple of weeks.” So, but everybody, we all understood the sacrifice that each other had made. Everybody on the team made a sacrifice from their income, whether they had a job, whether they had to take off, or their families, whether they were able to see their girlfriends or see their wives or see their families or sisters, brothers, whatever. From their passion, whatever they love doing in life – we understood that. Everybody made sacrifices to be here, so it was all mutual respect and understanding from that. (Bacon, 2017)

Dykes too remembered the kinship between teammates as a joyful part of the preparation stage.

So starting off at practice, I’d say the team chemistry was pretty good, and as each day would go on there would be more things to bring us closer together. And when we were not practicing, we would still be around each other at the hotels and things, playing cards to pass time, things like that. So we were essentially around each other for two weeks straight before India, so it was like a family almost. (Dykes, 2017)

This support structure would prove to be a vital resource for the participants throughout the entire experience, which is consistent with the findings of Falls and Wilson (2012) about athletes who leave their geographically-based support structures. It was particularly important in
the preparation stage for the purpose of keeping the team together amidst concerns about the
managers’ lack of communication and missed deadlines. McKie recalled,

Yeah, and then it’s like, “Oh, we don’t even know if we’re gonna go. What’s going on? We’re supposed to leave on this day.” And so the team is like, “Oh my gosh. What the heck?” So I really believe that, when you look at it from that perspective, the team itself is what really kept us there. If it wasn’t the team and our obligation to each other, we would have been left, ‘cause all of us was like, “What? Why are we here? When are we leaving? We’re working on a baseball field, we get to India, we get to practice on a real mat. What is going on? Why is this taking so long?” But it was just like, “You staying?” “I’mma see whatsup man.” “Alright, if you stay, I have confidence in you as a team, I’m staying.” So as a team, we sorta kept each other there, ‘cause without – it was sorta like a little bit of domino effect, ‘cause it was like, if one of us left, it would have been like, “Well, if he ain’t playing, I’m not playing.” It would have just been like, “Oh shoot.” So the team chemistry man, it was different characters, but we stayed together. (McKie, 2017)

Ritchey remembers the frustration of travel arrangements and managerial activities being out of the players’ control.

I don’t remember the exact dates and stuff but we didn’t get there until like the day or the night before our first match, that was the pretty crappy part. I wish that – we were supposed to have gotten there like a week before, but as teammates we weren’t really in the loop as far as what was making things happen, so we just knew that we might go, we might not. (Ritchey, 2017)

Dykes also explained the challenge of dealing with disorganized management, but cited a different resource as the factor that kept him committed.

But when we got to Jacksonville, I like things being organized and in place, and I’m not saying it wasn’t organized but there was no timeline of when we would go to India. It was like, “Oh, we’ll leave between this day and this day.” It was kinda open, so I was like, “Uh… Okay, okay.” And so at this point I don’t know anyone besides Twaney so I’m still trying to figure it out, so it was a whole lot of faith that was put into it, ‘cause it was like, “All right, we’re in Jacksonville now, just seeing how it goes.” I didn’t know how long we would be there. We were supposed to leave on a certain date, but some players on the team still didn’t have their passports, so it’s like, “Uh… are we gonna ever go?” So morale was kinda hard to keep up at times, ‘cause like, okay, what’s going on? It came to the point that we missed so many deadlines in my mind; I was not going to believe it until I got on the plane. But the only thing that saved me is our coach, because we knew that we
would go because the coach is here. So we’re like, “Okay, we’re going to India regardless.” (Dykes, 2017)

Bruener et al. (2008) note coaching as an important influence in the success of transition into elite sport for athletes. In this case, the mere presence of Coach Rana represented the commitment of the IKF to the U.S. Kabaddi Team, which was important due to the lack of confidence instilled by team managers up to that point. As far as Coach Rana’s ability to prepare and support the team, the participants appreciated his skill and effort, but noted the language barrier and time restraints as obstacles to a better coaching experience. McKie felt Coach Rana made the most of the situation, but was limited in his ability to communicate effectively.

I mean, Coach Rana man. Man, you could tell he cared very much. As a coach, he got us prepared, I could say he did the best he could with what we had. He definitely, in terms of having us learn a lot of the basics, he tried his best in terms of trying to get that to us. A lot of it was just – in the beginning, you could tell there was just a communication barrier. Not just – you can teach the game, but to really coach and bring the best out of certain players, you sorta have to be able to communicate beyond just the basic dynamics. Language takes a while, there’s a lot more colloquially needed to communicate with people, especially with athletes dealing with certain situations, or people being emotional. (McKie, 2017)

All of the participants appreciated the effort of Coach Rana, who taught the team as much as he could in the few weeks he was in Jacksonville. His presence was a key resource to the relative success of going to India at all. Rey described the coach’s demeanor and rapport with the team as something that grew more positive over time, and aided in their ability to learn.

Um, he’s more reserved. But I would like to see how he is now, now that he knows us. At first it was like, okay, there’s an obvious language barrier there. And then it was a feeling out stage where we were just trying to feel each other out, but he definitely loosened up. Like, by the time we got to India, we had him already, we were already – he was cracking jokes with us, listening to our music. . . . I’m just glad he was patient with us and all of the shenanigans and all of the questions and the different, and ‘Can you repeat that for me Coach?’ I know he might be getting frustrated but we just trying to figure out what you’re saying, so he was just illustrating for us by doing it. But we got a good balance. (Bacon, 2017)
The participants all discussed how their athletic backgrounds translated to kabaddi, and what the process of reentry was like for those who had been away from competitive sport.

According to Rey,

I was even having second thoughts, like, “Man, how quickly can I try and tap back in to this thing man?” Taking a couple years off of – ‘cause it’s different from playing, going to a basketball court every Saturday, to actually full time athlete, and doing athlete stuff, whether that’s lifting weights or watching film or taking ice baths or going to the trainer and getting - that’s a whole ‘nother beast, just trying to tap back into that. But I love it though man. I love it man. (Bacon, 2017)

For Dykes, returning to the mindset of an athlete was important in his the transition back into a regular training regimen.

I feel like it helped me, my history of playing and just knowing sports, it helped me stick to it, because there were times when I thought, “Should we continue, should we stop?” So I thought for me, it helped instill a discipline, because I feel like that’s one of the biggest things that being an actual team does. It’s like a fraternity almost, because you are brothers at this point, and you begin to realize, “Okay, I don’t want to practice but I know the guy beside me is.” I feel like that’s one of the best takeaways from any type of sport is being able to have that team feel, because that will essentially bring – it brings a discipline, and that’s one thing that I think was probably the best takeaway, one of the biggest things that I was able to pick up along the way too. Because I know all throughout high school and stuff, I did not want to practice but I still would. And so, small things like that from the past helped me to get in shape and be in the correct mindset for kabaddi. (Dykes, 2017)

In addition to the rigors of reentry into competitive athletics, some of the participants dealt with other physical challenges during the preparation period. Harding and Lovett-Harvey were both limited with injuries suffered in Jacksonville: Harding with a foot sprain and a meniscus tear, and Lovett-Harvey with a sprained ankle. McKie discussed the challenge of maintaining a vegan diet during training.

