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# The Manufacturing of High School Football Recruits in the United States (U.S.): An Examination of the High School Football Landscape as an Economic Sub-Sector

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The Manufacturing of High School Football Recruits in the United States (U.S.):  
An Examination of the High School Football Landscape as an Economic Sub-Sector

Charles Macaulay  
B.A., University of British Columbia, 2014

A Thesis  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirement of the Degree of  
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At the  
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Charles Macaulay

2017

**APPROVAL PAGE**

Master of Science Thesis

The Manufacturing of High School Football Recruits in the United States (U.S.):  
An Examination of the High School Football Landscape as an Economic Sub-Sector

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## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Statement of Problem .....	2
Need for the Study .....	5
Purpose of the Study .....	7
Research Questions .....	8
Significance of the Study .....	9
Definition of Terms .....	9
Chapter One Summary .....	12
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>14</b>
Historical Overview of High School Athletics in the U.S. ....	14
Interscholastic Sports and Community Outcomes .....	16
Commercialization of Interscholastic Athletics .....	19
Theoretical Frameworks and Models for Athletic Commodification .....	21
<i>Athletic Industrial Complex</i> .....	21
<i>Internal Colonization Model</i> .....	24
<i>Athletic-Department Brothels</i> .....	27
<i>Athletic Departments as Company Towns</i> .....	28
Theoretical Framework: Athletic-Market Economy .....	30
<i>Labor</i> .....	32
<i>Markets</i> .....	34
<i>Production-Market &amp; Distribution-Market</i> .....	36
<i>Consumption-Market</i> .....	36
Chapter Two Summary .....	37
<b>Chapter 3: Methods .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Data Collection .....	39
<i>Univariate</i> .....	42
<i>Multivariate</i> .....	43
Hypotheses: .....	43
<i>Hypothesis #1</i> .....	43
<i>Hypothesis #2</i> .....	43
<i>Hypothesis #3</i> .....	43
Limitations .....	44
Delimitations .....	44
Chapter 3 Summary .....	46
<b>Chapter 4: Results .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<i>Descriptive Data of Players</i> .....	48
<i>Descriptive Data of Schools</i> .....	48
<i>Research Question #1:</i> .....	49
<i>Geographic</i> .....	50
<i>Community Socioeconomic Characteristics</i> .....	50
<i>Community Racial Composition</i> .....	50
<i>School Type and Composition</i> .....	51
Market Types .....	51
<i>Research Question #3:</i> .....	54

<i>Research Question #4:</i> .....	54
<i>Research Question #5</i> .....	56
<b>Chapter 4 Summary</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>73</b>

## Abstract

The role of interscholastic athletics within the educational setting has been questioned by critics including many scholars for the seemingly incongruence between its stated mission and actual institutional practices. There have been numerous studies that have examined high school athletic programs and primarily have focused on the academic and social benefits derived therein. Yet, sports and athletics are becoming increasingly important and popular in U.S. society and globally. The commercialization of sport and athletics is not a novelty in the U.S., but the increasing attention paid to high school athletics is a fairly recent and emerging phenomenon. In 2005, the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) launched a subsidiary channel ESPNU and in 2006 the channel began producing and televising nationally ranked games between top high school football programs. As of 2017, there are numerous websites devoted to covering high school football and basketball, especially the players who rise to the top of the ranks. How they play and develop and ultimately what university they choose to attend is a national event. Despite this rise in attention for high school football there has been scarce scholarly investigation into its landscape. The aim of this study is to begin providing clarity on the high school football landscape in the U.S. including characteristics of schools, communities, and trends related to producing Division I football players. Using theories rooted in economic sociology on markets and labor, a theoretical concept is constructed in order to understand high school athletes as a product created to be bought and sold within multiple markets. The concept of the athletic-market economy and its various components are forwarded as a larger framework for understanding the production, distribution, and consumption of high school football, the larger football industry, and the athletic economy.



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

A 67 game winning streak, an Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) nationally televised game, and 17 players receiving financial assistance for tuition with a growing list of players emerging at the next level. This is not a college team, but rather it is a high school football program. The Bellevue Wolverines of Bellevue, Washington have emerged as one of the premiere football programs in the nation. Even more surprising is the fact that it stands outside of the big-three pipeline or more consistent states of California, Texas, and Florida for producing college football recruits. Interestingly, Bellevue High School, a publically funded high school, has managed to build a nationally ranked program. Bellevue High School has been thrust into the spotlight not due to their athletic performance, but due to a player scandal we are accustomed to seeing at the collegiate level. For a number of years, Bellevue's head coach and wealthy booster club funneled kids they wanted playing in their programs to a private high school that reportedly cost \$1,750 a month to attend. The school is composed of no more than 40 kids and lacks their own athletics program. Within Washington state, children wanting to participate in athletics, but attend a school that does not field a team, are allowed to play athletics with the next closest school (Liebeskind & Baker, 2016). This arrangement fundamentally changes the relationship those 17 individuals have with their educational experiences. Even if they receive a great education, the relationship between them and their school has been transformed. They are no longer students receiving an education, they are now labor, working to produce athletically in exchange for an education.

There could be any number of reasons Bellevue High School's coaches, booster clubs, and school community are willing to engage in this activity. It could be the desire to be invited to play in a national showcase against other top programs from around the country (Negrom, 2016).

It could be to receive an athletic apparel deal (Giannotto, 2016), or state funding for facility renovations (Gerber, 2016). Simply, it could be the pursuit of glory and being recognized as one of the elite powerhouse teams of the nation. It is believed that the majority of the interscholastic athletic “factories” or “powerhouses” are located in the football loving states of California, Texas, and Florida where football is an integral part of many communities and due to the prevalence of players from these states at the collegiate level. However, on some of these lists schools from Georgia, Louisiana, Washington State, Maryland, Michigan, and Ohio are beginning to appear. What makes a high school a “powerhouse” or “factory” has been left to internet bloggers and journalists providing their original spin on who belongs to this club (O’Neill, 2012; Cluff, 2016). While many of these programs are known for developing one or two NFL stars, there has been little formal investigation into the high school football landscape to determine what makes a “factory” and how many of them exist. Therefore, this study is seeking to explore and analyze the landscape of high school football and provide a clear understanding regarding the production of high school athletes in the United States as products for consumption.

### **Statement of Problem**

Within American society today, there are few who bat an eye at professional athletics and the commodification and commercialization of our favorite pastimes (Levin et al., 2013). Specifically dissecting the sport of football, the industry has spiraled from a Sunday tradition into a life style obsession. Not only has the National Football League (NFL) grown to a multiday league, it has blossomed into a stand-alone television network, it dominates sport coverage year-round, fantasy football is one of the fastest growing industries, the Super bowl is considered the largest event of the year, and now there are seemingly endless shows documenting the behind the

scenes action and drama of these teams and players lives. The collegiate level is as ubiquitous as the professional level. Games are not contained to Saturdays but rather happen almost every day of the week, coaches are paid millions, there is an insurmountable amount of media coverage following, documenting, and analyzing the game and players. Universities pour millions of dollars into their teams and facilities.

At these two levels, we are accustomed to seeing this level of commodification and commercialization that dominates the sports media cycle. We are accustomed to the intense level of exploitation experienced by the players who sacrifice their physical and mental wellbeing in order to maintain status and employment. However, football is America's game and it is not contained to the collegiate and professional level. There is a major market of children playing the game with dreams of entering those ranks. Football is now the one of the most played sports at the youth level with over 5 million kids aged 6 to 17 playing the game (both touch and tackle) (Langhorst, 2016). The developmental leagues of Pop Warner (and other youth leagues), interscholastic football, and now AAU / travel 7-on-7 teams are becoming sites of production, profit, and therefore exploitation.

Schools such as, Bellevue, IMG Academy, Bishop Gorman, DeMatha, St. Thomas Aquinas, and many others receive state funding to pay coach salaries and build facilities mirroring universities and professional organizations. They receive money for the naming rights of stadiums, sign apparel deals, and collect revenues from ticket sales from nationally televised games. Sport media websites produce endless amounts of content regarding these athletes and their abilities while demanding subscription fees to their websites and sell advertising during games they televise. All of this occurs while these high school students are left in a position

where they are unable to profit from their labor as they are transformed from students to players, to products to be bought and used to produce the next game.

