

## Negotiating Constraints to Sport Participation of University Soccer Players

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the strategies used by male university soccer athletes to negotiate constraints towards sport participation. Some selected socio-demographic factors (year of study, parental social economic status (SES), family involvement in soccer and birth rank) were correlated with strategies of negotiating constraints to sport participation. Data was collected through questionnaires from university soccer players (n=242) who were participating in a national university soccer championship. Pearson products moment correlation of coefficient was used to test hypothesis on selected socio-demographic factors and strategies for constraint negotiation. Findings indicated that the majority of players were either first born or second born and soccer was popular in their universities. The major strategies of negotiating constraints were time management, and interpersonal coordination. The selected socio-demographic factors had weak associations with the strategies used to negotiate constraints. Findings have implications to sport administrators in the universities and future researchers need to evaluate the association between participation motivation, constraints and constraint negotiation strategies of university athletes.

**Keywords:** Constraints, negotiation, soccer, university.

### Introduction.

Leisure researchers define constraints as negative factors that inhibit consumption of an event, product or service. Constraints are factors which preclude or limit an individuals frequency, intensity, duration or quality of participation in recreational activities (Ellis & Radmacher, 1986). Leisure constraints limit participation in desired leisure activities (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Crawford, Jackson & Godbey 1991). Common leisure constraints include but are not limited to time, money, health, lack of emotional attachment, social relationships and travel distance (Kleiber *et al*, 2008). Jackson (1993) considered leisure constraints as factors that are assumed by researchers and perceived or experienced by individual to limit the formation of leisure preferences and to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure e.g recreational constraints may include rules of games, constraints on space and place for activities, limitations on time and timing of activities and identity constraints (Shaw, 1994)

The constraints theory recognizes three types of constraints (intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural) that affect leisure preferences and participation (Crawford, *et al*, 1991). Understanding constraints to leisure has become a major focus of theoretical and empirical study over the last two decades. Researchers have called for greater consideration of the potential systematic variations in constraints and the process of negotiating constraints across population sub-groups (Crawford & Jackson, 2005; Shores *et al*, 2007). Henderson, Bialeschki and Taylor (1988) classified constraints into antecedent and intervening constraints. Antecedent constraints are the conscious and unconscious psychological status (e.g feeling of incompetence) while intervening constraints inhibits participation after preferences have been set up to e.g lack of money.

Constraint negotiation refers to the strategies people use to avoid or reduce the impact of the constraints and barriers on leisure participation and enjoyment (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Constraint negotiation is applied in order to mediate both the negative influence of constraints and the positive influence of motivation on overall participation (Son, Kersteller & Mowen, 2008). Leisure constraint negotiation strategies often include time management, skill acquisition, interpersonal coordination and financial management (Son *et al*, 2008). Hubbard and Mannell (2001) tested a variety of constraint negotiation models that they theorized based on previous research and found the greater support for the constraint-effects- mitigation model which describes the interrelationships among constraints negotiation strategies, motivation and participation. The data offered strongest support for a constraint-effects mitigation model suggesting that negotiation efforts were directly and positively influenced by motivation and perceived constraints while negotiation and constraints had a direct impact on participation.

Jackson *et al* (1993) proposed that individuals' engagement in leisure emerges from the interplay of leisure motivations, constraints that shape preferences and participation and the negotiation of these constraints. Researchers have proposed and tested models in varied contexts of constraint negotiation processes based on Jackson *et al* proposition (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Loucks- Atkinson & Mannell ,2007; Son *et al* 2008) and

found that the model does not reflect broader social structural contexts in which leisure is situated. Son *et al* (2008) observed that constraints and negotiation work independently to affect participation. The constraints effect –mitigation model developed by Hubbard and Mannell (2001) is based on the premise that constraints negatively impact participation levels and this negative effects can be mitigated by the use of constraint negotiation strategies i.e negotiation strategies help people overcome constraints that otherwise would limit participation. Hubbard and Mannell (2001) operationalized four primary types of negotiation time management, skill acquisition, financial strategies and interpersonal coordination. A time management strategy might entail substituting a desired activity with a more convenient activity whereas a skill acquisition strategy involve saving money to do desired activities whereas inter personal strategy might be meeting people with similar leisure interests.