Everybody was fed, but I have special diet or whatever, so keeping up with that and the routine of working out two times a day. . . . My body was going through that change also while I was practicing, so yeah it was definitely difficult. (McKie, 2017)
Ritchey encapsulated the greatest and most obvious obstacle to the participants’ transition into elite kabaddi: the unrealistic time frame with which they were allotted to become proficient in the sport.

The thing was that we had a very short time to prepare so we couldn’t go in depth as we learnt the game. The game was far more in depth than a few weeks or even a few months of learning. Like I said, this is a four thousand year old sport, so that’s how long its developed. So to have within three months of learning experience, we were only able – we were limited to a certain amount of information.”

The incredibly short time they were given to master a sport that they had no prior experience with was the most challenging aspect of the entire transition process. Because of their newness to the sport, the team’s familiarization with kabaddi continued well into the second meta-transition, which centered on their experience in India competing at the Kabaddi World Cup. The team had yet to play against anyone beside themselves - all of their experience had come from practicing against each other. As Ritchey explained,

Because we only had ourselves to learn with, I didn’t really get to learn the strategy until I was on the court. So after about the first, second, third game, that’s when I would talk to some of my teammates about what I saw (Ritchey, 2017)

Even in terms of proper training and exercise routines designed for kabaddi, McKie discussed how much more they continued to learn upon arrival in India.

It was difficult because it was like, when we got there – we’re here doing our exercise, learning certain things. When we got there we learned that there’s a whole world of different stretches and exercises that they’re doing, ‘cause one: this is a sport coming from India, and this is not just a sport that we’re making it up today, like base-ketball or something. This is a sport that’s traditionally been played for thousands of years in India. . . . So when you get over there, they have a whole set up of different stretches. They have a whole – it’s a mix of not just our stretches, but a mix of yoga that’s included in their stretches. A lot of it is staying on your calves, hopping, making sure your hand’s elongated and stretched out, ‘cause it’s kabaddi. You have to be flexible. So yeah, it was difficult because you’re learning a whole ‘nother way of training for a different sport. (McKie, 2017)
The participants continued to deal with lingering injuries and other physical challenges as well. Many of the participants had gastro-intestinal issues as they adjusted to the native cuisine. Without much time to prepare their bodies, Rey and Lovett-Harvey were stressed before the weigh-in. As Lovett-Harvey remembers it,

I weighed about maybe, I wanna say one ninety-seven to two hundred pounds and the weight limit was one eighty-five, and I had never really got – the last time I was one eighty I was maybe like a freshman in high school, so I was like, “How in the world am I gonna get down?” So when we landed in India I was about - I wanna say one ninety-five, one ninety seven. So I had about ten pounds to lose in a day because the weigh in was the next day, and I’m thinking to myself “How in the world can I lose ten pounds?” But Kush, our captain, he said “Man, I just lost, I think, ten to fifteen pounds just in the sauna”, and I’m like “What?!” So I got into the sauna, I had a jacket on, I’m running, literally every hour I was losing about maybe a pound to two pounds. Every hour – I started around maybe six in the morning, seven in the morning. And afterwards man, I was so dehydrated. . . . if the weight limit was one eighty-five I was gonna be around at least one eighty-five, under that one eighty-four, but a drink of water would literally make me overweight. So we got to the weigh-ins, and I’m looking at them bottles of water like, “Man, do I drink this bottle of water and not play in the world cup?” So it was like – that was probably one of the worst feelings… (Lovett-Harvey, 2017)

Despite the steep learning curve and physical challenges, Dykes and Harding both testified to the excitement and confidence of the U.S. team before their first match against Iran. Harding explained that regardless of the IKF’s reasons for sponsoring the U.S. team’s participation, the players were there to compete.

We were not just happy, we weren’t sitting here happy go-lucky, just be Americans and on TV and getting free food. No no no. I want to make sure that’s extremely clear. We were going out there to win the whole tournament. We were going out there to get first place, to put on for our country, and also put on for ourselves individually. Making sure people understood that this was not just a joke, this was not just something that we’re doing because it sounded cool. It was something we really were admirably wanting to be really really good at. And again, we picked up on the game really really quickly as well. That was one of the big things I want to stress too, because the game is not easy to learn and it’s not easy to pick up on in that short period of time. So we one hundred percent were going there to win. One hundred percent. (Harding, 2017)

According to Dykes, the team was confident in their ability to make a splash.
So although we were excited to be there, by no means were we content with losing. We thought we were going to shock the world. We really — you could not have told us we were not going to shock the world. We believed it. It was not a joke at all. But then reality hit us very quickly. (Dykes, 2017)

The first match was a rude awakening for the U.S. Kabaddi Team, as Ritchey explained.

Well, first we came there super confident because most of us have had athletic backgrounds, so we thought we were just gonna get some points on the board or anything, and it was straight domination. So as the game was going, our morale was kinda dwindling down in the first match. It was definitely a blow mentally because we’ve — like, we never played with another team before and our first team was one of the top teams in the league in general, so it was just definitely mind blowing and humbling. It was a humbling experience, really. (Ritchey, 2017)

Predictably, the U.S. team that was still learning the game wasn’t able to win a match at the highest level of competition. Lovett-Harvey remembered the challenge of remaining motivated after each consecutive loss.

I mean just in terms of frustration and in terms of just losing games, it was definitely kind of challenging. We just had — I was telling the guys, “Hey man, we’re babies in this sport.” I kinda knew that with two weeks, how are you really gonna truly be able to master a game in two weeks against guys who have been doing it for 3 years, 2 years? I think Kenya had, what, 2 years, a year? Something like a year, 2 years. And Iran has been doing almost as long as India. …So it was definitely so much learning, just how to learn the sport and not to get frustrated because once you lose your mental game, your physical game is going to go down too. (Lovett-Harvey, 2017)

To add to the difficulty of this meta-transition, drama involving the team managers resurfaced while the team was in India, affecting the ability of the participants’ to focus solely on the tournament. Harding, Dykes, and McKie all spoke about their frustrations with the off-court issues. McKie summarized the situation that created the fuss.

When we get there, there’s this big discrepancy on money and who put the team together, because the person who’s the liaison really that represents India that’s supposed to put the team together in the United States is over there. . . . And so there’s this whole big thing about money, and I don’t wanna get into specifics, but a large sum of money, and not having receipts, and just not being accountable, and there’s a lot of he-say and she-say, and this is going on between the two people.
that’s supposed to be our team managers. And because of that, that trickles down to the team… (McKie, 2017)

For Dykes, it was frustrating to be left in the dark about the team’s operations.

There wasn’t much transparency. So, we knew that the Kabaddi Federation was sponsoring us, so in my mind I figured that they had paid Celeste, and then Celeste was essentially using that to pay for housing and food, and things of that nature. It wasn’t transparent. (Dykes, 2017)

This lack of communication didn’t sit well with the players, who had already witnessed so many important deadlines missed by the management while training in Jacksonville. Eventually these issues came to head with a verbal altercation between managers and players, and later, the managers’ making a request of the team to boycott the last game against Kenya so as to pressure the IKF on the reimbursement point. In the words of McKie, “Eventually it was the last game, and they were asking us to boycott, and we’re like, “Hell no there ain’t no boycott. We’re not – are you serious? (McKie, 2017) This drama only exacerbated the emotional toll of losing every game on the world stage, and put the players in a difficult position between team management and the IKF.