At every level these athletes are given a small return (albeit well below their market value), if any, for their labor in proportion to what they generate (Huma & Staurowsky, 2012). The exploitation that occurs at the professional and collegiate level within the football industry is vastly documented. Studies by Adler and Adler (1987), Beamon (2008), and Benson (2000) highlight the educational neglect, experienced by individuals who participate in football and basketball at the collegiate level (often times Black athletes from economically disadvantaged backgrounds), fostered by athletic departments in order to maintain a desired level of focus on the sport rather than educational attainment. This includes creating fake classes, clustering athletes within particular majors deemed “easy” or flexible, completing the work for these athletes, and athletes graduating without being ready for a career outside of athletics. Many have documented the level of disparity of wealth generated by athletes, both at the professional and collegiate level, compared to the average wages and forms of adequate compensation they receive (Rhoden, 2006).

The same commercialization is occurring at a younger age. The Under Armour All-American game first occurred in 2008 becoming a premier event for the top recruits in the nation. In 2005 ESPN launched ESPNU and in 2006 began televising nationally ranked showdowns between high school football teams. While the desire to win may be driving coaches’ decisions like Bellevue, there is immense financial opportunity available for high schools who are able to perform well. While there are some journalistic pieces such as Bissinger’s (1990: 2015) *Friday Night Lights* and Dohrmann’s (2010) *Play Their Hearts Out* and

scholarly pieces like Buford-May's (2008) *Living Through the Hoop* there has been little in-depth investigation into the escalating commercialization of interscholastic athletics.

### **Need for the Study**

Countless studies have examined the benefits of sport participation on standardized test scores (Feijin, 1994; Videon, 2002; Marsh and Kleitman, 2003; Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005; Lipscomb, 2007), reported grades (Fejgin, 1994; Videon 2002; Guest and Schneider, 2003), class attendance (Danish, 2002; Videon, 2002; Eccles et al., 2003), and educational and career aspirations (Melnick, Sabo, Vanfossen, 1992; Sabo, Melnick, Vanfossen, 1993, Fejgin, 1994; Ewing 2007; Barron, 2000). Nonetheless, many of these studies have examined athletics broadly, choosing to focus across all schools. While a sport like football is a cultural practice that can dominate schools' operations like Foley (1991, 1999) found in a small town in Texas, there are schools recognized as "powerhouses" and "factories" known for winning often and / or producing a number of NFL talent. However, at this time these schools have been determined subjectively by sports media writers and bloggers creating their own lists of who they believe the top schools are for producing athletes. As these articles or posts are limited there is a need to operationalize schools' production of recruits and determine the prevalence of high producing schools. Without knowing how many of these high producing schools exist there is little knowledge regarding the school type (such as public or private), the size of the school, the location of the school (state, county, community type). Among other socio-economic, demographic, and other educational indicators that are important for understanding the landscape and scope of interscholastic athletics and the trend of commercialization could be having on it. As will be discussed below, many claim certain communities and populations are targeted for recruiting, often painting a picture that many of these football players are coming from low

income communities and public schools. Further, with the increased commercialization of interscholastic football there may be a consolidation of schools producing recruits. Beginning to understand the schools these players are coming from will be the first step in understanding the educational and athletic experiences of these players.

There is an ever-growing base of journalistic exposés documenting the rise of particular players and the increasingly precarious paths they are choosing to ensure their recruitment or “show-casing,” (Whisenant, Forsyth, Martin, 2014) but there are limited scholarly studies on the schools and programs where these athletes emerge. Further, there have been a number of analogies forwarded by numerous sport sociologists regarding the collegiate athletic system, but these analogies fail to capture the entirety of these athletic systems. We have seen Hawkins (2010) propose an internal-colonization / slavery analogy, Smith (2009), an athletic industrial complex analogy, and Southall and Weiler (2014) propose an analogy comparing universities to company towns.

All of these are relevant analogies and have been highly influential in the construction of this project, but the author contends there are additional areas for expansion when examining the multi-faceted layers of commercialized sport in the U.S.. While it is important to address in depth the collegiate athletic world, especially for the sports of football and basketball, this is one component of a larger *athletic-market economy*, which includes youth sport through the professional ranks. For instance, in football this translates as Pop Warner football or other pee-wee football programs to high school to college and the NFL as well as other professional leagues such as the Canadian Football League (CFL). Therefore, there is a need for a more robust analogy that is capable of capturing the production of football players as a product for consumption from their introduction into the production market through the entire industry. This

study hopes to provide the basis for this conceptual model while specifically focusing on the interscholastic football landscape.

It would be naïve to believe athletics, as an industry, is going to cease operating for profit. It is problematic when the industry is built and maintained on the exploitation of youth and young adults who are unable to profit from their labor. It becomes further problematic as these spaces of exploitation are transpiring within the institutions entrusted to facilitate the holistic growth of our children. A transformation occurs when an individual is brought into an educational space in order to perform academically as the players at Bellevue High School have experienced. It transforms the relationship into an economic exchange wherein both parties are obligated to fulfill the requirements of the transaction. High school football is no longer just a leisure activity for school pride and social status. It is a product created for the financial benefit (from television series, ticket sales, and apparel deals) of those who are in control of the means of production while those who transform themselves into the product (the players) are consumed with only meager returns in the form of playing time and an often subpar education. Despite this transformation occurring within high school programs, there has been little attention paid to the interscholastic football landscape. If high school football is morphing in a way that it is evermore reflecting the professional and collegiate ranks (Whisenant, Forsyth, Martin, 2014) a critical eye needs to be cast upon it in order to understand the diverse landscape that exists across the interscholastic and adolescent sector of athletic development.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the landscape of high school football in the U.S. and its connection to the football industry. Within this effort, a subsequent aim is to build on previous theoretical approaches and develop a more encompassing athletic-market

economy conceptual model that captures the entirety of the U.S. capitalistic athletic system. The purposes behind narrowing the scope of this project to focus on elite interscholastic football is twofold. Focusing on football as a market economy is vastly different than the market economy for basketball. For instance, high school basketball is no longer considered as vital for securing a college scholarship as participating in Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball circuit is recognized as *the* institutional governing body for the youth basketball economic sub-sector in the U.S.. In contrast, interscholastic institutions govern the youth football economy sub-sector.

### **Research Questions**

This study is seeking to accomplish a number of objectives. These objectives include defining and understanding what constitutes an athletic-market economy, the football industry, and high school football as an economic sub-sector. Each of these questions are guiding a larger purpose of understanding the interscholastic football landscape. Below is a series of specific questions seeking to illuminate, address, and satisfy this goal.

- 1) What are the geographic, community socioeconomic, community racial composition, and school type (private vs. public) characteristics that constitute the high school football economic sub-sector in the U.S.?
- 2) How many schools are producing consistently? Are there levels of production?
- 3) Are there differences in the market types across geographic regions?
- 4) Are there differences in the market types across community socioeconomic characteristics?
- 5) Are there differences in the market types across school types (private vs. public)?
- 6) Are there differences in the market types of high school football-markets across community racial characteristics?



- 7) Do geographic, socioeconomic, and school type characteristics predict market type? If so, what are the characteristics of high productive market types relative to the others?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will explore and analyze the landscape of high school football in the U.S.. High school football is increasingly reflecting its collegiate and professional counterparts yet there has been little investigation into the trends associated with the high school football sub-sector. A broad understanding of the high school football landscape from a demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic standpoint will be developed. There have been numerous analogies made to describe the intercollegiate level of athletics especially for the sports of football and basketball. This project attempts to develop a theoretical model that explains the breadth and complexity of the system through the high school level. Drawing on economic sociology (Granovetter, 1985) in order to accomplish this task along with the collection of quantifiable data, this study will offer meaningful contributions to the field of sport sociology and specifically those who are interested in examining systems of athletic matriculation.

