



Caribbean Teams in North American Professional Soccer: Time for a New Direction?

Glen ME Duerr

Department of History and Government
Cedarville University
104 HRS, 251 N. Main Street
Cedarville, Ohio, USA 45314

gduerr@cedarville.edu

Caribbean Teams in North American Professional Soccer: Time for a New Direction?

Abstract

This paper examines the interrelated issues of time and money in club and international football. Specifically, the focus is on small Caribbean countries and territories that are rich in talent, but poor in opportunities. In the past decade, several professional teams in the Caribbean have played in the minor league system in North America, but have been stifled by several factors. This paper argues that the creation of a 'Caribbean division' that plays in either the North American Soccer League (NASL) or United Soccer League (USL)-Pro league would enrich and develop teams and players from all parties involved, and they would be more competitive in FIFA World Cup qualifying. The key ingredient is correctly timing such a venture.

Keywords: Caribbean, soccer, North America, USL-Pro, NASL

Introduction

Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF), the regional governing body of soccer in North America, Central America, and the Caribbean, sends three and a half teams to the quadrennial FIFA World Cup. The fourth-placed CONCACAF team plays a home and away playoff series against a team in another region, either in Asia, South America or Oceania, depending on the rotation. On every occasion since the number of berths was expanded to three in 1998, the United States and Mexico have taken two of the berths. On several occasions, Costa Rica has taken the third place. Periodically, a fourth team will qualify from CONCACAF; therefore, teams such as Jamaica, Honduras, and Trinidad & Tobago have also qualified. However, the opportunities are rare for any other association in the region. So, what happens to smaller federations in the Caribbean? Simon Kuper, a journalist, and Stefan Syzmanski, an academic, argue that three factors are most important to winning soccer games: the size of the country, wealth, and a history of success (Kuper & Syzmanski, 2009). The next question, then, is will a small federation ever qualify for the FIFA World Cup? Are there any strategies that could help?

The argument made in this paper is to advocate the creation of a ‘Caribbean division’ that could participate within one of the lower-level leagues of professional soccer in North America – such as the North American Soccer League (NASL) or the United Soccer League (USL) Pro Division – would help to improve the opportunities for small Caribbean countries/territories in developing domestic talent, and their pursuit of making a FIFA World Cup, or at least becoming more competitive in the process. There are further elements to the argument – creating a ‘supranational’ soccer division, and finding the right timing to unveil this idea – which will be unpacked later in the paper after new, complex terms are introduced.

Thus far, the idea of creating a Caribbean division has not been successful – it has been stifled by issues of both time and money. There are a range of factors that need to come together in order for the idea of creating a Caribbean division to be successful. These factors include: developing a soccer version of a supranational entity, the emergence of a new idea, and a window of time through which a new idea becomes reality – in this paper described as punctuated equilibrium. The research conducted for this article is a collection of primary and secondary sources on North American and Caribbean soccer, but is aided by information obtained by the author who served as a player and broadcaster in the lower levels of the North American professional soccer system. Informal interviews with players, coaches and managers, as well as newspaper articles helped to inform this research.

This paper first examines the idea of supra-nationalism as it relates to the sport of soccer. A more in-depth discussion of timing in soccer is then examined. Next, the former Caribbean teams that participated in the North American minor league system are examined individually to highlight their successes and weaknesses. Finally, the performance of each national association is

investigated with regard to their performance during FIFA World Cup qualifying campaigns. Interestingly, this paper finds that the creation of a new franchise in the minor league system has coincided with better performance in qualifying. In essence, the timing of these new franchises aligns with greater success.

Soccer and Supra-nationalism

Supra-nationalism is the creation of a governing structure across national boundaries in which shared institutions guide member countries towards convergence; it is the result of a growing pan-regional identity (see Duerr, 2007; Eriksen, 2000; Tsebelis & Garrett, 2001). Supra-nationalism builds over time as people do not automatically associate, or identify, as a member of a region, instead of a country. The citizens of the European Union are the best example of supra-nationalism, wherein a given person may have a specific national identity (e.g. German, Polish, Spanish etc.), but also identify as a European (Eurobarometer, 2012). National identity remains the most important form of identity, but many people also identify as European. Small minorities of people even see themselves as European ‘first’ or European ‘only’. The governments of these different countries also share different areas of policy, and have therefore become more homogenous. It is therefore possible to describe a nascent ‘European’ identity. This more European identity has been built over time with slow change towards the idea of promoting peace and prosperity across the continent.