Again, it was the participants’ bond with each other that carried them through this difficult period. Their support structure of fellow teammates allowed them to soldier on and continue to compete despite the many challenges they faced. All of the participants expressed how much they appreciated each other and how closely the experience brought them together. Lovett-Harvey explained,

I told them, it’s gonna be like a brotherhood for life. We just had the opportunity to be the first ones to do what we do. Literally, it’s like something we can tell our grand children, our great grand children about. And it was like a comedy show. We were cracking jokes. I mean Ronnie, he was – there’s this dance called the milly rock, he was milly rocking in the airport in Saudi Arabia… It was amazing. The team chemistry, just laughing, training together, we were like all newbies in the sport so we were all learning and just having fun, and its definitely a brotherhood
that’s gonna last for a lifetime. If any of those guys ever need a place to stay, or anything like – it’ll be like, open arms for life. (Lovett-Harvey, 2017)

McKie also used the term “brotherhood” to describe the relationship developed by the team members.

It’s a special bond you get, and I think that’s a natural bond that’s supposed to happen in human life that we’re missing. But it’s great, and it’s a great experience to have that at the age I did. Not saying I’m old or anything, but wow, that was definitely a great experience. We bonded, yeah. We’re on the team, everybody’s meshing, and we have a common goal. Everybody’s different, but we all have this common goal, and that’s to play kabaddi. . . . It became like a nice team of brotherhood. (McKie, 2017)

In addition to the value of the participants’ connections to their teammates, they were provided with appropriate amenities from the IKF to support elite athletes while in India. This included room and board at a five star hotel, a full time security detail, travel arrangements, medical support, and practice time at kabaddi facility. Most of the participants experienced some gastro-intestinal distress from the foreign fare, but the chef at the hotel did his best to accommodate the U.S. team, as Harding described,

He knew that some of the foods we were getting, people’s stomachs were getting a little woozy and whatnot. There’s sometimes he’d cook fish and stuff like that for us. Just for us. He was like, “I was waiting on you guys but they said your match wasn’t over yet, so I just left some of the food back there for you guys.” (Harding, 2017)

One of the most consistently mentioned and appreciated resources was the relationship with members of the other teams competing at the World Cup. The Americans connected with several of the other national teams, specifically enjoying interactions with players from Poland, Thailand, Korea, and Kenya. As Ritchey explained,

We saw Kenya at the mall, and that was pretty cool. The last day Korea came up to visit and that was pretty cool. The whole time I was messaging some guys from Korea, and we were just talking man, just talking about the stats. Their team is way better than ours and way more experienced so those are like our big brothers and that was pretty cool. (Ritchey, 2017)
The captain of Thailand, Khomsan Thongkham, came to help the U.S. team practice late in the tournament, which Lovett-Harvey remembered as particularly valuable.

The captain of Thailand, he gave me a lot of great advice. He was probably one of the most helpful because, me being 6'3 6'4, he was like 6'4, 6'5 so I thought it was going to be a little more difficult for me. But he was just saying you’ve got to use your height to your advantage. ... So he – just to be helpful – to help us after they beat us, and still be able to give us advice was definitely very – a lot of class act on their part. (Lovett-Harvey, 2017)

These experiences with the other national teams illustrate the participants’ achievement of a level of membership in an international elite kabaddi subculture, relating to subgroup identity theory from Donnelly and Young (1988). The welcoming nature of the more veteran teams was encouraging and affirming for the participants during their transition into the sport, which indicates a confirmation of membership from established members of a subgroup (Donnelly & Young, 1988). This may have contributed to the participants’ increased recognition of themselves as international kabaddi athletes as well. The positive interaction with the other teams also restored some confidence in the potential of U.S. Kabaddi, as expressed by Rey.

I appreciate them for kinda taking our team under their wings and really going out and showing – of course they didn’t take it lightly on us when we played in the matches, but, “We’ll beat y’all but we’ll still teach y’all too.” So, that was really good, getting some pointers from people who actually play it professionally, the best of the best. But at the end of the day, I feel like they all knew… I don’t know if this is going to get back out, but they all knew that once we got ahold of it, as America? They’re trying to be our friends now. “I was your friend, remember buddy?” (Bacon, 2017)

The potential for the U.S. Kabaddi Team to be a threat in the future depends much on the participants’ final meta-transition: the post-tournament period. As illustrated in the participant profiles, all have expressed an interest in remaining involved in kabaddi in some way. Even Dykes and Harding, who would rather remain on the business side of the fledgling NKF in the future, both expressed their desire to continue to play kabaddi for leisure. Lovett-Harvey, McKie,
and Ritchey all planned to continue playing with the U.S. Kabaddi Team and encouraging the
growth of the sport. Lovett-Harvey dreamt of opportunities kabaddi could lead to after
discussions with some of the coaches in India.

One of the coaches that was helping us over there, he said – because I was still a baby learning the sport, but by playing other sports kinda translated some, and even when I was injured he was telling me, ‘Man, I want you to stay in India and I could make you a world class kabaddi player.’ When he told me that, I knew it was a certain click that went in. It was just, you know what, let me just master this. Man, let me – 2 weeks is not enough to learn, so let me master this and take it as far as I can take it, and that definitely gave me that fuel to the fire to keep pushing. (Lovett-Harvey, 2017)

Rey too heard rumors of interest from the Pro Kabaddi League and was excited about the prospect of being selected in the league’s player auction in May of 2017. Rey had the most involvement with kabaddi after the World Cup. He founded the National Kabaddi Federation to serve as the governing body of square-style kabaddi in America and to grow the sport domestically. He began acquiring uniform sponsorships, and continued organizing periodic U.S. Kabaddi Team practices and events.

However, progress slowed significantly for the NKF and U.S. Kabaddi Team during this last meta-transition. As Ritchey stated when discussing his lack of athletic identity, the team rarely practices because of the geographical distance between all of the players. The lack of funding since returning from India has made it challenging for Rey to compel significant time commitments from teammates.

So it’s just kinda been difficult getting people, because like I said, people before, they had full time jobs, or they had stuff going on. I can’t – I personally, as a grown man, won’t tell another grown man how to get his money or how to feed his family or feed himself or anything, so it’s like - unless I can do it. Unless I can say, “Hey. Stop. Take two weeks. Here go two thousand, three thousand dollars. What you get paid? Let me check. All right, cool. Now come and do kabaddi.” I don’t feel comfortable enough just because I gotta - man, I’m trying to sell beats. I’m trying to make money. But I just understand that if I don’t do this, it may either get lost, or
somebody else may pick it up and capitalize on it. So I’ve bitten a couple bullets, just trying to make sure this is still up and going. (Bacon, 2017)

In relation to Schlossberg’s factors affecting transition, this would qualify as the unavailability of resources to make the transition successful. The NKF’s two attempts at hosting international matches in the spring of 2017 were both canceled. No United States player was selected in the PKL 2017 auction. It is reasonable to assume that the NKF and the U.S. Kabaddi Team will be more active as they begin to prepare for the 2018 Kabaddi World Cup in the coming years. However, as of June 2017, the U.S. Kabaddi Team activity had settled at a low hum during its post-tournament meta-transition, despite continued interest and effort from the participants.