### **Definition of Terms**

- **Leisure activity** - An activity that individuals participate in during their free time. This is a non-compulsory activity dictated by necessity, economic need, or economic accumulation, but rather is engaged in purely for enjoyment.
- **Economic activity** - Either the production, distribution, and / or consumption of goods and services for profit at all levels within society.
- **Economic Production** - The combination of labor and resources to create an output of a good or service.

- **Economic Distribution** - The process of output from economic production is dispersed into a space where it can be bought and sold for consumption.
- **Economic Consumption** - The use of an output by an individual, individuals, organizations, or institutions.
- **Market** - A space wherein three or more individuals are voluntarily competing to secure the best economic outcome for their self. Further, the market is defined, there are beliefs, norms, tools, rules, and behaviors that constitute the market, an economic value of what is being exchanged can be determined, and it exists over time.
- **Industry**- An industry consists of multiple markets that is led by a market either upstream or downstream from it. This market has a significant influence over how the other markets within the industry operate.
- **Economic-sector** - A series of related markets, grouped together according to the product produced, distributed, and consumed.
- **Post-industrial economy within America** - A market or markets of services, information, and research being the largest sector of the economy. The United States of America economy is currently composed of 77.2% service-industry (DPE Research Department, 2011).
- **Athletic-market economy** - A market or market-sectors devoted to the production, distribution, and consumption of athletic related practices and products. The athletic-market economy encompasses the four dimensions, sport-industry, competitive economic sector, competitive sport specific economic sub-sector, and the recognition of competition across various-market economies.

- **Football Economic Sub-sector (First Dimension)** - The first dimension encapsulates individuals entrance into an organization wherein they are transformed through market production, distribution, and consumption into a product. The economic sub-sector is dependent on the sport and age level. Therefore, this text primarily is focusing on the high school economic sub-sector or the upward movement from student to athletic product.
- **Football Industry (Second Dimension)** - A football-industry is a group of markets that are led by the actions of one market within the broader U.S. athletic-market economy. The football-industry is a series of markets devoted to the production, distribution, and consumption of football related practices and products.
- **Age level economic sector (Third Dimension)** - This dimension captures the competition that exists between different sport organizations. For instance, within the adolescent economic sector, basketball and football exist simultaneously and are competing against each other for both potential laborers as well as consumers.
- **Leisure-Market (Fourth Dimension)** - This dimension captures the competition that exists between the sport-industry and other leisure activities and forms of entertainment. For instance, going to the movies or theater.
- **High school football player** - Any player recruited to a National Collegiate Athletic (NCAA) Division-1 (D-1) university football program as indicated on the 247sports recruiting website.
- **High school football market (factories / powerhouses)** - While many may describe certain schools as “factories” or “powerhouses” with no clear definition or operationalization of these concepts, this study is seeking to operationalize high school

football markets. As the definition of a market is a space wherein three or more individuals are voluntarily competing to secure the best economic outcome for their self, there are beliefs, norms, tools, rules, and behaviors that constitute the market, an economic value of what is being exchanged can be determined, and it exists over time. A high school football market must obtain all of these dimensions with the primary product exchanged being the players.

### **Chapter One Summary**

Interscholastic athletics, especially football, is beginning to look similar to their collegiate and professional counterparts. ESPN continues to facilitate and broadcast major games between high school football market, schools are signing apparel deals, and young students are going to great lengths to move themselves into a top-tier program. Despite being a near mirror image of the collegiate level, there has been a lack of academic research into the world of high school football. With the amount of money being introduced into the interscholastic athletic world through television and apparel deals, it is important to begin to understand the overall landscape of high school football and how it is becoming enveloped into the larger football-market economy and athletic-market economy.

This study's goal is to explore and analyze the landscape of elite high school football in the U.S.. The data collected for this study will serve as a building block in constructing the larger theoretical model of the football-market economy and the athletic-market economy through which youth sports through to the professional levels can be studied. The athletic-market economy is constructed on the work of numerous scholars who have devoted their life's work to critically analyzing sport in our society. The various analogies and theories drawn from the field will be placed in conversation with economic sociology. Resting on these foundations, this study

performs a quantitative analysis of the characteristics of the elite high school football-market economy. This is the first step of hopefully many in the theoretical construction as well as empirical exploration of the athletic-market economy.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Historical Overview of High School Athletics in the U.S.**

High school athletics emerged as sports emerged into the formalized pastime of America. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as baseball becomes the pastime of America, football is transformed into a large spectator sport, and basketball was invented (Spring, 1974). It is also during this period (1890s to 1920s) that athletics becomes integrated into high schools (Mirel, 1982). There have been three frameworks for understanding the incorporation of athletics in the educational sphere. The first is a character-building mechanism that was and is needed to develop well-rounded citizens (Forsythe, 1950). The second is a critical critique of sports as a mechanism for placating the masses and subverting labor unrest (Spring, 1974). Finally, understanding athletics as being integrated within education as an institutionalization process due to sports being an increasingly corrupt social sphere (Mirel, 1982).

Despite the framework used to understand why athletics exploded in popularity and why they were integrated within education, high school sports have remained a steady constant within high school culture since their marriage in the period between 1890 and 1920. However, how high school athletics operates has changed drastically over that period. As Frankl (2007) notes since the inception of sports they have increasingly moved from being organized and played by the youth towards more and more adult control (see Seefeldt & Ewing (1996) for a detailed overview of this trend). This cultural shift has resulted in a change in approach to how sports operate within American society. It has moved from a “sand-lot” orientation towards a hyper-competitive arena. For example, according to Spring (1974) a Carnegie Foundation study found between 1887 and 1906 secondary schools moved from informal coaches towards professional coaches with technical skill. In 1876, Providence (Rhode Island) created its first high school

athletic association, three were developed in Michigan between 1883 and 1886, and in 1906, New York City organized a Public School Athletic League (Mirel, 1982). Capping this period off is the development of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFSHAAs). As it appears, high schools maintained a monopoly over the organization of sport from that point until the inception of Little League Baseball in 1954, which introduced private organizations into the development of youth athletics. The movement from school centric athletic participation was furthered helped in 1978 when President Jimmy Carter signed the Amateur Sports Act which provided protections for amateur athletes and established U.S. Olympic sport governing bodies. This forced the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), which was established in 1888, to shift its focus from international competition to domestic competitions of all age levels. It has been from that point forward in which athletics has operated with two developmental leagues in tandem (school-based vs. private/club orientation). However, which league is more important for individual player development is sport dependent. Football player development has resided within the interscholastic realm while AAU basketball and baseball is the more important leagues for players' involvement.

It appears that we may have entered a new phase of high school athletics as the hyper-competitive culture of this social mechanism has been co-opted by economic forces for financial gains, as coaches and players strive to remain relevant. Coakley (2009) provides a robust overview of high school athletics and several trends that appear to exist since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This includes the rise of pay-for-play and schools that are exceptional at producing players and championships. However, much of the literature referenced throughout this section are journalistic pieces and investigations (Brady and Sylwester, 2004; Brady and Glier, 2004; Glier, 2004; King, 2002; Sokolove, 2004; Moore, 2007; Saslow, 2006).

Research has primarily approached understanding athletic participation in relation to its effects on an individual's success academically and athletically (Bowen & Greene, 2012; Gould, et al., 2007; Marsh and Kleitman, 2002, Sabo, et al., 1993, Hartmann, 2008). The findings vary between high school athletic participation having a positive impact on academic success and career success (Jordan, 1999), to significant differences being identified across sports (Eccles, Barber, Stone, Hunt, 2003), and yet others finding the socio-economic background being a significant indicator on how athletics operates as a mechanism for increasing academic success (Guest and Schneider, 2003).