### Literature Review

Numerous studies have been conducted on the strategies used to negotiate sport and leisure constraints. However, most of the studies have been conducted on participants outside educational institutions. Little (2002) found that women were constrained by factors such as gender role expectations, family and other commitments, personal constraints related to cultural motions of gender and adventure and the technical nature of adventure recreation, engaged in several negotiation strategies namely, prioritizing leisure compromising on activity and anticipating future involvement. The study also found that women experience more constraints than men such as low self-esteem or lack of skill in a particular activity and found that most women in her study were able to negotiate and overcome the constraints to effectively participate in recreational activities e.g prioritizing time by cutting down on work hours and domestic chores and focusing more on learning new skills and participating in new recreational activities.

In educational settings, Beggs *et al* (2005) examined the strategies most commonly used by college students to negotiate constraints related to campus recreational sport participation. They found that time management and skill acquisition were the most commonly used strategies by the students. Similarly, Elkins, Beggs and Choutka (2007) study of negotiation strategies used by college students in pursuit of campus recreational, sport participation, interpersonal relations physical fitness and skill acquisition were identified as being most commonly used strategy. Woods (2011) showed that time management strategies were cited as being most often whereas skill acquisition and interpersonal coordination were also employed by some of the students.

In a related study, Samdahl and Jekuborich (1997) participants spoke of many constraints to sport participation which included; Structural constraints like time, money and health; Interpersonal constraints like family responsibilities, lack of leisure partners or having a mismatched leisure partner and interpersonal constraints such as personalities, low self-esteem and insecurities. They identified some common ways that leisure constraints are negotiated, Making time for you to overcome time or work commitment constraints, coordinating time with others to negotiate lack of time or responsibility constraints, compromising activities to negotiate with mismatched leisure partner constraints, and sharing leisure experiences with others to negotiate time, money and availability constraints.

Scott (1991) discovered ten different types of constraints that were experienced by an individual or group as well as three strategies that were used to adapt or alleviate them. They included, acquisition of information about limited opportunities, altered scheduling of games to adjust to reduced group membership and individual time commitments, skill development to permit participation in advanced play and recruitment of substitute players to fill the role of missing members. Kay and Jackson (1991) regarding financial constraints, the majority of respondents in their study reduced their participation saving money and finding less expensive opportunities to cope with financial constraints, and as for reactions to time constraints, the majority opted to reduce their leisure travel.

In secondary schools, Jackson and Ruck (1995) in an examination of constraints to leisure for junior high and high school students, found that the student engaged in negotiation strategies when faced with constraints including acquiring the necessary skills, changing leisure aspirants, getting physical therapy, changing ones interpersonal relations, modifying time and commitments and improving finances. Jackson and Wilt (1994) constraints depicted in their survey included admission fees and charges, being too busy with work, lacking the necessary physically ability and having no opportunity close to home.

Chung (2005) findings indicated that constraints showed an inverse relationship to negotiation but had no significant negative impact on negotiation. This implies that respondent's negotiation strategies to participate in events did not allow respondents to overcome the constraints. Jackson *et al* (1993) concluded that leisure participation did not only depend on the constraints affecting attendance but on the negotiation a person goes through to overcome them.

From the literature review, negotiating strategies which have been used spur participation in recreational and competitive physical activities involved participating with others, meeting the physical limitations of the

majority, reconciling family commitments with group leisure, coordinating activities of the group, maintain connections despite distance, new members adjusting to group.

One of the major decreases in engagement in physical activity occurs during the transition from adolescence to young adult, a period often associated with the commencement of college on university studies (Melina, 2001). Understanding physical activity engagement by this group is particularly important because they are faced with increased stress and a new set of a responsibilities as they move away from home leaving some decisions to be made without parental influences.

Researchers suggested that leisure constraints research should examine socio-demographic factors such as age, gender (Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008; Chung, 2005). Understanding whether or not negotiation strategies help people overcome constraints to participation have practical implications for the provision of leisure-based health promotion programs. Thus the purpose of this study was to examine negotiation process of university male soccer athletes in Kenya. The study was out to determine whether the negotiation process is mediated by age, parental social economic status, nature of university (private vs. public) and level of education.