While it is not the purpose of the current study to evaluate the success of these participants’ transition into elite sport, it is worth acknowledging that from a cursory assessment, the transitions may seem to have been unsuccessful. The timeframe of the preparation period was unreasonable, as was the expectation that a team could go from a beginning level of knowledge to an elite level of competition without years of practice and training. The result was an underprepared team that lost every match, and that has struggled to maintain what little momentum they had since returning from the tournament. This is clearly not a good example of how former athletes should transition into elite levels of sport. Yet, the concept of success is relative in this case. While the participants were tasked with an unrealistic objective and faced many obstacles even at the earliest stages of transition, they still made it to India and competed at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup. In the face of constant defeat and requests to boycott the tournament from their own managers, the team still played to win every match, networked with many other international kabaddi players, and became overnight celebrities in India. Even after returning to America and having difficulty coordinating team events, they still took the first steps towards legitimatizing square-style kabaddi in the United States. Despite a lack of training, a
lack of winning, and a lack of foundation, these men became the best square-style kabaddi players in the country as far as is readily apparent, and they plan to continue playing the sport and representing the United States in future elite tournaments. Given those results, some level of success must be recognized in these athletes’ reentry transition into sport.

**Effects of Identity Intersectionality on Transition**

The intersection of athletic, racial, and national identities and the transition experience of the participants have both been examined separately. In connecting the two concepts, it is apparent that the participants’ overall transitions into kabaddi were affected by their national, racial, and athletic identities in a few specific respects. The interaction of athletic, racial, and national identities helped to foster the development of a distinct personality and purpose within the team, and both were integral to the participants’ transition experience.

The team’s personality was unique, particularly to the world of kabaddi. Part of what facilitated the uniqueness of the team was the fact that the players came from many different situations. Their athletic backgrounds were largely different, as were their career paths. In comparison, the participants’ racial and national identities were largely similar, as was their arbitration of those oft-conflicting identities, which allowed for greater bonding within the team. Harding described the ways in which the players connected beyond the kabaddi mat.

I was staying in the room with Kip and Denmar. Very very knowledgeable people, and we would bounce back ideas on life and the way we think of ideology and stuff like that. And that was like – it would be me, Kush – Troy Bacon – Pharoh D, which is Denmar, Kip, Paul and I in a room. And even Biz, Ben, and everybody on the team. We would have real deep introspective conversations on life. And that was I think what made us even closer, just ’cause everyone had like – so, to say this – I know that I’m getting long winded with my answer, but everyone was rappers and stuff like that, but they also have a very intelligent and introspective way of thinking on things, and their long term outlook and short term outlook on life, and why they probably are rappers or producers or whatever they might be. And it was
cool understanding, getting a look inside their life and how they view things. How they go after and tackle different ideologies and stuff like that. (Harding, 2017)

The charisma and confidence of the team blended with elements of an African American sub-culture that the Indian citizens fawned over. As McKie saw it, the U.S. Kabaddi Team’s personality was representative of the individuality and self-confidence that are valued in America, while also depicting a warmth and kindness that was maybe unexpected.

We go over there and we’re really just being who we are, especially in America we’re taught so much to be yourself, and saying develop who you are as an individual, and then you go into a cultural place where it’s more like, there’s so many people around and everybody’s individuality isn’t so much pushed. So then you go there and you have this big event, and of course they’re attracted to that. It’s something that’s different and everything. But it comes off sometimes as arrogant and misunderstood, but then you actually realize when you actually get to know the team, that we’re very love-hearted and very cool and very chill, so all the other teams eventually were like, “America is the cool team! America, they cool.” But at first it’s more like, “Who do they think they are?” Intimidating too, ’cause we’re America. They don’t know what to expect from us. (Mckie), 2017)

Along with the team’s distinctive personality came a connected sense of purpose. This purpose reflected facets of the intersection between athletic, racial, and national identities. The participants discussed the gravity and respect they held for the opportunity to pioneer the United States’ involvement in square-style kabaddi as African American athletes. In the words of Lovett-Harvey,

“I think probably what really stuck out to people was that we came out in the red, white, and blue and a majority of the team was black – I think we were already patriotic in a sense of the colors that we’re wearing but once we really kinda brought our own flavor to seeing – really representing our people. It’s a fact, you know, as much things as our people went through in this country, to be on that world stage and represent the country really was a statement in itself. We didn’t really have to say much. You could just see us as “Wow, they’re doing something that no one from their country has ever done before”, so that’s really kinda a testament to see how powerful, how strong we are as a people.”
Several of the participants discussed being intentional about their behavior while in India, so as to portray Americans, and particularly African as well as possible. Harding explained how his national identity related to this intentionality.

I think we take it for granted in the United States, the power that we have. . . . We drive culture. We drive everything that’s cool, and sometimes I think we take it for granted of what type of power we truly do have and how that translates to other people’s viewpoints on us. So I was actually cognizant every time I was wearing this practice jersey, that I was being as respectful as I could to everybody, even the people who were sweeping on the side of the street, made sure you’re as respectful – because I’m not just representing myself right now, but I’m representing the United States of America which I wanted to uphold in a nice positive respect. (Harding, 2017)

This type of outlook allowed the team to network effectively with other international kabaddi teams, and respond well to the rigor and demands of celebrity status during their transition.

Perhaps the clearest example of how the participants’ intersections of identity affected their transition was in the desire to establish an American kabaddi culture. Besides playing with the team, McKie described his current involvement in kabaddi as, “still trying to be an ambassador to really create something or someway to facilitate that here in the states” (McKie, 2017) Rey, as founder of the NKF, outlined his goal to create a kabaddi culture in the United States.

So we could set up a culture, because when you say football, you already think of a whole thing, whether it’s tailgating, going with you homeboys to get some beers, watching a game, going to a bar or getting a whole bunch of people in your house, y’all got chips and dip and salsa. Like, what does that look like for kabaddi? And that’s what we’re trying to establish right now, so people can walk into a whole entire culture instead of saying, “Hey, check out this game.” “Hey check out this game, but hey, check out the food we eat with this game. Hey check out the clothes.” (Bacon, 2017)

The desire to design an attitude and an atmosphere for American square-style kabaddi is evidence of the participants’ intersection of identities on their transition into the sport. When these athletes were invited into the sport of square-style kabaddi, there was no American kabaddi subculture. The concept of achieving membership in a subculture, as presented by Donelly and
Young (1988), notes the modeling of behaviors, attitudes, attire, and cultural expressions that aspiring members perceive as prerequisite for belonging to the subgroup. Without a preexisting American kabaddi subculture to join, the participants had an opportunity to cultivate their own idea of what American kabaddi culture should be – an opportunity that may be even more enticing to a group of minority individuals held in the periphery and barred from participating in determination of American cultural norms, as discussed by D’Agati (2011). As was previously highlighted, the participants did achieve a level of acceptance into the subgroup of international kabaddi athletes, and perhaps this will inform some of the subculture Rey sought to establish. The interaction of athletic, racial, and national identities during the participants’ collective experience at the Kabaddi World Cup shaped their impression of themselves in the larger kabaddi community. Their desire to foster the growth of a subculture in America encouraged their continued involvement in the sport, and thus facilitated their transition in the post-tournament period. This sense of ownership will be important in the future for the U.S. Kabaddi Team as they work to build a foundation to better support future endeavors in the sport in America.