### **Interscholastic Sports and Community Outcomes**

There have been some studies that have taken a qualitative approach to understanding sports role within the school and community. Most notably Coleman (1961) was the first to examine the role of athletics and the status of athletes in high school. It is because of this study the conversation on the role of sports in high schools has been dominated by examining its effect on student success. Coleman (1961) found that while athletics provided a social space for inclusivity among students and acted as a social space for the larger community, Coleman expressed concerns regarding the educational benefits sports actually provided students, finding athletics tended to deter attention away from classroom performance. Specifically focusing on high school football, Foley (1990) conducted an ethnographic study of one small South Texas town. Within this study, Foley (1990) examined how football is a community ritual that reproduces social, economic, and gender inequities within the town. However, Foley (1990) also found sites of resistance that existed in football, around football, and throughout the community that challenged the political and economic divide between Chicanos and Whites. The study also provided strong insight into the cultural practices that shape masculine and feminine identities,



social status, and inclusion within the larger community. Foley's study and other pieces like Bissinger's (1990) novel, *Friday Night Lights*, chronicling the Odessa, Texas high school football team provide rich detail regarding how football is more than just a game within Texas high schools and communities.

What these studies as well as the numerous studies examining the benefit of youth participation in athletics shows us athletics and high school athletics are important. They also provide a brief glimpse into the diverse landscape existing across the nation regarding communities and individual's relationship to athletics and specifically football. However, Eitle and Eitle (2002) found students who identify as Black to be more likely to participate in football. However, a family's socioeconomic status did not have a statistically significant effect on whether a student participated in football or not. Recently, Dubrow and Adams (2015) conducted a study wherein they compiled the racial identity, social class and family background of National Basketball Association players to determine how these indicators affected one's chance of playing in the NBA. Interestingly, they found individuals, no matter what an individual's racial identity, the social class a player was from determined their odds of playing the NBA.

Focusing on football Allison, Davis, Barranco (2016) conducted a study examining the communities from which the ESPN top 100 football players were from and whether they matriculated into the National Football League player draft over ten years. They found that African American players who come from lower socio-economic communities have a higher likelihood of being drafted compared to African Americans who came from less dense, higher educated, higher income socio-economic communities. Further, individuals who are White have a higher chance of being drafted if they are from a less dense, higher educated, higher income socio-economic community. While Allison, et al. (2016) are focused on players making it to the

draft, this data shows that within the top 100 hundred athletes every year there is a vast diversity of community type from which players are coming from. This provides precedent for the direction of this study. Allison et al. (2016) begin to shift the focus from the individual to community to understand how the community may or may not play an important role in an individual's matriculation to the professional ranks. This study is interested in understanding the organizations that are succeeding in matriculating players to the next level and the communities they are situated in. Another report recently conducted by *Undefeated's* Tom Farrey (2016), found that the number of first generation players declined in the year between 2010 and 2015 in all sports especially basketball and football. Basketball experienced a 9% drop and football a 3% drop despite individuals who identify as Black continuing to be the predominant racial group occupying these sports. While Farrey (2016), could only speculated the reasons behind the drop he discusses the increasing costs associated with these sports, college readiness, and an expanding middle class who can afford to make the investment in the sports.

These three studies provide an alternative to the cultural narrative prevalent in our society surrounding football and basketball. Although, they found individuals who are Black are still more likely to participate within these sports they provide a counter narrative to the assumption they also hail from poor neighborhoods and families. Seeking to provide clarity on the landscape of high school football, understanding the geographic, socio-economic, and the school characteristics where players are coming from is something this study is seeking to answer. While this study does not discuss the characteristics of individual players, it does provide an understanding of areas players are coming from.

## **Commercialization of Interscholastic Athletics**

While Coakley (2009) and Whisenant, Forsythe, and Martin (2012) acknowledge the intrusion of commercial forces into the interscholastic field, there has been a failure to study how these new trends are affecting the landscape of high school athletics and more specifically high school football. A number of the journalistic pieces cited above focus on the lengths parents and high school players are willing to go in order to compete at a level that may propel them to the next level or beyond athletically (Brady and Sylwester, 2004; Brady and Glier, 2004; Glier, 2004; King, 2002; Sokolove, 2004; Moore, 2007; Saslow, 2006) however, it is notable much of this attention has been directed towards basketball and the grueling combination of AAU and interscholastic athletics on aspiring basketball players. While this professionalization of youth sport appears to be a well-known phenomenon, there is a dearth in academic literature critically analyzing how interscholastic sport is changing.

One journalistic piece, (Moore 2007) highlighted the extent to which several preparatory schools are willing to go in order to play games against other highly ranked teams. While the article focuses on basketball schools, it relieves some schools traveling across the country in order to play five games in six days against nationally ranked teams. ESPN having launched ESPNU in order to facilitate the growing demand to broadcast collegiate sporting events has also expanded coverage to broadcast these nationally ranked high school games<sup>1</sup>. Moore (2007) reported some schools will walk away with upwards of \$25,000 from playing in games like those highlighted in this article. To be clear, at the moment there is no financial wind-fall from having

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<sup>1</sup> ESPNU was launched in March of 2005 in order to facilitate the broadcasting of more collegiate sporting events. It was within the same year the channel began broadcasting nationally ranked men's high school football and basketball games.

a game broadcast however, it appears most revenue comes from ticket sales with most game day expenses being covered by the broadcaster (Sentell, 2011; Moore, 2007).

It is for this reason it is imperative we begin to understand the landscape of high school athletics beyond investigating whether participating in sports increases academic performance or improves athletic career success. This study acknowledges there may only be a handful of schools willing to pursue the competitive level that propels them into the national spotlight; however, currently there is no clarity on how many schools are engaged in this type of hyper-competitive behavior within the U.S. capitalist high school athletic market. Furthermore, many of the journalistic pieces obtained have focused on basketball; both the club system (AAU) and the interscholastic system, which appears to be dominated by preparatory schools (read private schools). With the exception of Foley's (1990) ethnographic study, it has been difficult to find literature providing strong insight on the high school football landscape.

The current study seeks to understand the composition of the schools and communities that produce the top high school football players. It is difficult to determine revenue schools are making from ticket sales and broadcasting rights. Further, at the heart of this industry are the players who are propelling football to the heights in popularity it is reaching. Therefore, focusing on players and the schools will provide a strong indication regarding what schools are the top schools in terms of recruitment outcomes. While we could look at the top 25 rankings (USAToday) to determine these schools, focusing on the number of high school players who matriculate to the Division I collegiate level provides a stronger indication of the strength of the program. As with college football, rankings are in-part based on final record, a school may end the year with 2 or 3 losses and be ranked outside of the top 25; however, this organization may be one of the strongest programs based on player talent production (read recruitment to Division

I football programs). The study will determine the schools and communities where players are being recruited from and determine the characteristics of these schools and communities as we begin to shift the focus from individuals towards understanding sociological and organizational patterns within elite high school football. In the next section, a number of theoretical models are reviewed for their merits and connection to the phenomenon under investigation. This section is followed by an attempt to forward a new theoretical model with the intent of explaining the trends within high school football (and high school athletics broadly).

### **Theoretical Frameworks and Models for Athletic Commodification**

There have been a number of models and analogies discussing the social relations of sport. However, these models and analogies have primarily focused on college basketball and football. Many justify this narrowed scope on the fact collegiate football and basketball are high revenue and widely publicized sports in the U.S. I believe this has come at the expense of missing the larger institutional interactions shaping the overall landscape of college athletics. While this study is focusing on high school football, it will also incorporate previous theoretical building blocks for a larger theoretical conceptual model capturing the entirety of the U.S. football landscape. Within this section, I will discuss the analogies and models previously constructed and what I see as their limitations. I will then discuss the market economy theoretical concept I am forwarding, beginning with a number of definitions for key concepts building on each other to construct the athletic-market economy and subsequently the football-market economy.

***Athletic Industrial Complex.*** The Athletic Industrial Complex (AIC) was first forwarded by Earl Smith in *Race, Sport, and the America Dream*. In a chapter entirely devoted to discussing the AIC, Smith (2007) describes it as, “AIC refers to the fact that intercollegiate

athletics is now firmly embedded into other economic institutions, from the hotel and entertainment industry to construction to clothing and transportation” (pg. 123). This conceptualization of the athletic-industrial complex is predicated on the imagery of the military-industrial complex first conceptualized by C. Wright-Mills and made popular by Former-President Eisenhower (Dunne and Skons, 2009). The military-industrial complex is understood as the relationship between the military industry (companies specializing in the production and distribution of military equipment) and the government entities designated for dealing in armed conflict. This has resulted in what some describe as a continuing need for conflict in order to maintain the economic activity produced from the government entities purchasing military equipment from private manufacturers. This has resulted in a complex interdependence of military manufacturers and subsequently the individuals they employ (generally entire towns) being reliant on the government renewing production contracts (Dunne and Skons, 2014).