### Methods

**Instruments:** The negotiation measure was used to assess how the university soccer athletes negotiated barriers in order to participate in competitive soccer for their respective universities. The instrument had two sections. Section A captured the demographic information of the respondents such as year of study, playing soccer experience, parental SES (education and occupation) and popularity of soccer in their university. Section B composed to twenty seven items which addressed the constraint negotiation measures. A 5 point likert-type response format was used with values ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often) the instrument had been used in previous studies of Hubbard and Mannell, 2001; Woods, 2011) but was slightly modified to capture the sport participation situation in Kenyan universities.

### Data Collection

During the time of the study, Kenyan had seven public and fifteen private universities. These universities have regular sport competitions and it is during these competitions best teams are selected to represent the country or individual universities in subsequent competitions. Data was collected from (n=242) university soccer players who were representing their universities during the Kenya Universities Sport Association (KUSA) selection for soccer teams to represent the country in the East African University games scheduled for February ,2012.

### Data Analysis

Data was coded for frequencies, means and percentages under statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) .To test the resulting hypothesis one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. Any significant F ratios were subjected to post- hoc test of Tukey honestly significant differences (HSD) at 0.05 level of significance.

### RESULTS

The demographic details of the respondents are presented in table 1 and their parents SES are presented in tables 2 and 3.

**Table 1: Demographic details of the soccer players.**

Year of study	n	%
1 <sup>st</sup>	30	12.4
2 <sup>nd</sup>	70	28.9
3 <sup>rd</sup>	65	26.9
4 <sup>th</sup>	73	30.16
5 <sup>th</sup>	4	1.7
<b>Birth rank</b>		
First born	86	35.5
Middle born	106	43
Last born	50	20.7
<b>Duration played for the team</b>		
1 year	41	16.94
2 year	80	33.05
3 year	93	38.42
4 year	23	9.50
Over 5 years	5	2.06
<b>Popularity</b>		
Not popular	26	10.74
Popular	113	46.69
Very popular	103	42.56

Result in table 1 show that 4<sup>th</sup> year students were 73 (30.16) followed by 2<sup>nd</sup> years 70 (28.9%) third years were 65 (26.9%), first years were 30 (12.4%) and the least were fifth years 4 (1.7%). It is apparent that majority of the participants were in 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 4<sup>th</sup> years with low representation of first years and fifth years. The bulk of the players were middle born 106 (43%) followed by first born 86(35.5%) and last born were 50 (20.7%). The respondents duration of playing for the university team show that 93 (38.42%) had played for their university team for three years, followed by those who had played for two years 80 (33.05%) and those who had played for one year 41 (16.94%) while 23 (9.50%) and 5 (2.06%) had played for their university for 4 and 5 years respectively. Other demographic details showed that 150 (61.98%) of the participants family members were engaged in soccer while 92 (38.01%) of the family members did not involve the members in soccer. The participants rate of popularity show that 113 (46.69%) rated soccer as popular in their universities followed by 103 (42.50%) very popular and 26 (10.74%) rated soccer as not popular. The participant's parental social economic status as indicated by parental education and occupation is presented in table 2 and 3 respectively

**Table 2: Parental Education of the Participants**

	Father		Mother	
	n	%	n	%
Level of education				
No schooling	9	3.7	11	4.5
Primary education	6	2.5	18	7.4
Secondary education	37	15.3	43	17.8
Middle Level College	86	35.5	94	38.84
University	104	42.97	76	31.4
Total	242	99.7*	242	99.94*

\* Rounding off error

**Table 3: Parental Occupation**

	Father		Mother	
	n	%	n	%
Occupation				
Teaching	46	19	45	18.59
Medicine	19	7.85	29	11.98
Farming	27	11.15	51	21.07
Civil service	19	7.85	15	6.19
Business	70	28.9	62	25.61
Accounting	17	7.02	13	5.37
Armed forces	5	2.06	0	-
Clerical	16	6.61	15	6.19
Others	14	5.78	12	4.95
Not indicated	9	3.71	0	-
Total	242	101.93*	242	99.95*

\* Rounding off error

Data in table 2 show that 104 (42.97%) of the athletes fathers had university education followed by 86 (35.5%) who had middle level college education, secondary Education 37 (15.3%) and primary education 6 (2.5%) and no schooling 9 (3.7%). For the mothers 94 (38.84%) had middle level college education, followed by 76 (31.4%) had university education 43 (17.8%) had secondary education while primary education had no school had 18 (7.4%) and 11 (4.5%) respectively.