**Globalization and Transition**

There is ample evidence to suggest that globalization is actively occurring in the sport of kabaddi. The mere effort of the IKF to host a Kabaddi World Cup suggests the intent to give the sport a more global flavor. The sub-theories about Americanization as a homogenizing force are visible in the Kabaddi World Cup as well, evident through the spectacularization of the event and corporatization of the sport as an industry (Andrew & Ritzer, 2007; Klein, 1991). The current study’s participants all spoke of the grandeur of the event and the attention to detail that went into assembling the finished product. For Rey and Lovett-Harvey, it was a surreal experience.
The production of the event reminded me of a pro wrestling event. The way that everything was just so in your face, action packed, right here right now. From us – when we ran out, the smoke came, and we’re running along the lighted pathway and we gotta do a circle around, with all the people cheering. I’m like, “Woa man, we really out here!” (Bacon, 2017)

It was like when somebody tells you something, and you know its going to be good, but once you get there, it was just like, seeing all these people representing these different countries. I mean, waving their flags in the stadium. It felt like the Olympics. It was literally like the kabaddi Olympics. (Lovett-Harvey, 2017)

Dykes recalled Star Sports’ assurances that their production of the event would impress even American standards. “I was just amazed at the level and quality of production. And they told us a hundred percent that their production is better than the NBA, to put it in perspective for us” (Dykes, 2017) Ritchey described the quality of the arena and the similarities he saw to American sporting events.

Nothing was rinky-dink, like the arena was professional the arena itself was being built – the city of Ahmedabad was being built in general, in Gujarat State. So we were in a developing city, but the arena itself, the cameras, everything, everything, was super legit. . . . It was in an arena setting, so it reminded me of arena style events, and then we have every year the Atlanta Classics and that’s like a nice arena, the Georgia Dome. So the arena style was pretty cool, seeing crowds close up to you, the stands are close up to you, and cameras everywhere, that’s how it was. (Ritchey, 2017)

Rey encapsulated the concepts of sportification and globalization in his analysis of kabaddi’s modern progression from a sandlot game to a spectator event (Sage, 2010).

Growing up in school, a lot of Indians, they would tell me they played in school outside in the dirt, and so just bringing it inside in the Arena, giving it a clean-type crisp feel, I think that helped to make it televise-able as well (Rey, 2017).

When asked if the sport had a “made for T.V.” feel, the participants’ affirmation was unanimous. Ritchey was open about the attention to detail paid by Star Sports to make it a modern television spectacle.

It was made for TV. The players, the way we have to run off the field, everything was made for camera. And I mean I applaud India for their organization, and for
their wit, and their strategy in terms of making a four thousand year old sport – reviving it as a modern day thing for TV consumers, I think that was pretty cool. (Ritchey, 2017)

McKie detailed the mechanics of the production, noting the amount of direction the team was given, and the control exerted by those in charge of the event.

At the end of the day, this is on television, and so the fact that it’s about to be on TV, you have to sort of be ready, and you have to entertain. When you’re going out there, they tell you, “Come out and jump up and down, do something to entertain the crowd ‘cause it’s good for TV.” . . . Or upset on the sidelines. They’re like, “Try not to be so down because we see that, and that’s the morale of the team and how the people will perceive the team.” You’re like, okay. Yeah, it’s like that. And so you realize that a lot of sports is entertainment. Even when I went to do a little press conference thing, I sat down and they’re asking me questions. They’re telling me, “If they ask you this, tell them this.” So they’re prepping you for it sort of, to say the right things, and make sure you make kabaddi look good. (McKie, 2017)

This controlled projection of a globally growing sport with advanced international players was directly connected to the underlying purpose of the Kabaddi World Cup. The IKF officials were very clear with the participants’ about their intentions and goals. Rey remembered his captains’ meeting with kabaddi executives and their explanation.

The CEO of the IKF . . . sat us down in that captain’s meeting and kinda told everybody what he wanted to accomplish with the world cup, how he expected us to conduct ourselves and our teams… he wanted over one point five – over a hundred million viewers. He wanted diversity in the matches. (Bacon, 2017)

Lovett-Harvey also recalled the World Cup organizers’ emphasis on growing the sport’s brand in India and internationally.

Oh yeah, they told us in the meeting things that – the president of the league, he was saying really they want to get out to as many people as possible – marketing, marketing. I didn’t really realize how many people it reached until we actually got back to the airport in Saudi Arabia and a guy from America who was living in Singapore, he walked up to us, he said, “You speak English?” and I said, “Yeah”, he said “I saw the Kabaddi world cup over in Singapore” and I was like “Wow.” I mean, ‘cause I thought maybe it was just in India, but seeing somebody from our country living in another country watching the sport was just like, man, this really got all over the world. So they definitely did a great job of marketing. (Lovett-Harvey, 2017)
The most commonly cited purpose of the tournament was to position kabaddi as an Olympic sport in the future. Harding had a thorough explanation of how the event was designed to help accomplish this goal, and why the involvement of the United States was especially important in his impression.

So they had Australia, they had Argentina, they had Kenya, they had United States. So I think you always need the United States in any international sport to make it legitimate, quote unquote. So because they touched every single continent, and they already had Thailand, India, Iran, all that type of stuff. Because they touched every continent, even touched Europe with England, they want this sport to be in the next Olympics. And they also made that apparent to us to an extent a little bit. They knew what they were doing, and it was carefully orchestrated to make sure they had the teams that were necessary to make this a reality. And as I said about the United States, we don’t understand the power we have. Once we checked in that box for the United States that we were coming, it now made the tournament very legitimate. Also on top of that, it might have not got on ESPN three – no disrespect to the IKF or any of them, but I don’t believe – and I think they said it to us to an extent too, it wouldn’t have got on ESPN three if not for the United States playing in the tournament. So, they carefully orchestrated it and made sure that we were there, and made sure each country that they needed was in it so that their chances of getting into the Olympics next go around – it’s gonna be possible. So they want to get into the Olympics. (Harding, 2017)

McKie and Ritchey were clear in their descriptions of what the tournament was intended to accomplish, and the truth about why underprepared teams, such as their own, were sponsored to compete.