This type of shared identity exists to different extents across the world. The people of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Southeast Asia and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) in South America, for example, share institutions across national borders, but do not yet share a collective identity. Then, to a lesser extent, the people of North America are interconnected through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), but do not share any tangible sense of ‘North Americanness’ in that people almost never refer to themselves as North Americans, but as Canadians, Americans or Mexicans.

In this paper, the term ‘supra-nationalism’ has been borrowed from the literature on the EU for the purposes of this argument. In essence, supra-nationalism is used here to describe the sharing of resources across national boundaries – in this case, the creation of a pan-Caribbean division made up of select teams that can compete against one another and other North American teams. Teams in different countries could work towards the goal of creating a stronger CONCACAF region, and in doing so provide them a better chance of competing for a place in the FIFA World Cup.

In some ways, soccer already has its own supra-national bodies. The UEFA Champions League, for example, has served as a way of creating a pan-European tournament. This is another example of how, over time, a shared sense of connection has been built, which has benefitted all members. Other continents have their own versions of the Champions League, too. Within CONCACAF, a similar type Champions League exists.

However, when it comes to playing soccer at the domestic level in any country, national borders are firmly established. Only in a few cases do teams from one country (or FIFA association) play their domestic league football in another country. For example, Cardiff FC and Swansea FC in Wales, play in the Barclays (English) Premier League. The Wellington Phoenix from New Zealand

plays in the Australian A-League. Three Canadian teams – Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal – play in Major League Soccer. There are a few other cases around the world, but this type of situation is rare. This is perhaps the last barrier for the ‘internationalisation’ of the game. Players move freely across borders (Antonioni & Cubbins, 2000), television broadcasts can be watched around the world (Bellamy, 1993), and tournaments such as the World Cup feature teams from across the world, but rarely do domestic leagues feature teams from several different countries.

In the lower leagues of North American soccer, however, several Caribbean-based teams have played in the various leagues. Conversations, both online and among decision makers in the leagues, have emerged, wherein the idea of creating a ‘Caribbean division’ has long been discussed. This information was gleaned when I served as a former semi-professional player and broadcaster in these North American lower leagues during numerous conversations with a range of different executives across the various leagues. However, the idea of creating this new division has never properly materialised. The question is why?

Scholar John Kingdon touched on this question in his book on why government responds to certain issues at specific times. He argues that a confluence of policy streams come together – assuming significant demand – to create a scenario wherein an idea gains momentum to become a policy or a law. A ‘policy window’ opens at an appropriate time providing an opportunity for an idea to become reality (Kingdon, 2001: 166). This concept can be used to discuss the successes and failures of Caribbean soccer. Timing is extremely important because in order for Caribbean associations to have a better opportunity to advance in the FIFA World Cup, their domestic players need greater exposure. This, historically, has been strategised in two ways: 1) their players sign contracts abroad, or 2) the domestic league attempts to develop players. This paper purports a third idea: the development of a supranational North American minor league system, which allows for the creation of a ‘Caribbean division’. This division will then allow elite Caribbean players (who may not be quite good enough yet to play in Europe or MLS) to develop into better players who could help their respective national teams better compete in global football tournaments. A Caribbean division would create a level of soccer above the domestic league, but below the standard of MLS, Europe or South America, which could help to improve the level of play in the country/territory and allow for a more focused time of training for the players.

Timing is important because, as Kingdon (2003) argues, a confluence of the right ingredients has to merge at the right time in order to create something new. Kingdon describes a range of ideas out in the wider world operating within a ‘policy primeval soup’ (Kingdon, 2003, p. 116). The idea of developing a Caribbean division has been discussed and the possibility has arisen, but the issue is timing: how can this idea become a reality?