Data in table 3 reveals that majority of the soccer players fathers' were engaged in business 70 (28.9%) followed by teaching 46 (19%) and farming 27 (11.15%). For the mothers the majority of the mothers' players were in business 62 (25.61%) followed by farming 51 (21.07%) and medicine 29 (11.98%). The participants' means and standard deviations on negotiating constraints is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Means and standard deviations on negotiating constraints to soccer participation.**

Negotiation methods	mean	SD
Try to find people to play soccer with	3.57	1.1
Try to be organized, to manage all academic and soccer matters	3.42	1.07
Try to budget my money	3.75	1.02
Arrange soccer training with my friends	3.87	0.97
Plan ahead of things	3.87	0.96
Set aside time for soccer	3.83	1.00
Save money to do soccer as a priority	3.26	1.12
Swallow pride and try my best	3.59	1.03
Get up earlier or stay up late to compensate for lost time	3.57	1.10
I ask for help from friends.	3.61	1.02
Drop what I'm doing and participate in soccer.	3.27	1.14
Improvise the soccer facilities and equipment	3.31	1.12
Attend certain soccer games	2.99	1.15
I try to meet people with similar interest	3.69	1.00
I participate with people of same gender	3.47	1.09
Take in soccer activities that fits my class schedule	3.55	1.10
Practice on my own	3.54	1.05
Finish assignment early in order to have time for soccer	3.78	0.99
Team mates assist me in skills development	3.78	1.00
Participate in soccer schedules that meet my abilities	3.70	0.99
I don't have to be there every week	3.02	1.24
Team mates remind me about soccer activities	3.20	1.23
Encouragement from team mates enables me to be active in soccer.	3.71	1.09
My friends are willing to participate in soccer with me	4.03	0.9

Data in table 4 shows that the main methods of negotiating constraints were that many friends are willing to participate in soccer with the them, followed by planning things ahead , arrange soccer training with my friends and finishing assignments/studying early so that I have time for participate in soccer . On the other hand, the least methods utilized were attending games that fits the schedule of activities , followed by I participate in soccer when I know I don't have to be there ever week ,team mates remind me about games, Sometimes, if I need some recreation time, I just drop what I am doing and I will participate in the game that day and I save money to do soccer activities .The correlations on negotiation strategies used by the soccer players and selected socio-demographic factors are presented in table 5.

**TABLE 5: Correlations on Negotiation Strategies to soccer participation and Selected Socio-Demographic Factors**

Negotiation methods	Father Education	Mothers Education	Years Of Study	Family involvement
Try to be organized, to manage all soccer activities	0.146			
Try to budget my money	0.129	0.138		
Arrange soccer training with my friends			0.132	0.115
Save money to do soccer a priority	0.109			
Improvise with the equipment		0.136		
Soccer that fits my class schedule	0.115			
Finish assignment early	0.127			
Team mates assist in skills development				0.115
Team mates remind me		0.128		
Encouragement from team mates	0.132			
My friends are willing to participate	0.149	0.107	0.125	

## Discussion

Findings of the study reveal that the majority of the players were in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year of study and the minorities were in first and fifth year of study. For the first years, they have just joined in universities and unless they are exceptionally good in soccer, it is difficult for them to join the university soccer team. Fifth years are tired student athletes whose focus in to leave the university, could be busy networking for job placement and possible outright discrimination by the younger students. This distribution is not remote as the management leadership of terms in Kenya universities is vested with students (most of the varsity teams do not have qualified coaches). Consequently there is lack of structured criteria in the recruitment and appointment to the university team. Most of the times and even faculty spread (a captain will be comfortable to select somebody from his own facility) at the expense of attendance to training sessions and talent. In all these dispensations the first year talented athletes is ready disadvantaged. Indeed, Njororai (2010) opined that freshman year of college is stressful time of social and academic that they are integrated in campus academic culture and adjustment.