This analogy is compelling as it captures what some have called the arms-race occurring within collegiate athletics. Specifically, the renovation and construction of multi-million dollar facilities in order to attract new recruits (Hoffer, et al., 2015). The AIC captures how universities are choosing to invest exorbitant amounts of money in their athletic departments in order to win games and experience financial windfall. It is a similar story at the professional level, where we see professional organizations threaten to move cities if they do not receive the facilities they desire (i.e., former St. Louis Rams relocating to Los Angeles). Cities often capitulate out of political backlash and financial concerns regarding cultural economic activity (deMause, 1999).

However, this model begins to wain when we try to stretch it down into the interscholastic level. There have been some cases where districts have used public money to build large athletic facilities particularly in states such as Texas (Smith, 2016). While this may

seem irrational from a financial standpoint, the impetus driving these decisions is less about generating economic activity, but rather facilitating the participation in a cultural activity (i.e., Friday Night Lights). Further, these examples are still few and mainly clustered within the Dallas region of Texas (Smith, 2016). There are not many high schools investing millions of dollars into the high school football facilities outside of the Dallas, Texas area. While high school football may possess a special space within communities' culture around the nation there is no evidence suggesting an economic dependence exists between high school football and other industries survival the way in which Smith argues exists between collegiate football and various service industries. Further, in many states across the country high school athletics have entered into a pay-for-play system due to economic constraints felt by municipalities (Coakley, 2009). This stands in opposition to the athletic industrial complex we would expect to see a government investment in athletics due to their importance to the community both culturally and economically, not moving away from publically subsidizing them.

Second, this analogy has difficulty stretching across sports. While it maintains there is a large investment and industrial complex among football and basketball, the same investment in facilities has not been occurring across sports. Lastly, if we couple these two concerns regarding the malleability of the AIC there are a variety of sports that construct varying experiences for athletes. For instance, if we take a glance at gymnastics, the elite gymnasts do not compete at the collegiate level. While there is a sensational level of talent at the collegiate level those who represent the United States' National team are competing at extremely high levels at international tournaments from a very young age.

Choosing to conceptualize the relations of production governing college football and basketball as the *athletic-industrial complex* is male and sport centric, thus limiting its use and

encouragement of use to be applied elsewhere. The athletic world is a complex, multi-dimensional social institution within American society and there is a need for a theoretical model capturing its vast reach. The athletic-industrial complex has its merits when examining the interconnected economies surrounding collegiate football. This provides insight into how connected collegiate football is within local economies. However, this conceptual model focuses on the financial capital invested and generated from the industry. There is a need to center the laborers who make the system operate and how they are being transformed from students into a product that is bought, sold, and consumed.

***Internal Colonization Model.*** Narrowing the scope of his conceptual model Dr. Billy Hawkins in his seminal piece, *The New Plantation: Black Athletes, College Sports, and Predominantly White Institutions* (2010), focuses on the relations of production between the predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and talented Black male athletes. Within this manuscript, Hawkins outlined the international colonization model as a form of exploitation wherein PWIs recruit young Black men for economic gains for their athletic labor. This model is comprised of a number of components including a discussion on internal colonialism and oscillating migrant labor. Colonialism has often been referred to the control and exploitation of a native or transplanted population in the majority via a transplanted population in the minority. Internal colonialism turns this on its head, recognizing a population in the numerical majority may control and exploit a group of native persons or transplanted people who are in the numerical minority. An order of control and suppression is exacted over the group being colonized both physically and psychologically. Colonizer's limit the ability for the colonized to define themselves, consistently portraying the colonized as less-than human in order to justify



the continued suppression in addition to using physical force to coerce and dominate the colonized group.

Within the collegiate athletic context of football and basketball universities depend on Black athletic bodies for their athletic talent in order to win, generating billions of dollars, while these individuals who are Black rely on the universities to provide them with an opportunity to better their athletic skills and / or receive a free education. Hawkins description of the colonial model highlights how this exchange invokes more components of colonialization rather than one of mutual exchange. For instance, athletes are often provided a subpar education through academic clustering, graduation rates are low, and many of the players come from economically disadvantaged areas receive minimal financial reward while they may struggle to maintain affording groceries. The players are limited in their choices in economic mobility due to the colonizers perpetuating monopolistic conditions with little institutional benefits available to help create social mobility through educational and entrepreneurial obtainment (restricting individuals' ability to make money from their image and likeness).

The second aspect of Hawkins new plantation model is oscillating migrant labor. Oscillating migrant labor is the movement of labor from their home to a foreign community in order to work, returning when they are no longer of use. Within the world of college football and basketball, we see this occur with colonized individuals moving across the country to attend university via an athletic scholarship. Once their eligibility has expired or they are dispensed from the team the players return home. This is problematic due to the racialized bodies traveling to perform the physical labor for financial gains for a White elitist controlled industry. Similar to individuals who are from Mexico working within the agricultural sector, they are foreigners or outsiders within the community. As many of the athletes are coming from the predominantly

Black communities to PWIs, there are a number of cultural as well as racial challenges facing these players.

This model has been ridiculed for the severity of the analogy as critics point to the number of benefits provided to the players including free tuition, room, and board. Further, there are now studies examining the socioeconomic background of many of these athletes. Dubrow and Adams (2010) examined the economic position and family structure of athletes who had been drafted to the National Basketball Association (NBA). Analyzing 245 articles from local newspapers between the years 1994 to 2004, Dubrow and Adams coded the social origins of NBA players. They used information regarding parents' occupation, description of neighborhood, general statements about class to create a class variable including lower, middle, and upper class. They also created a variable to capture the player's family structure using the same methods, however they focused on statements regarding the presence of the player's parents within the individual's life. Overall, they found 65.68% of African American players who had made it to the NBA came from middle to upper class backgrounds. For players who are White the rate was 92.85%. However, the authors suggested players who come from economically advantaged backgrounds have a higher likelihood of making it to the NBA.

In a similar study, Allison, Davis, Barranco (2016) examined hometown characteristics of players who were recruited to NCAA D-I football teams and whether they were drafted or not. They found Black athletes from economically disadvantaged and more dense areas were more likely to get drafted while White athletes from economically advantaged and less dense areas were more likely to get drafted to the NFL. However, of those who were draft eligible (487 players total) 268 of those players were Black athletes and not drafted compared to 156 Black athletes who were drafted. According to Allison et al. those who were drafted were from

neighborhoods that are more dense, had lower educational attainment, and had lower income levels. While more players from these neighborhoods are making it to the NFL, it appears more players from middle class communities are attending university overall.

These are important studies as they begin to shed light on a narrative often presented to us whether as fantasied stories told through movies and television shows of glorified tales of athletes overcoming insurmountable odds. Further, it challenges Hawkins' (2010) notion universities are entering economically disadvantaged neighborhoods or ghettos as he refers to in his text, in a colonizing fashion. However, it could mean the colonization process is occurring earlier than the migration from high school to university. It could be students are migrating into high school football markets in order to increase their opportunities to move to the next level. Rather, a shift may be occurring in terms of how athletic talent is being developed and thus, where it is being developed. We could be seeing the beginnings of a shift towards other sports in America like soccer, swimming, baseball where a degree of economic wealth is needed to be able to participate.

***Athletic-Department Brothels.*** In a 2011 presentation at the College Sport Research Institution's annual conference, Southall, Hawkins, Polite, and Sack (2010) forwarded a metaphor comparing athletic-departments on university campuses to brothels. Building on the work of Nussbaum (1999), who contends all wage laborers can be equated to sex workers because in some capacity we are all using our bodies to produce a profit, Southall et al. (2011) asserted, due to the control over the working conditions of college athletes, university athletic departments are pimps and the players - sex workers. The metaphor is predicated on the controlled compensation structure, lack of personal agency, and the work environment of migratory sex workers (Southall and Weiler, 2014). Further, there are similarities in how control

is exerted over the worker. Both sex-workers and athletes are emotionally, psychologically, and physically coerced.