Horology and soccer

Human beings mark time through the pendulumatic swings of day and night, calendars, clocks, and other such temporal markers, as time and change are interrelated in the human experience (Geertz, 1966, pp. 360-411; Mughal, 2014; Wood, 2008). Horology, in essence, is the study of measuring time through various tools such as time pieces, or sundials, or atomic clocks among others. Horology also has an impact on how humans perceive time. Philosopher JT Fraser introduces his book *The Voices of Time* with an assessment of a young child who travels through life, from its start to its end wherein every part is changed, adapted and shaped by his perception

of time (Fraser, 1966). His life is a temporal experience. The craft of horology, therefore, is one that plays a major role in life, and, by extension, sports. In many sports, although certainly not all, time can be viewed as 'objective' in that it is fixed, linear, quantifiable, homogenous and measurable; some sports, however, are timeless, others are to be experienced (Martínková & Parry, 2011).

The world's most popular sport is a game of 90 minutes, and time affects the game in a myriad of ways. For example, the difference between winning and losing (or drawing) is often bound to timing. 'Injury time' added at the end of the game provides added drama because the clock is no longer at the discretion of the players, but with the referee. The tempo at which the game is played can provide an advantage or disadvantage, depending on the abilities and stamina of both teams. The time of day can affect the outcome of a match. All of these factors have a bearing on the game as it is played. Other factors affect the administrative side of the game. For example, the decision to start (or buy) a professional team, and when, affect the game. What would the Barclays Premier League look like today if Chelsea and Manchester City did not obtain new ownership in the last decade?

Timing is a complex subject. It matters when something starts, and when it ends. Within this particular context, timing matters because Caribbean soccer could really progress under the right circumstances. Much of the discussion and debate in the social sciences surrounding institutions pertain to timing. For example, the early decisions made within an institution, which could be applied to a North American sports league, often overtly influence the life of the said institution (Pierson, 2004, p. 17). Once the early decisions have been made in the life of an institution, many of the later decisions depend on what happened at an earlier time – this is known as 'path dependence' (Pierson, 2004, p. 18). In essence, the time at which decisions are made influences events. Other institutionalist arguments note that a 'punctuated equilibrium' can change the trajectory of an institution. In contrast to historical institutionalism, a major event can radically alter the trajectory of an institution (Peters & Pierre, 1998).

An additional benefit of creating a Caribbean division within the NASL or USL-Pro league is that it will create better opportunities for small Caribbean countries/territories to be more competitive in FIFA World Cup qualifying (at least for the countries/territories involved). By adopting the idea of supra-nationalism for soccer, opportunities can increase in the Caribbean. What is required is a break in timing, with a concerted effort to create a Caribbean division, which will help existing Caribbean teams to prosper within the North American lower league system. This will, in turn, help stabilise the NASL or USL-Pro leagues and create a better system for all associations involved. Over the course of the last several years, the numbers of teams playing in the NASL and USL Pro leagues have fluctuated. One of several reasons for this has been the expansion, and then contraction, of Caribbean-based teams. MLS will also become a better league because it will strengthen the competing lower leagues. Obviously, a great deal of money, time and effort are required to start a Caribbean division, but when one examines the number of Caribbean teams that have actually been attempted in the past decade, it would have been better and more efficient to create a specific division for Caribbean teams. Time and money have become interrelated in sports, and especially soccer. Financial issues have long affected the sport across the world and have changed the dynamics involved (Platts & Smith, 2010), which thus far have not facilitated the growth of Caribbean soccer.

Timing: Caribbean teams in North America

One of the challenges of this subject is to correctly define terms. MLS is a largely American league, but since 2007, has accepted three Canadian teams – Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. It is fairer to say that MLS is now a North American league, rather than just an American league (Duerr, 2014). Unfortunately, it would be very difficult for any city in the Caribbean to be in a position – demographically or financially – to consider bidding for an MLS expansion team. Despite this drawback, it is very feasible for Caribbean cities to host a lower league professional soccer team in North America. Even though the Caribbean, through Caribbean Community (Caricom), the Caribbean’s free trade area, is linked with associate members in South America, no team from the Caribbean has ever entered a league in South America; instead, all teams have entered North American leagues.

Indeed, several Caribbean-based teams have entered (and exited) the North American minor league system, but this opportunity could be viable in the long term if costs were reduced. The easiest way to reduce costs is to decrease travel and lodgings expenditures. A Caribbean division would strongly offset costs, and could maintain the benefits of participating within the North American system by playing against teams in the southeast of the United States, with a focus on Florida. For example, there are significant fluctuations in price when one compares the cost of flying to different cities in the NASL and USL-Pro leagues – Orlando, Dayton, Los Angeles and Edmonton were selected for geographic comparison. A flight from Dayton to Puerto Rico is approximately \$100 more expensive than a flight from Orlando to Puerto Rico. The flight is approximately \$350 more expensive when starting from Los Angeles. A final comparison shows that it is approximately \$450 more expensive to fly from Edmonton. These prices can make a big impact on the budget of a team when at least 16 players, plus coaches and staff, need to fly to games.