I know their goal was to grow the sport, because over there kabaddi is the second-most watched sport next to cricket, pro kabaddi. And that’s in India, so they’re trying to, of course, have the sport spread across the world, and actually have it be an Olympic event. But for that to happen, they have to have established kabaddi in South America, North America, Africa, Asia, and Europe, all the continents. That’s their goal, so they put on an international thing. …The way that we got picked up, it was sort of like, “Hey, you guys wanna play kabaddi?” So I felt like the purpose was to get U.S.A., ‘cause they’re India and they can sorta get away with that. (McKie, 2017)

“The goals were to get in the Olympics, that’s why they did it. They were basically hiring teams, man, to play. They needed enough countries to participate in the World Cup in order for it to be in the Olympics so we were pretty much guinea pigs kinda, and I mean I took it man, that’s an opportunity – we benefitted each other,
that’s how it was. We get a once in a lifetime experience, and we get eligibility for the Olympics, I think that’s how it all – it was strategy.”

These frank explanations of how and why the U.S. Kabaddi Team came to be are plainly laid examples of the effects of globalization on the players’ transition into the sport. In truth, it’s the entire reason that these players had the opportunity to even learn of the sport’s existence. The desire of the IKF to portray an international following for kabaddi led directly to the participants’ recruitment and training. Dykes discussed how their recruitment and training, while hurried, was essential to the participants’ initial transition into the sport.

So I feel like the recruiting and training for us was key, because we didn’t really have anything to – like, we honestly didn’t know anything about kabaddi. The only thing that we knew about it was on YouTube and things, so we really couldn’t relate that much. And so the training and things for us was necessary to learn the techniques of the sport, and actually how to play it. So it definitely made the sport seem more real to us. And I feel like it also helped us pick up the sport faster by having that training and one on one teaching. So I feel like it was essential for us, and the only thing - I just wish we could have done it a bit earlier and had more time to train and get to India earlier, because we would have been a force for a fact and would have won a lot more games. (Dykes, 2017)

The level of grandeur and spectacularization at the Kabaddi World Cup made a disparate impact on the different participants’ transitions, in their own perspectives. Some felt that the amount of attention the event received via television was a motivating factor during the tournament. In the words of McKie, “I think if anything it motivated you. It should have, because you’re out there in front of millions of people literally on television” (2017). Rey agreed, and also discussed how the level of viewership kabaddi receives in India encouraged him to continue pursuing the sport as a potential professional opportunity.

Whatever happens, whether we embarrass ourselves or whether we look great, a lot of people are gonna see.’ That definitely kept the fire lit under me. And like I said, I can only speak for myself, but that definitely was a motivating factor. My mom’s gonna see this, my girlfriend’s gonna see this. Whoever I come back and tell about this, they’re gonna see me doing this right here, so let me make sure I at least make it seem like I know what I’m doing or I got some type of grasp… (Bacon, 2017)
I was like, if they can have this stuff on this scale, if the pro league is on this scale, which it is in India – okay, A: I would like to go play pro. [laughs] Obviously to get paid, but if it’s going to give me this type of exposure to one point four billion people in India. I want to get to the people, if I want to influence anybody. (Bacon, 2017)

For Lovett-Harvey and Harding, the professionalism of the event and amount of resources provided to the team in India were important facilitators of their transition.

We knew it was very professional, so I think by seeing it as that professional we knew that – we were always going to do our thing, practicing, training, training, but just to see it, how professional it was made us get to the next level. We tried to treat it like, this is not just a little pick up game, this is – we’re playing on the world stage so we need to be world class athletes. (Lovett-Harvey, 2017)

Yeah, we would go to the practice facilities all the time, and to be honest, making it a big sport probably even helped us out. So the South Korean team beat India the first match right? So we had so much hoopla around us, they really wanted us to do well. The IKF really wanted us to do well. So they got the coach for South Korea as well to come help us out before our Poland match, because again, we had a lot of raw talent on our team. Everyone was good. We just had to make it all click together and be synchronized and play as a team. And that’s really what it is: it’s all about playing like a team. But we had to understand the game a little bit more to understand how to play like a team. So the South Korean coach, who was an Indian coach. He’s like one of the coaches in India, he came with us and spent like three days, four days with our team specifically, just refining our technique, our talent, how to tackle, all this kind of stuff. And I thought that was really a turning point in our whole experience in kabaddi as well. So with it being so big, I also think that helped us out. . . . With the big stage, I know that they brought in that coach because they want our team to be better, and with our team being better that helps their ratings. So it even just helped us that it was such a big sport and that it was such a big deal. (Harding, 2017)

Ritchey was the only participant who wondered about the amount of training they may have missed because of the deadlines imposed by the major event.

“It might’ve prevented us from getting as much in depth learning experience as we could, we kind of had to get enough to put on for TV versus like in depth, private, American training, you know what I’m saying, so I think that it definitely affected our ability to – our experience in learning how much we could for the competition.”

In these ways, it is clear that the active globalization of the sport of kabaddi affected the participants’ transition. It is a result that is unique to the U.S. Kabaddi Team’s experience at the
2016 Kabaddi World Cup. It is unlikely that there are many examples of initial introductions to a sport occurring on an elite level and massive stage. Thus, it is valuable to explore the effects of globalization on transition in this rare phenomenon. The globalization of kabaddi, particularly in the aspects of Americanized spectacularization and corporatization (Andrew & Ritzer, 2007; Klein, 1991), did have an impact on the transition experiences of these athletes into a new sport.

**Researcher Reflections**

This section will serve as an opportunity for the researcher to examine his impact on the results and analysis of the study. There is a clear power difference between participant and researcher tilted in favor of the researcher when conducting oral history, or any qualitative research. This is due to the researcher’s inherent control over the proceedings – the direction of questioning, the subsequent analysis of testimonies, and the application of theory to the introspection of the participants. Although care was taken to base all analysis in the data provided by the participants, and to accurately reflect meanings as intended by the participants, it was the researcher’s decision as to the organization and purpose of the research. I, as the researcher, have biases and ideas that informed these decisions, and thus it is through my voice that the participants speak to some extent. As is so aptly stated by Haynes (2010) in her reflections on oral history practice, “I alone have interpretive authority, choosing what to leave in, what to take out, transforming the oral encounter into a written representation of a life” (p. 225). The reality of researcher subjectivity in qualitative research requires a self-reflection of how one’s own perceptions may have influenced the final product. In the case of the current study, my personal awareness of relevant sport management theory and expectations about the participants’ answers may have influenced the data collection process and analysis in subtle ways.
The purpose of the study directed many of the questions in the interview guide. If the only purpose of the study had been to gather superficial facts about the event and the timeline, many of the elements regarding identity, transition, and globalization would likely have been more lightly discussed. I was intent on extracting data about these topics from the interview, and in several interviews rephrased the same question in a different way after receiving a less direct answer. My preconceptions for what these answers would be may have also changed the wording of questions in the moment. Interestingly, some of my internal hypotheses were proven to be off base, such as an expected increase of national pride and prominence of national identity in the participants. The fact that the participants’ answers were surprising affirms my willingness to accept and convey accurate meanings, but also verifies I had hypothesized some likely findings, which could have influenced the attention to certain details during interviews. Some of my other expectations were to find a unanimous increase in athletic identity, and a conflicting national and racial identity. I was fairly uncertain of what might come from questions about transition and globalization, but as more interviews were conducted, I became aware of thematic consistencies between participants, and these eventually developed into expectations as well.