As Southall and Weiler (2014) pointed out this metaphor along with internal colonialization model references provoke individuals eliciting criticisms about how these analogies are overly sensationalized. However, in some regards these metaphors and theoretical models goal is to provoke a guttural reaction in order to spurn conversation and thought regarding the experiences and disproportionate relations of production found at the collegiate level. The critique found here of these pieces, is much like those of the AIC. These metaphors have narrowed in on the relations of production specific to the collegiate level. It is difficult to stretch either of these metaphors and conceptual models up into the professional ranks, or lower into the interscholastic and youth arenas, and across sports that are not football or basketball. Many of those who enter into sex work are doing so out of economic disparity and physical coercion. While, this argument may work when focusing on African American athletes who participate in football and basketball, studies like Dubrow and Adams' (2010) and Allison et al. (2016) suggest there is a greater diversity of economic background prevalent within these sports. While many players may see football or basketball as their only opportunity to secure a better quality of life, the educational opportunities provided to these players makes it difficult to compare the experiences of individuals within sex work. This study will attempt to understand what type of socio-economic situations individuals are migrating from to continue to shed light on the journeys these individuals are taking.

*Athletic Departments as Company Towns.* Southall and Weiler (2014) utilize a 19<sup>th</sup> century coal-mining town as a metaphoric symbol in a cross comparison analogy of for-profit athletics (basketball and football) at university. The authors argue a number of characteristics

governing the relations of production between athletic departments and for-profit athletes are similar to those company owners and overseers in West Virginia coal mining towns of the past. First, Southall and Weiler (2014) take the time to continue forwarding student-athletes who participate in football and basketball are employees of the university and are not amateurs. There has been a plethora of literature examining collegiate football and basketball players as employees of the university (Van Rheenen, 2011; Baade, Sundberg, 1996; Mixon, Trevino, Minto, 2004; Donnor, 2005). Continuing within this framework Southall and Weiler (2014) are hoping to construct a conceptual model capable of changing the minds of those who are married to the collegiate athletic model as they call it (student-athletes as amateurs and who should not receive any special benefit a collegiate student does not receive).

They buttress this argument with highlighting characteristics reflecting company towns of the past. This includes, profit-athletes' as oscillating migrant workers, monitoring and control of athletes' behavior and movement, grant-in-aid's as scrip, limited athlete representation in college-sport governance, associated college-sport health risks, and moral and character-based justifications for the collegiate model. The overall attention to these factors draws eerily similar comparisons between the modern athletic department and a company town of the past.

Each one of these metaphors and models captures how for-profit collegiate sports have been established to limit, control, and economically exploit those who produce the product (the game and players). While each metaphor is provocative and forwards a number of points adding to the literature and the understanding of the complexities of how for-profit collegiate sports are run, each analogy harkens on imagery reflecting an older relation of production. Today the economy is highly complex with a diverse range of financially situated individuals as well as employment types. We no longer exist in a purely dichotomous relation of production (workers

versus owners). Thus, it is important to engage in a conversation to understand the role of education in our society, how it creates a splintering within our society, and how this is related to athletic labor production.

Further, the narrowed scope of these analogies make it difficult to assess the interconnectedness of the various institutional relations exist across industries, but also across economic sectors. Finally, many proponents of the collegiate model point to the benefits these individuals receive, theoretically placing them at an economic advantage compared to a number of their peers when considering the cost of higher education presently. Further, referring to for-profit athletes as oscillating migrant workers without recognizing not-for profit or expense athletes and teams, are also migrating great distances to compete weakens the problematic nature of this relationship. As such, building on these theoretical building blocks, a more encompassing athletic-market economy conceptual framework is presented.

### **Theoretical Framework: Athletic-Market Economy**

The theoretical model, athletic-market economy is being forwarded to capture how individuals are transformed from people into labor as a commodity to be bought and sold in various markets. A great deal of this theory rests on Marx's (1994) notions of estranged labor or the alienation of labor and Asper's conceptualization of markets. This theoretical model is constituted by many aspects composing four dimensions. The first dimension is the production of the product in an upward manner. We move from a group of individuals into products manufactured for consumption. This dimension is called an economic sub-sector wherein the products are produced, distributed, and consumed. The second-dimension accounts for the flow of the products towards the professional ranks. The professional ranks act as the lead market within this dimension. All the other markets are oriented to this market. This is demonstrated by

the fact players generally have to move in a step like fashion to reach the professional ranks. When taken in its entirety (each step from youth to professional), the second-dimension can be recognized as an industry. The third-dimension can be thought of as providing depth to the markets constituting this model. This accounts for the competition occurring between organizations within this dimension, which can be considered an economic sector. Finally, there is the fourth dimension, which accounts for the fact these markets do not exist within a vacuum but rather are competing within the larger entertainment and leisure markets vying for consumer dollars. Together, these four dimensions compose the athletic-market economy. Below, a diagram is presented highlighting the dimensions.

Working backwards and to elaborate a bit further, the fourth dimension of this model encapsulates athletics within its own economic-ecosystem while also acknowledging its existence in relation to other economic-ecosystems. The third-dimension acknowledges there are numerous sports within the athletic-market economy, however due to the gradational composition of athletics we often discuss sports across these competitive levels. For instance, adolescent athletics, collegiate athletics, professional athletics. It is for this reason the third-dimension is considered an economic sector. The second-dimension captures the various industries that exist within the athletic economic eco-system. An industry is defined as having one core market with other markets orientated towards it (Aspers, 2012). This is true for the football industry as each of the economic sub-sectors composing the football industry are in relation to the professional ranks in terms of participation. Finally, the first-dimension is considered economic sub-sectors as it is within this dimension the intersection of sport type and competition level is considered.

Within the specific sport cross section being investigated within this study, the first dimension refers to interscholastic football. However, this can be easily applied to the collegiate football sub-sector and professional football sub-sector. The economy is defined by Aspers (2012) as the coordination of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. The athletic-market economy and its four dimensions describe how athletics is coordinated through a market form of coordination. Markets are explained below in more detail but it is within production-, distribution-, and consumption- markets athletic products are created, distributed, and consumed. However, athletics is a complex and hierarchically ordered world. There are competition levels gradated based on age and skill level and there are numerous sports and sport activities with multiple levels and multiple types of leagues to compete in. This conceptualization captures this complexity within the four dimensions. The next sub-sections discuss how individuals transform from being unaffiliated individuals into products exchanged on multiple markets.

**Labor.** The first dimension begins with the introduction of individuals into the production market. It is also dependent on the foundation labor is seen as a commodity. Thus, it is felt it is important to discuss how the individual is transformed from an individual belonging to the collective society to a laborer and subsequently to a commodity. As our society, has become more complex and diversified economically a conversation regarding education and the alienation of learning will follow which will then lead into a conversation concerning how individuals are transformed into an athletic product, even at the interscholastic level. The notion of estranged or alienated labor can be traced back to Marx's work on relations of production in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Specifically, in his, "Estranged Labor", Marx states, "labor produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as a commodity" (Marx, 1994 pg. 59). This



occurs as the products created by the laborer are removed from the laborer's possession. Thus, the laborer in fact does not own what they are creating. It belongs to the owner of the means of production (the technologies / tools used for creation). This transforms the laborer into a commodity as the individual is valued for the work put into the creation of the product rather than the humanity instilled in the material object through the creation process. Thus, labor becomes an interchangeable product to be bought and used.

Today, Marx's notion of labor is often disputed as we have entered into a hyper-specialized economy wherein individuals work a variety of professions including lawyers, doctors, and professors. These professions take years of training and education to complete making them harder to interchange. However, I argue these professions are just as interchangeable due to the educational system in which we all pass. In their piece, "Estrange Labor/Learning", Lave and McDermott (2002) discussed rewriting "Estranged Labor," as a piece reflecting the education process. They argue learning is a process of labor competition guised as a self-actualization process. This is captured in a lengthy revision where labor (and related verbiage) has been transformed to reflect learning...