The North American soccer ‘pyramid’ works with MLS on Tier I. Tier II is the North American Soccer League (NASL). Tier III is the United Soccer Leagues (USL) Pro Division. Tier IV consists of USL’s Premier Development League (PDL), as well as the National Premier Soccer League (NPSL). At different points in time, Caribbean teams have played in almost all of the leagues from Tier II to Tier IV. The rest of this section will examine the three Caribbean teams that have participated in the minor league system: Puerto Rico Islanders, Bermuda Hogges and Antigua Barracuda, as well as the brief history of Sevilla FC Puerto Rico, River Plate Puerto Rico and Puerto Rico United.

Puerto Rico Islanders (2004-2011)

The most successful ‘Caribbean’ team in the North American minor league system, by far, has been the Puerto Rico Islanders. Although Puerto Rico is technically part of the United States, in many global sporting organisations (including FIFA) it has a separate institutional representation. This means that Puerto Rico participates in FIFA World Cup qualifying and could, theoretically, play against the United States in order to compete for a place in the tournament. Puerto Rico has its own domestic soccer league, but the Puerto Rico Islanders have served as the ‘major’ professional league team on the island. The Islanders have had some success in the minor league system, as well as in Caribbean Cup competitions and the CONCACAF Champions League. The

Islanders won the Caribbean CFU Club Championships in 2010 and 2011; while also securing the runner-up position in 2009, and third place in 2008 (USL Previous Season Stat Archive; USL Media Guide, 2009). In 2008, the Islanders made it to the semi-finals of the CONCACAF Champions League (USL Media Guide, 2009).

The Puerto Rico Islanders have some advantages over other Caribbean teams. Institutionally, Puerto Rico is part of the United States, so the norms and expectations are closer to the mainland. There are few travel restrictions getting into and out of Puerto Rico, which facilitates the ease of access for players and fans. The Islanders played in the USL First Division from 2004 through 2009. (This league existed until 2010, when the USL teams divided into two separate entities: USL Pro and the NASL.) The highlight of this time was their appearance in the league final in 2008, and their semi-final appearance in 2007 and 2009 (USL Previous Season Stat Archive; USL Media Guide, 2009).

Despite their advantages, the Puerto Rico Islanders team has currently folded. They may participate once again in future years, but the team is currently on a more permanent hiatus from competition. Lowering travel costs could be one way to help revive the team and to increase competition in the Caribbean region. Unless a concerted effort is made to integrate Puerto Rico's sporting associations into the United States' associations, the small island will continue to attempt to qualify for the FIFA World Cup.

Antigua Barracuda (2011-2013)

For three seasons – 2011 to 2013 – the Antigua Barracuda team played in the USL Pro division. During their first season, the idea of a Caribbean division had, seemingly, been recognised. Antigua Barracuda played against three teams from Puerto Rico, as well as a team from Los Angeles. During the start of the season, Antigua Barracuda was leading their division. However, quite abruptly, the three teams from Puerto Rico all folded, leaving USL Pro to make a quick switch. The remaining teams – Antigua Barracuda and the Los Angeles Blues – had to change to another division, and Antigua's advantage was lost due to the large number of points accumulated by the other teams in their division.

The 2011 season started quite well for the Barracuda, winning nine games. The International Division was abandoned midway through the season, as Antigua was moved to the American Division. Unfortunately, the Barracuda went from first place in the International division, and ended up in last place in the American division. The team lost thirteen games, and drew two of them. In 2012, the Barracuda entered a one-table, eleven team USL Pro league. The team won five matches, but lost eighteen and tied one, resulting in a last place finish. The 2013 season was played entirely away from home given issues with hosting matches. The team lost all twenty-six matches, and folded after the end of the season.