To allow maximum transparency, a brief profile of the researcher is appropriate. As a white middle-class American male, it is impossible for me to fully empathize with or understand the experience of African Americans in modern society. So too is it impossible for me to fully understand cultural intricacies that are unique to the African American experience. Thus, I acknowledged my inability to empathize and experience these phenomena, but defend my ability to point to the existence of the unique African American experience and culture that is important to the study’s findings. All of the aforementioned acknowledgements constitute the researcher’s potential influence on the results and analysis. The value of reflexivity is that it allows the reader...
to decide the value and relevance of the research to his or her own work or knowledge base
(Johnson & Waterfield, 2004).
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

The current study accomplished multiple purposes. The archival of participants’ oral history interviews marks an official preservation of details about the U.S Kabaddi Team’s conception and participation at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup. Applied to sport management theory, the study examines the transition experiences of these former athletes into a new sport while considering the impact of identity intersectionality and globalization on their transitions. The study links the micro-level experiences of these athletes with macro-level theory, as is the function of inductive discovery and oral history as a qualitative method (Hesse-Biber, 2016).

The study produced several findings about the intersectionality of athletic, racial, and national identities in African American athletes representing the United States. While each participant had a unique perception of their own athletic identity, four of the six participants expressed greater athletic identification after competing at the Kabaddi World Cup. Regarding the intersection between racial and athletic identities, participants were focused on public perception. Some grappled with the stereotype of black people as naturally superior athletes, but most discussed the opportunity to promote a positive perception of African Americans through their platform in India as celebrity athletes. The intersection of national and athletic identities was also related to the participants’ celebrity status, because their national identity as American athletes earned them massive attention from Indian citizens, and thus facilitated the intensification of athlete identification. Yet, the prominence of national identity was mitigated as it intersected with racial identity among the participants, who struggled with representing the United States as a government during a time of peak political frustration for African Americans.
The team’s unique and distinctive personality reflects the intersection of those identities, and the intersectionality of these athletes’ identities impacted their transitions as well.

The study used these findings regarding the participants’ identity intersectionality to examine the impact of intersectionality on the transition of former athletes into new sports. The team’s distinctive personality that was influenced by the intersection of their athletic, racial, and national identities was coupled with a shared sense of purpose that reflected facets of that intersectionality. The participants placed great value on the opportunity, as African American athletes, to pioneer the United States’ involvement in square-style kabaddi. The participants’ intention to give a positive impression of African Americans, and Americans in general, to the host country aided them in responding well to the rigor and demands of celebrity status during their transition, and in building positive relationships with many other international kabaddi players. This led to the achievement of a level of membership in the subgroup of elite international kabaddi athletes through confirmation of established members, as applied to Donnelly and Young’s (1988) theorization of subgroup identity formation. Upon returning to the United States, the participants had an opportunity to cultivate their own idea of what American kabaddi subculture should be, which assuredly will be reflective of the team’s distinctive personality. Their desire to design and foster the growth of a square-style kabaddi subculture in America encouraged their continued involvement in the sport. In these ways, the identity intersectionality of the participants influenced their transition experiences.

The current study also investigated the question of whether or not the globalization of kabaddi had an impact on former athlete transitions into new sports. According to the participants, the IKF sought to portray a larger international kabaddi following so as to improve the sport’s bid as a potential Olympic event. This directly led to the participants’ introduction to
the sport and IKF sponsorship of the U.S. Kabaddi Team. The participants’ testimonies depicted the active sportification and Americanization of kabaddi in its progression from a sandlot game to a spectator event (Sage, 2010; Klein, 1991). The spectacularization of the Kabaddi World Cup was evident through the attention to detail paid by Star Sports to make it a modern television spectacle, as well as the abundant resources provided to the team during their stay. The participants perceived the impact of the Americanization and spectacularization of the Kabaddi World Cup on their transitions in different ways. Some felt that the amount of attention the event received via television was a motivating factor during the tournament. Others thought that the professionalism of the event and amount of resources provided to the team in India were important facilitators of their transition. One participant thought that the amount of training they may have missed because of the deadlines imposed by the IKF was a detrimental effect of the event’s magnitude. Through these findings, it is clear that the active globalization of kabaddi did affect the participants’ transition experiences.

**Application of Findings to Sport Management**

The current study’s greatest contributions are its application of macro-level theories to micro-level phenomena. It has relevance to several areas of sport management theory that are important for practitioners in the sport industry to consider. Specifically, this study expands the body of knowledge regarding the impact of identity negotiation and intersectionality in athletes. It is valuable for those working directly with athletes to consider these internal negotiations on the motivations, struggles, and behaviors of athletes. The study also presents valuable findings regarding the impressions of minority athletes representing a nation, and specifically of African American athletes representing the United States in international competition – an area of research that deserves much more attention than it has received from the sport management community in recent years. The intersection of these identities was complex and prominent in the
minds of the participants, who competed on a stage largely unnoticed by the American public. It seems reasonable to hypothesize that minority Olympians, or other minority athletes in other more prominent international competitions, may be experiencing similarly conflicting identity intersections on a greater stage. This is important to consider for those working with international athletes in any capacity. Additionally, the findings on transition are relevant for sport managers. Little research has been done regarding the reentry transition of former athletes into new sports, and this study serves as a foray into that field of inquiry, despite the distinctly singular nature of the U.S. Kabaddi Team’s introduction to the sport. Finally, the study’s examination of globalization effects at an applied level is valuable to many in the sport industry. Those involved in international sport, or those looking to spread the international footprint of a sport, should consider how globalization of a sport affects those who participate in it. The investigation of this macro-level concept at an applied level expands the body of knowledge regarding both globalization and transition – two theories oft applied to sport, but rarely in conjunction.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study accomplished its purposes and answered its research questions, but leaves plenty of room for further exploration about the several topics of interest. Often, quantitative research that suggests the existence of a phenomena serves as the launching point for qualitative research to investigate the reasons and processes related to the phenomena. In the case of the current study, qualitative research could serve as an initial excavation of findings that deserve some quantitative inquiry. Tracking intersectionality of participant identities before, during, and after an event such as the Kabaddi World Cup could provide additional valuable data on the fluctuations of multiple-identity negotiation during transition experiences for elite athletes. From a qualitative approach, ethnographic research may be an effective method of investigating the
effects of globalization on athlete transition, particularly if the researcher were able to travel with the team during the event.

Lastly, there is certainly more information to glean from the fledgling U.S. Kabaddi Team. There are seven more members of the team that competed at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup who deserve to have their oral history accounts preserved. There is also opportunity for continued assessment of their transition as athletes into the sport of kabaddi, and their likely involvement in the next Kabaddi World Cup provides occasion for deeper research about that specific event as well. The potential development of a kabaddi sub-culture in America, the future of square-style kabaddi, and the continued experiences of this incredibly unique and interesting team warrant further scholarly inquiry and historical attention in the sport management community.
APPENDIX A
SAMUEL PROCTOR ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM DEED OF GIFT

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
Dr. Paul Ortiz, Director
Tamarra Jenkins, Office Manager

DEED OF GIFT
Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
University of Florida

I, ____________________________ (interviewee/interviewer), herein permanently give, convey, and assign my oral history interview to the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program (hereafter SPOHP), which is currently in possession of my interview. In so doing, I understand that my interview (or oral memoir) will be made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published or broadcast in any medium that the SPOHP shall deem appropriate.