"... The *learner* produces not for himself, but for *his or her place in the system*. It is no longer sufficient, therefore, for him simply to *learn*. He must produce *knowledge appropriate to his situation*. The only *learner* who is productive is one who produces *test scores* for the *school*, or in other words contributes towards the self-valorization *and redistribution* of the *educational hierarchy*..." (Lave and McDermott, 2002, pg. 44).

The individual is valued for abstract measures of intelligence rather than who they are as an individual and are thus selected for consumption within a different economic subsector based on their production. Expanding this idea to encompass a high school football player, the player is not playing for their benefit. Rather they are playing in order to perform for the benefit of someone else. It also places the player in direct competition with their peers as they vie for

position and status to acquire rewards from the individual who benefits from their estranged athletic labor. They are not only competing to fulfill a hierarchical need, they are also competing to ensure they are the best product for consumption. They want to be bought by the coaches who give them the opportunity to play at the next level, those who award scholarship dollars, and limited spaces at the best universities. This effectively transforms interscholastic athletic spaces into production markets, in which McDermott's (2007) description of productive consumption, whereby the player consumes the knowledge they are given with benefiting in the future, becomes useful. The player is benefiting from receiving the education in the sense they will be able to increase or maintain their quality of life. However, it is not without cost as they are in competition with their peers to receive the athletic opportunities in order to do so, which can also lead to athletic identity role engulfment (Cooper & Cooper, 2015).

It is important to note while the concept of labor is being drawn from Marx's work on labor who was a staunch anti-capitalist and the numerous theoretical frameworks referenced prior to the introduction of this conceptual model discuss the student-athlete as an exploited entity, this model is not seeking to claim exploitation is inherent in the system. Rather this model is seeking to provide an understanding of how the individuals within a modern economy are transformed from an individual into a commodity. This transformation occurs within markets.

***Markets.*** Within the first dimension, the movement of the individual into and up through the various markets is constituted by their move from a solo entity competing against others within a market of students or athletes into an organization, becoming a member. A market has a number of significant characteristics distinguishing it from other forms of material exchange or trade (Aspers, 2011). A market has to be composed of at least three actors; two buyers, one seller, or one buyer, two sellers. A market needs to have exchangeability of the roles of buyers

and sellers. Meaning, the buyers or sellers both are giving something up. However, to differentiate this from trade, the third actor needs to be present in order to create competition. This is when the actors are vying for an end they could not share. These two components are what distinguishes a market as a form of exchange coordination compared to a network or a hierarchy / organization.

A network is a binary connection between actors in an opportunity to provide space for the exchange of information and material. Trade may still occur, but the absence of competition in the interaction separates this from a market. Further, a network may be vast, however, it is generally a number of formal and informal binary relationships which are loosely connected (Aspers, 2011, pg. 20). According to Aspers (2011), a hierarchy or organization is when a number of actors are assembled within and under one administrative body. Every actor has their own task(s) to perform and complete. And finally, organizations generally have some sort of hierarchal structure. However, within this text a slightly modified Slack and Parent (2012) definition of organization will be used; an organization is a goal oriented entity, with defined membership with specific tasks needed to be completed to facilitate the accomplishment of the goal. Aspers (2011) highlights these three forms of coordination as the relations governing exchange within our society. Aspers notes, in reality these three rarely ever exist independently or in a pure form.

No matter the cross section between coordination forms there are a number of other important aspects to markets to be considered, which Aspers describes as market order, for them to be considered legitimate. A market cannot exist unless we know what it is about, there is a culture directing activity within the market, the products in the market have value, there is competition between actors, there is exchange between actors, and the market exists over time.

***Production-Market & Distribution-Market:*** Although, the first dimension consists of several markets including the production and distribution market this study is focusing on the consumption market which is discussed below. Briefly the production market consists of the internal markets and market networks that form within schools and between schools. It is within these spaces the students are transformed, through their labor, into a product to be bought and sold. The distribution market captures acquisition of the broadcasting and dissemination of the products which in this instance is the games and the players. It is in this space these two products are truly abstracted from their labor and therefore themselves and brought into the consumption market. Continuing within the first dimension and applying the above conceptualization of a market on to football, as well as all athletics, we can continue building upon the notion of athletes as a labor commodity. First, students at high schools generally compete to earn a position on the high school's football team. We can think of the general student body as the labor market.

***Consumption-Market.*** Production markets take raw materials, in this case students or individuals, and transforms them into products through internal market competition and market network competition. Distribution markets purchase the products, transform, and then distribute the product within another market – the final level of the first dimension; the consumption market. Games are consumed by viewers, attendees, readers, listeners and often is the last time they consume the game. This does neglect game highlights, reruns, reality television shows. However, for the most part the product is consumed once before it is archived. Players as products in the consumption market are consumed by organizations at the next level of the football industry.

Here the players enter into a strange space where they are at once both a product being

bought and also buyer choosing a university. Organizations at the next level, in this case the collegiate level, do not get to choose the players they want. Rather, the collegiate teams have to sell their universities, programs, coaching, and any other perks to the player. Simultaneously, the individual player is valued for what they are able to accomplish on the field. If a player has a good game or a good season, the player's value rises increasing the quality and / or quantity of offers. When the transaction is completed between the team and a player, the player moves not only over but also up into the next competitive level. This completes the first dimension or high school economic sub-sector of this model; the transformation of an individual into a product is distributed and then consumed. Further, we see the second-dimension of the conceptual model. As the players move from being a product purchased within the consumption market within the high school economic sub-sector they move diagonally (up and across) into the next level of competition and product construction, repeating the same processes found within the first dimension.

There are multiple reasons adopting this theoretical model is beneficial as we continue to theoretically, empirically, and practically engage with understanding and transforming athletics. Specifically, within this study the model provides the foundation for examining high school football. However, this model is built on the notion of markets as the form of coordination governing athletics. As noted earlier, a number of key requirements constitute a market including an exchange, competition among three or more actors (buyer and seller), clarity of the market's purpose, market culture, clear value for the products, and the market's existence over time.

## **Chapter Two Summary**

Surrounding interscholastic football is a prevalent cultural narrative painting those who participate in the sport as hailing from poor, urban, predominantly Black communities. Further,

as there are a number of theories seeking to explain the collegiate model this study is seeking to forward a new theoretical framework for understanding interscholastic football within a larger athletic-market economy. The above sections describe in detail what is exchanged, how competition exists, what the market is about, and the value of the products within the various markets. The two aspects left unverified is whether a culture exists within these markets governing how individuals act and interact. And, do these markets exist over time.

Therefore, one of the goals guiding this project is to construct a measure determining whether these markets exist over time. This model is designed to theoretically understand athletes as laborers and labor as a commodity bought and sold within various markets. Focusing on athletes who have been abstracted from their selves and transformed into an abstract measure of rank, star caliber, and statistics on a recruiting website captures components integral to a market existing. These measures of production are used to assess players worth when recruiters and coaches are finding their next recruiting class. The question is whether there are markets where long standing patterns of consumption exist over time.

## Chapter 3: Methods

### Data Collection

In order to examine the above questions, data has been compiled from several sources including 247sports.com, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the National Center for Educational Statistics. Below, detailed descriptions of the data sources and data retrieved from each source is provided.

***Recruits.*** 247sports.com is a sports oriented website founded in 2010 and according to their website now resides within the top 10 sports information providers within the United States. They provide a “data-driven” product primarily focusing on the sports of football and basketball. Specifically, they provide extensive coverage of high school men’s football and men’s basketball recruits. The website provides in-depth analysis of the top recruits as well as in-depth rankings of recruits for both football and basketball. The information provided within these lists include the players name, high school, town, the university they have committed to and attended for at least summer training (including transfers), physiological information including height and weight, position, and a numerical and “star” grade capturing perceived talent level are also included.