Timing was a key factor in the history of the Barracuda franchise. Monetary issues are almost always a concern for lower league professional teams, but the Antigua team was doing very well at the start of the season. A supra-national soccer league had, seemingly, been created. Antigua Barracuda thrived in the first part of their inaugural 2011 season; however, as the International division was dissolved, difficulties began to increase. The punctuated equilibrium was very short lived – in reality, the change reversed very quickly. In essence, the lessons of historical

institutionalism – that the early decisions matter most, affected the outcome of the Barracuda franchise. The dissolution of the USL-Pro International Division (see Table 1) increased expenses and took away the early success of the team.

Bermuda Hogges (2007-2011)

For three seasons, the Bermuda Hogges played in the USL Second Division. Although the team never made the playoffs, the team was quite competitive against other teams. For example, I played against the Hogges during the 2007 season. My team, the second-placed Cleveland City Stars, was held to a goalless draw in Bermuda. Moreover, the Hogges won a number of games, and lost narrowly during most of their defeats; in the return leg, the City Stars defeated the Hogges 2-0 in Cleveland (USL Media Guide, 2008). The Hogges played in the USL Second Division for three seasons – 2007 to 2009 – before moving to the PDL for another three seasons – 2010 to 2012. In their time in the USL Second Division, the Hogges came in last place in the division on two of the three occasions, and missed the playoffs every year. Nonetheless, the team won matches every season (USL Previous Season Stat).

In many respects, the set-up of the Hogges made it difficult to compete. The team was made-up entirely of domestic players, which was very good for the development of domestic talent, but made it difficult to compete against the other teams. Considering that the population of Bermuda is a mere 70 000 people, there are basic demographic challenges to competing in the third tier of the North American system. Compare, for example, many metropolitan cities in the United States or Canada, which can draw on populations of over a million people. Moreover, almost all NASL, USL-Pro and PDL teams have players from across the country (and from across the world). Bermuda's roster was always made up of domestic players only (USL Media Guide, 2009).

On 26 May 2013, the Bermuda Hogges officially withdrew from the PDL prior to the start of the 2013 season (Bermuda News). The major reason noted by team officials for withdrawing was financial, but timing was also a problem. One of the overarching challenges for Bermuda – even with the creation of a Caribbean league – is that it still costs a great deal of money to travel elsewhere in the Caribbean given the geographic separation of Bermuda with any other country/territory. Had Bermuda been able to play with other Caribbean teams, it is possible that their demise could have been avoided.

The USL and Puerto Rico

For the first part of the 2011 season, three additional teams from Puerto Rico graced the USL Pro league, and helped to create an international division – it looked like the time had come for the development of a Caribbean division within a North American league. Three teams from the Puerto Rican Soccer League (PRSL) – Puerto Rico United, River Plate Puerto Rico and Sevilla FC Puerto Rico – all played for a portion of the first half of the season in 2011.

Originally, an agreement was made between the USL and the PRSL to invite three teams to participate in the USL Pro division. However, on 11 May 2011, the USL revoked the agreement citing increased travel costs, and the unexpected poor health of two of the three owners (USL Reforms Agreement with PRSL). The International Division table on 10 May, when the division was dissolved, stood as follows (Table 1):

Table 1: International Division on 10 May 2011

Team	Wins	Losses	Draws	Points
Antigua Barracuda	6	2	0	18
Los Angeles Blues	3	0	2	11
Sevilla FC Puerto Rico	1	3	2	5
Puerto Rico United	1	2	1	4
River Plate Puerto Rico	0	3	2	2

Analysis

The big issue here is that all of the Caribbean teams in the North American soccer system have now folded. Timing was a major part of the problem. Had all Caribbean teams played in the same division, at the same time, it could have been different for these teams. Low attendance was a factor, especially in Bermuda and Antigua, but had the teams had more success, this could have been different. An attempt was made to create a supra-national structure in the lower professional leagues in North America, but the convergence of ideas supporting the Caribbean division did not materialise. In essence, the early decisions made it difficult to institute a separate division for Caribbean teams within the larger structure. On a positive note, an attempt was made, seemingly creating an opportunity for punctuated equilibrium, but this plan did not survive the first portion of the 2011 season.

If taken together, three Caribbean teams could have unified in a single division: Puerto Rico, Bermuda and Antigua. Although not large enough for its own division, perhaps the addition of a team or two from the southeast of the United States could have helped to fill the group. The goal of a Caribbean division should be continued exposure playing against high-level opposition in North America, but also working to keep costs down by traveling more frequently within the Caribbean. Each of the teams listed above has to travel around the North American mainland in order to play their games.