In making this gift I fully understand that I am conveying all legal title and literary property rights which I have or may be deemed to have in my interview as well as all my rights, title and interest in any copyright which may be secured under the laws now or later in force and effect in the United States of America. My conveyance of copyright encompasses the exclusive rights of: reproduction, distribution, preparation and derivative works, public performance, public display as well as all renewals and extensions.

Interviewee:

Date

Interviewer:

Date

SPOHP Director Dr. Paul Ortiz

Date

Interviewee: Address, City, State, Zip Code

Interviewee: Email and Telephone

Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution
APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the Research Study: An Oral History of the U.S. Kabaddi Team: Transitions, Identities, and Globalized Sport, IRB#201700097

As an invitee to participate in this study, the following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision about your willingness to participate. Please feel free to ask any questions regarding this project. You are invited to participate because you were a member of the U.S. Kabaddi team that traveled to India in the fall of 2016 to compete at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup. The purposes of this study are as follows:

- The preservation of data about the U.S.A. Kabaddi Team’s conception and participation at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup to serve as an official record about this phenomenon from those who experienced it.
- The primary purpose of the study is to examine the transition experiences of former athletes into a new sport.
  - This involves investigating the impact of participating in the Kabaddi World Cup on players’ athletic, national, and racial identities.
- This study also intends to explore the applicability of established globalization theories to the experience of the U.S. Kabaddi Team at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup and how globalization of sport is connected to athletes’ transition experiences.

Participation in this study will require at least 45 minutes of your time, but can last as long as 3 hours depending on the amount of testimony provided by you, the participant. The project will rely on oral history interviews with each participant about you as a person, the U.S. Kabaddi Team, and experiencing the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup. As a voluntary participant, you are entitled to decline answering any questions, or withhold any information that you prefer not to disclose. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time, or request a redaction of any information recorded in an interview during this study at any later point in time. This research is not anonymous; you will be identified and associated with your responses. Information obtained during these interviews will be stored in the digital public archives of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida. The information obtained in this study will be used for a master’s thesis in Sport Management, and may be used for other historical purposes in the future.

Documentation of Informed Consent
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

__________________________________  ________________
Signature of Subject  Date

Principal Investigator
- Samuel P. Winemiller  Cell: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Faculty Advisor
- Michael Sagas, Ed.D.  Dept. of Tourism, Recreation, and Sport Management
This is Sam Winemiller with the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program here at the University of Florida and we are conducting an interview with a member of the U.S. kabaddi team. Can you state your full name please?

Okay, let’s start from the very beginning. Where were you born?
  - Did you move around or did you grow up there?
  - Can you tell me about your immediate family – parents, siblings?

When did you first get involved in sports?
  - Did you have a favorite sport growing up?
  - Did you play other sports?
  - How long had it been since you were involved in competitive sports before getting involved with the kabaddi team?
  - Did you consider yourself an “athlete” growing up?
  - What was it like to not play sports for a while?
    - Was this challenging at all?

Where were you living and what were you doing for a living before you got involved with kabaddi?
  - Are you still doing that now?
  - Did you have to put that on hold when you joined the kabaddi team?
    - Were there any challenges related to this?

Can you tell me the story about how you first got involved with the U.S. kabaddi team?
  - Who invited you?
I read on Deadspin that Celestine Jones and Kevin Caldwell were ones who were originally presented the opportunity to form a team from some people involved in the Pro Kabaddi League. Do you know anything about that story that you can elaborate on?

- I read that the team trained in Jacksonville. Did you have to move there or did you commute?

- Can you tell me about your coach Narinder Rana?
  - How did he become the coach?
  - Is he more of a quiet teacher-type coach, or is he more of the loud, in your face kind of coach?
  - Do you feel like he was skillful at teaching you the game?

- Can you describe what the training was like in Jacksonville before the tournament?
  - Around what month did training begin?
  - Was it challenging physically, or were you used to that level of exercise?
  - How much time was spent teaching the game, as opposed to conditioning or working out?
  - Was it challenging to learn the strategic elements of kabaddi?
  - Were there any personal challenges you had to face as you learned the sport?
    - (If so) How did you deal with these?

- How did your history as an athlete affect your ability to learn and play kabaddi?

- What was the team chemistry like when you first arrived?
  - Did you know many of the other team members before you joined?
  - Did you all get along, or were there challenges?
o Do you think the team chemistry changed from when you first started training together to after you had competed together?

- Did you receive payment of some sort to be able to put your life on hold for those few months?
  - Did the team as a whole receive funding for travel or the coach or those kinds of logistical costs?
  - Did the team get any nutrition or medical support or any kind of additional services like that?

- What was travel like?

- When you arrived, what was your reception like from the Indian citizens?

- Where did the team stay?
  - Is that where all the other teams stayed as well?

- How much time did you have in India before the first match?

- Can you talk about your first match on October 7 against Iran?
  - What were you thinking or feeling during and after the match?

- Can you talk about your last match on October 18 against Iran?

- Did you interact with players from other teams much outside of the arena?
  - (If so) Did you build connections with the other teams?
  - What impression do you think the other teams had of the American team?

- What feelings do you have about representing the United States on an international stage?
  - Did you feel patriotic about America?
• In recent years there has been a resurgence of racial issues in the United States, sparking movements such as Black Lives Matter. As an African American, how does your race relate to your pride in America and in being American?
  o Did you have any thoughts or feelings about representing the United States as an African American in an international competition?

• Do you think of yourself as an athlete?
  o Did you think of yourself as an athlete before joining the kabaddi team?
  o Do you feel like being on the kabaddi team has affected how you identify yourself in this way?

• What was your impression of how the Kabaddi World Cup was run?
  o Did it seem like it had received a lot of funding?
  o Did the tournament remind you of other athletic competitions you’ve seen or participated in before, or did it have a different feel to it?
    • Did it feel like a made-for-TV event?
  o What do you think were the PKL’s goals for this tournament?

• Did those aspects of the tournament make a difference for you while learning the sport?

• Did those aspects of the tournament make a difference in your desire to continue playing kabaddi?

• What is your involvement with kabaddi at this point?

• How do you feel like the process of being recruited and training to participate in the Kabaddi World Cup affected your feelings about the sport?

• Are there any other thoughts or feelings that you’d like to share?

• Thanks so much for your time and your story.
LIST OF REFERENCES


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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sam Winemiller was born and raised in Nokomis, Florida. He graduated from Venice High School in Venice, Florida in 2009. Sam attended several schools in his undergraduate career, receiving an Associate of Arts degree from the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from the University of Central Florida in the fall of 2014. Sam began enrollment at the University of Florida in the spring of 2015. His academic focuses as a graduate student included qualitative research, oral history, online education, sport sociology, and sport history. Sam received a graduate certification in online teaching and learning in the spring of 2017, and graduated with a Master of Science degree in sport management in the summer of 2017.