Beyond the year of study, 50% of the athletes who took part in the study were middle born. Previous studies (Udoh, 1997; Rintaugu, 2005) had indicated that even in high school sport, first and last born were minimally represented. Udoh (1997) found that younger siblings were over represented in comparison to older borns. McPherson, Curtis and Loy (1989) indicated that first born are less likely than last born to participate in games considered more dangerous such as hockey and soccer. This is not far-fetched as soccer is the most popular sport in the world and in Kenya we have soccer sports infrastructure starting from primary schools running through secondary.

Findings of the study show that the parents of the athletes had good jobs and education as well. Various studies have indicated that as education increases so does the likelihood of participating or encouraging ventures into sport of leisure (McPherson *et al*, 1989). Parental social economic status determines such choices as residence hence neighborhood, leisure activities engaged in the playing apparatus and even kind of peers one gets (Njororai, 1996). Rintaugu (2005) reported that a significant number of successful athletes in Kenya come from families where family members are involved in sport. This is evident in this study as family members of 61.98% of the participants had participated in soccer as players. Parents transmit attitudes and values about sport, pay activity fees, are powerful role models and provide physical and emotional support (Grevis, 1991). Equally, Synder and Spreizer, (1990), Lewko and Ewing (1980) had reported that athletes in their study had family members who are engaged in sport.

The finding on the methods negotiation constraints to soccer participation revolved around use of friends, planning ahead, setting aside time for soccer. These methods of negotiating are restricted to the constraints of interpersonal and structural and have been reported in previous studies (Scott, 1991; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Kay & Jackson, 1991; Beggs *et al*, 2005; Samdal & Jekuborich, 1997). These results find support in Beggs *et al* (2005) who found that time management and skill acquisition were the most commonly used strategies by the students to negotiate constraints. Similar findings were reported by Elkins *et al* (2007). Interpersonal relations, physical fitness and skill acquisition were identified as being most commonly used strategy. This is buttressed in Jackson and Rucks (1995) negotiation involved acquiring the necessary skills, changing leisure aspirations, getting physical therapy, changing one's interpersonal relations, modifying time and commitments and improving finances.

Previous studies had suggested that leisure constraints research should examine socio-demographic factors such as age and gender and how they may mitigate the constraint negotiation strategies. Consequently, this study was out to unearth how year of study, birth rank, family participation in soccer and parental SES impacted on the negotiation process. The negotiation strategies correlated mostly with Fathers and Mothers education. McPherson *et al* (1989) observed that as parental education increases so does the likelihood of participating or encouraging ventures into sport of leisure. Parental social economic status determines such choices as residence hence neighborhood, leisure activities engaged in the playing apparatus and even kind of peers one gets (Njororai, 1996; Yang, Telama, & Laakso, 1996). Lareau (2000) had opined that educated parents not only provide the enriched home learning environment required to raise educational trajectories' but they are more likely to be involved in their children education and participation in sport. The lack of correlation with other selected demographic factors of age, year of study and birth rank and negotiation of constraints may point out to the homogeneity of the soccer players. Nay the participation in university sport is purely based on talent and the student-athletes may enjoy a similar environment where the university bares more obligations in student soccer participation.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings have showed that soccer players use different strategies to enhance/negotiate their participation in soccer. It was evident that the selected socio-demographic factors of year of study, birth rank, playing experience

and family involvement in soccer had significant but weak correlations. Therefore it is recommended that sports administrators and coaches take cognizance of the different negotiation strategies used by student-athletes to participate in soccer. This will possibly ensure that training and competitive soccer programmes schedules are made flexible and accommodative to the student – athletes. Secondly, it may be difficult to address all the social demographic factors influencing negotiation process but it would be prudent for those concerned with student sports welfare to address family background factors that influence the negotiation process. There is every need to address the minority soccer student-athletes participation in soccer especially those in first and fifth years of study. Future research should dwell on how socio-demographic details such as age, gender and course of study may correlate with the constraint negotiation process of athletes in other sports. The connection or interrelatedness between constraints, negotiation process and participation motivation among soccer players in universities will shed more light on the nexus between participation in soccer and constraint negotiation process.

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