Supra-nationalism has become quite prominent in the 21st century world. In many regions of the world, governments have given over some autonomy in order to develop trade with neighbours. The EU is the best example of this, but the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Caricom both serve as local examples. Therefore, at governmental level, there is experience in the CONCACAF region of using supra-national blocs. The same could be applied to soccer and provide benefits for the United States and Canada, as well as Caribbean countries and territories. Many of the networks for travel, trade and communications are already in place, allowing better soccer competition to take place.

Successes

The Caribbean-based teams in the USL Pro and NASL leagues had some high points. Simply by participating in the North American minor league system, these teams provided an opportunity for domestic players to participate and achieve their dreams. The Puerto Rico Islanders stand out as the model Caribbean franchise. The team regularly drew crowds of several thousand and, during some of the playoff and CONCACAF Champions League matches, the team drew over 12 000 fans (USL Previous Season Stat).

The Bermuda Hogges and the Antigua Barracuda both competed well in their time in the North American lower leagues. Even though both teams did not have much on field success, the mere presence of both teams did much to highlight the respective islands, and allowed both countries/territories to better engage the United States and Canada. Thousands of tourists visited both Bermuda and Antigua to watch their favourite teams play against the local teams. This type of success is not easily measured, but, at least for many players and fans, the opportunity to travel to the Caribbean to play soccer was a highlight of the season.

History in FIFA World Cup qualification

One of the major benefits of fielding a high level team in the North American minor leagues is, given the limited evidence, overachieving in FIFA World Cup qualifying. The FIFA World Cup is the most important competition in the global game; in part, because of its periodicity – it is a rare event, and participation is extremely important to billions of people across the planet (Roche, 2003). The goal of the respective Caribbean USL/NASL teams has been to better compete in high-level international tournaments (USL Media Guide, 2007, p.51). All three associations – Puerto Rico, Bermuda, and Antigua – overachieved in major ways. In CONCACAF, there are four rounds of qualifying. The first round is preliminary, and typically featured lowly-ranked teams from the region. The second round usually separates small teams out. The third round then features the beginning of play for the top six teams in the region. For the 2014 campaign, these teams included: the United States, Mexico, Honduras, Jamaica, Costa Rica and Panama.

In the second round of CONCACAF qualifying for the 2014 tournament, all three teams were placed in groups with other Caribbean and Central American countries (Only the top team advanced). Puerto Rico did well, finishing in second place in their group, only losing out to Canada. Bermuda came in third place in their group, but very narrowly missed out on advancing. While Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago finished above them, the Bermudians won three matches, including a major victory over a much larger country, Trinidad & Tobago (FIFA World Cup).

The major success, though, was that Antigua & Barbuda won their group, beating Haiti, Curaçao, and the US Virgin Islands. The Haitians were heavily favoured to win the group, but were beaten by Antigua & Barbuda, and held to a draw with Curaçao. Given that Antigua & Barbuda only lost once to Haiti, and won all other matches, the team advanced for the first time to the third round. In the third round of competition, Antigua & Barbuda was drawn into a group with the United States, Jamaica and Guatemala. Although Antigua & Barbuda only obtained one point from six matches, the team was competitive throughout. For example, the United States only defeated Antigua & Barbuda by scores of 2-1, and 3-1 (FIFA World Cup qualifying). Antigua & Barbuda even secured a 0-0 draw against Jamaica, thereby almost eliminating the “Reggae Boys” out of the competition. (Jamaica and Guatemala finished with the same record, and nine points. A superior goal difference saw the Reggae Boys advance to the Hexagonal – CONCACAF’s fourth round of qualifying.) The interesting issue here is that Antigua & Barbuda had significant success that coincided with the participation of the Barracuda franchise in the North American minor league system. The confluence of these two events suggests that the timing of the decision to create the franchise had a bearing on national team performance.

In 2010, Bermuda, Puerto Rico, and Antigua & Barbuda won their FIFA World Cup qualifying first round series matches. The second round was challenging because it was played as another

playoff series round. Bermuda lost narrowly to Trinidad & Tobago by an aggregate score of 3-2. Bermuda even won the first leg 2-1 (FIFA World Cup qualifying). Puerto Rico lost 6-2 to Honduras, but the campaign was still considered a success because Honduras ultimately qualified for the FIFA World Cup. Antigua & Barbuda was roundly defeated by Cuba 8-3, but this was before the Barracuda franchise was launched in the USL Pro league (FIFA World Cup qualifying). Although none of the teams reached the third round of FIFA World Cup qualifying, Bermuda and Puerto Rico did much better than their population size would suggest. Again, there is some evidence that the participation of their respective teams in the North American minor league system had a positive bearing on the performance of their respective national teams. The confluence of these events shows the importance of timing – the creation of a team in the North American minor leagues with an improved FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign.

Some caveats

The first caveat is that if Caribbean countries/territories were to place teams within a lower league North American division, the existing domestic competitions should be maintained and supported. The purpose of placing a team in a North American league would be to build a year-round ‘National B’ team, which would allow the players to gain international experience, and to build team chemistry year round. The domestic league should still have a major role to play in developing young players, and by providing an opportunity for domestic players to hone their skills. The creation of a Caribbean division should enhance – not undercut – the domestic league.

A second caveat is that private ownership groups should be sought for this endeavour. However, if none are available, the idea of a Caribbean division should wait. The problem has been the creation of a team or two, which eventually languishes because it costs a great deal more money to send a team to mainland United States for every away match. If Caribbean governments want to aid in the process, it could facilitate the development of the Caribbean division, but this is an endeavour that should seek to be financially solvent.

A third caveat is that there is the potential for significant pushback on the part of the domestic owners and stakeholders in various Caribbean countries. Little research on this has taken place, but an article by academic Roy McCree argues that elites in the domestic league in Trinidad & Tobago entered into conflicts to protect their vested interests in the sport in that country (McCree, 2000). There may be a desire to protect local interests, but in order for a small Caribbean country/territory to have the opportunity to perform at the FIFA World Cup, player development must be a high priority.

All of these caveats impact time: whether or not the time for an idea to become practice has arrived. Kingdon’s idea of a policy stream converging is an apt metaphor for this idea. The Caribbean division had its opportunity in 2011; for a short period of time, it seemed as if the required event for punctuated equilibrium had taken place. However, due to finances and the poor health of two of the Puerto Rican owners, the idea was not fully realised (USL Reforms Agreement with the PRSL). The policy window opened, but there was not enough momentum to successfully create a lasting Caribbean division.

Conclusions

Many soccer players in the Caribbean are tremendously gifted athletes who work very hard at their profession and feel deeply patriotic. It is typically their desire to help their respective countries/territories succeed in the world of soccer. For example, in 1998, when Jamaica qualified for the FIFA World Cup, it ranked as a major highlight for the sporting history of the country. It also showed that a small Caribbean country could qualify for the sport's most prestigious tournament. In 2006, when Trinidad & Tobago defeated Bahrain in the intercontinental qualifier to make the FIFA World Cup, it served as the sporting zenith for the country (FIFA World Cup). The success of Trinidad & Tobago, even though they did not advance past the first round, was to show that even smaller countries could make it – and compete– in the FIFA World Cup.

One major strategy that could be used in the Caribbean is the creation of a Caribbean division within either the NASL or USL-Pro leagues. The Caribbean division should be inaugurated at a point when at least four stable franchises are available to play. This would reduce the costs of travelling to play teams in the United States and Canada, and would allow prominent Caribbean players to stay at home and build their professional careers. Very few players in general will be able to make it to high-level European leagues, so logically very few players from the Caribbean will make it either. As a strategy for smaller Caribbean countries, creating high-level competition in the region could serve to improve their chances of making a World Cup tournament.

Time has a major bearing on the sport of soccer. On the pitch, timing matters – whether a tackle, a shot, when a goal is scored, when the half time whistle blows, or when the game ends. Time also matters to the administrative aspects of soccer. The creation (and retention) of a Caribbean division in 2011 could have drastically changed the franchises listed in this paper. Had the Caribbean teams played together, costs would have been lower, potentially allowing them to continue. Moreover, now that there are no Caribbean franchises in the NASL or USL-Pro leagues, what prospects do the national associations of Bermuda, Puerto Rico, and Antigua & Barbuda have to qualify for the 2018 FIFA World Cup? History suggests that they will not qualify; however, given their strong performances in 2010 and 2014, resulting (at least in part) from a presence in the North American system, there is even less chance now that their players are not regularly exposed to high-level club football. Time can make all the difference. Indeed, if new Caribbean franchises are to be considered in the NASL and USL-Pro, timing is of the essence.

References

- Antonioni, P. & Cubbin, J. (2000). The Bosman ruling and the emergence of a single market in soccer talent. *European Journal of Law and Economics*, 9(2), 157-173.
- Bellamy, R. V. (1993). Issues in the internationalization of the US sports media: The emerging European marketplace. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 17(2), 168-180.
- Bermuda News. (2013, May 26). Bermuda Hogges withdraw from PDL league. Retrieved from <http://bernews.com/2013/05/bermuda-hogges-withdraw-from-pdl-league/>
- Duerr, G. M. (2007). Traversing borders: Supranationalism, public policy and the framing of undocumented immigration in the United States and the United Kingdom. *CEU Political Science Journal: The Graduate Student Review*, 2(2), 175-191.
- Duerr, G. M. (2014). Becoming apple pie? Major league soccer as the fifth major team sport in the United States. In Y. Kuichi, (Ed.). *Soccer Culture in America: Essays on the World's Sport in Red, White and Blue* (pp. 143-159). Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Eriksen, E. O. (2000). Deliberative supranationalism in the EU. In Eriksen, E.O., & Fossum J.E. (Eds.), *Democracy in the European Union: Integration Through Deliberation?* (pp. 42-64). New York: Routledge.
- Eurobarometer, 2012. European Commission, Public Opinion. *Eurobarometer 77*, Spring 2012.
- Fraser, J.T. (1966). *The Voices of Time*. New York: George Braziller.
- Geertz, C. (1966). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers.
- Kingdon, J. W. (2003). *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies (2nd edition)*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Kuper, S. & Szymanski, S. (2012). *Soccernomics: Why England Loses, Why Spain, Germany, and Brazil Win, and Why the US, Japan, Australia, Turkey-And Even Iraq-Are Destined to Become the Kings of the World's Most Popular Sport*. New York: Nation Books.
- Martínková, I. & Parry, J. (2011). Two ways of conceiving time in sports. *Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis. Gymnica*, 41(1), 23-31.
- McCree, R. (2000). Professional Soccer in the Caribbean: The Case of Trinidad and Tobago, 1969-1983. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 35(2), 199-218.
- Mughal, Muhammad Aurang Zeb (2014) *Time, Space and Social Change in Rural Pakistan: An Ethnographic Study of Jhokwala Village, Lodhran District*, PhD Thesis. Durham University.
- North American Soccer League. (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.nasl.com>
- Peters, B. G. & Pierre, J. (1998). Institutions and time: Problems of conceptualization and explanation. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 8(4), 565-584.
- Pierson, P. (2004). *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*. Princeton University Press.
- Platts, C. & Smith, A. (2010). 'Money, money, money?' The development of financial inequalities in English professional football. *Soccer & Society*, 11(5), 643-658.

- Roche, M. (2003). Mega-events, time, and modernity: On time structures in global society. *Time & Society*, 12(1), 99-126.
- Tsebelis, G. & Garrett, G. (2001). The institutional foundations of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism in the European Union. *International Organization*, 55(2), 357-390.
- Soccer Leagues. (2014). Retrieved from www.uslsoccer.com
- United Soccer Leagues. (2009). *USL Media Guide 2009*. Tampa Bay, FL: United Soccer Leagues
- United Soccer Leagues. (2008). *USL Media Guide 2008*. Tampa Bay, FL: United Soccer Leagues
- United Soccer Leagues. (2007). *USL Media Guide 2007*. Tampa Bay, FL: United Soccer Leagues
- United Soccer Leagues. (2014). USL previous season stat archive. Retrieved from <http://www.uslsoccer.com/scripts/runisa.dll?M2:gpx::72011+L2/+E+131>
- United Soccer Leagues (2011, May 10). USL reforms agreement with PRSL. Retrieved from <http://www.uslsoccer.com/home/524777.html>
- Wood, C. H. (2008) Time, cycles and tempos in social-ecological research and environmental policy. *Time & Society*, 17 (2-3), 261-282.