As the scope of this project is focused on high school football data was obtained from the football recruiting rankings list 247 Sports publishes every year. Despite being founded in 2010, the website provides these ranked recruiting lists from 2000 forward. For this study, the years 2000 to 2016 were chosen in order to provide a longitudinal assessment of the number of high school football markets and their town characteristics. From these lists the top 500 players were chosen. The purpose for choosing this number of recruits is to determine if there are schools producing “lower-tier” talent at a high rate. While many individuals may know about one or two schools who have produced several elite players, there may be schools who are not receiving the

same recognition because they have not produced elite players. The only two years 500 recruits were not selected was 2000 and 2001. There is only data available for 120 and 129 recruits respectfully. From these lists, player's names, high school, town, state, position, star caliber, and university recruited too were acquired. Each player was given a unique identification number for statistical modelling and player anonymity although the data is public.

***Zip Codes and Towns.*** The United States Census Bureau is a subsidiary of the Economic and Statistics Administration within the Department of Commerce. The organization strives to provide multifaceted glimpses into U.S. society through a number of large surveys. Two of the surveys they conduct, which this study has relied on, is the Decennial Census Survey and the American Community Survey. The Decennial Census survey is a constitutionally mandated survey occurring every ten years. The survey is seeking information regarding housing and population.

From this survey data was obtained regarding the population by zip code tabulation area or census block of the high school and the county the high school is located within. A census block is an area designed by the U.S. census bureau. It is defined in a number of ways depending on geographic location. This means it could be defined by city blocks if it is in a high-density area or by natural land formations in rural areas. Within this area, the most common zip code is determined and assigned to as the census block number. According to the U.S. census bureau the average census block has 39 "blocks" composing it with over 11 million census block areas.

The Decennial survey provides population break down by racial and ethnic group and thus, the racial and ethnic composition was obtained for the zip code area and the county area. The year 2010 was used as the decennial survey is only administered every ten years. A number of variables were created from the information obtained from the Decennial survey. The



variables created include, “*Total Population, Percentage of White Population, Percentage of Black Population*” for the zip code tabulation area (also known as census block).

Obtained from the American Community Survey (ACS) were the median income estimates for individuals over the age of 16 from the years 2007 to 2011. The ACS is a long form survey seeking to gather detailed information regarding housing, social, and economic data in addition to the information about characteristics of the population like sex, race, age, latinx heritage, household relationships, owner / renter, which is captured by the Decennial survey. The ACS is administered every year in order to provide more in-depth understanding of America’s communities.

***Schools.*** The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) is the government entity for collecting and analyzing educational data. Every public school and a vast majority of private schools are assigned a NCES identification number. The data made available by this branch is collected in a number of nationwide surveys. Common Core Data is collected by congressional mandate every year and private school data is collected every other year through the Private School Universe survey. This data is dependent on the private school participation with the survey while the common core data completion is mandated.

From these two datasets information regarding school population characteristics and teacher / pupil ratios, and school type were obtained. The latest available year was collected for both public (2011/2012) and private schools (2011/2012). The student teacher ratio is defined by the NCES as the number of students there are for every one teacher within a school. Urban centric locale is determined based on U.S. census bureau data. These locales have 12 variations across four types (city, suburb, town, rural) and range from large to small (city / suburb) and fringe to remote (town / rural). For this study, these 12 variations have been condensed into the 4

types. The NCES defines these codes based on population size and distance to an urban center. A population of over 250,000 residents classifies a city (within an urbanized area and principal city) or suburb (within an urbanized area but outside a principal city) as large, between 100,000 and 250,000 as mid-sized, below 100,000 as small. A town is a territory within an urban cluster and is considered fringe when it is less than 10 miles from an urbanized area, distant when it is more than 10 miles but less than 35 miles from an urbanized area, and remote when it is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area. The U.S. census defines the rural area and is considered fringe when it is less than 5 miles from an urbanized area, distant 5 to 25 miles from an urbanized area, and remote when more than 25 miles from an urbanized area. 12 codes have been reduced to 4 community types, rural, town, suburb, and city.

***Markets.*** Based on preliminary analyses a variable has been created to capture four *types* of markets based on the number of years a school had a player recruited to a Division I university. A further description on the construction of these variables occurs within the results section. These four types include, *1 and done*, *low producing markets*, *high producing markets*, and *mass production markets*. The *1 and Done* market type is a school that had one recruit one year and did not appear in the data again. The *low producing market* type are schools having at least 1 player recruited between 2 and 5 years. The *high producing markets* are schools that have at least 1 player recruited between 6 and 10 years. Finally, the *mass production markets* are the schools that have at least 1 player recruited 11 or more years. Within the sections below a more – in-depth discussion is provided regarding the construction of these types and their characteristics.

## **Data Analysis**

***Univariate.*** A number of univariate analyses were completed to provide a holistic overview of the data sets provided. For each variable the median, minimum, maximum and

percentiles were computed to accomplish this task. Using the information of high school, hometown, and state information, demographic, socio-economic, and educational data from the U.S. Census Bureau's data and the National Center for Educational Statistics' data (U.S. Census, 2016; NCES, 2016) were matched. This data included population size of the zip code tabulation area (ZCTA) and county, racial composition of ZCTA and county, median income of ZCTA and county, employment rates of ZCTA and county, homeownership rates of ZCTA or county, high school size, student-teacher ratios, and success indicators of schools.

***Multivariate.*** In addition, a multinomial logistic regression model will be fit to determine which predictors change the risk of a school being classified as a low production market (LPM), high production market (HPM), and a mass production market (MPM). A multinomial regression model is being used as the market type variable is an ordered categorical variable. Therefore, this statistical test is being applied to determine differences between the market types.

### **Hypotheses:**

Based on the research questions provided earlier and previous literature a number of hypotheses are forwarded.

***Hypothesis #1.*** Based on the previous literature and the cultural narrative purveying our society, there is an assumption the majority of high school football players are coming from low income, urbanized, predominantly Black communities. The Dubrow and Adams (2015) and the Alison et al. (2016) study provide some indication this may be changing. Therefore, it is believed players who are recruited by a NCAA Division I university will be located within low income, urbanized, predominantly Black communities and attend public schools.

***Hypothesis #2.*** As this study is trying to determine the number of schools producing NCAA Division I football recruits on a consistent basis, it is believed the number of schools producing these players consistently will be 10 or less.

***Hypothesis #3.*** With the first and second hypothesis in mind and the goals of this study, it is believed public schools located within low income, urbanized, predominantly Black communities, will increase the likelihood of the school being classified as a more productive type.

## **Limitations**

As this is a macro-level analysis of the landscape of interscholastic football the study lacks the ability to speak to the nuance of the cultural norms, beliefs, attitudes, values, practices constituting the individual markets. For instance, although individual school demographic data has been acquired, there is a deficit in determining the actual composition of the football program (as opposed to the high school demographics more broadly). Further, there is speculation (Dohrmann, 2010; Farrey, 2017) that individuals are migrating into these markets. While there is some evidence of this phenomenon, there is not enough to make statistical inferences. Furthermore, without having the personal information regarding each player's race, socio-economic status, hometown, and educational capacity, identified by each player there are limits to the inferences that can be presented and verified. Finally, this data is only as strong as the source. The information was gathered from an online recruiting website which does not operate within larger institutional structures providing oversight. Therefore, there may be errors regarding the information abstracted from these ranked lists.

## **Delimitations**

This study is focusing on elite high school football programs across the U.S.. It is performing a macro-level analysis designed to explore and critically analyze characteristics surrounding elite high school football-markets. The data covers 7,674 unique cases. Each case has been matched with demographic data of the town of the high school the individual attended as well as educational data. Although, there is a broad set of data covering racial demographics to median income, this study is delimited by its quantitative orientation. This study does not claim to speak to the individual experiences of any of the players or claim to understand how a highly productive market operates specifically.



### Chapter 3 Summary

In order to determine whether markets exist and if there are any differences in the markets a number of univariate and multivariate analyses will be used. This is accomplished using data from a number of sources including, the 247sports.com, the U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 decennial survey data, the American Community Survey, and the National Center for Educational Statistics Survey. From these surveys a number of variables were generated including school type (public / private), school racial composition, community type, community population size, racial composition, income levels, among others. In order to answer whether there are markets that exist, a focus on the number of recruits over time determined there are 4 market types; *1 and Done*, *low production*, *high production*, and *mass production markets*. In order to determine how community and school variables affect each market type a multi-linear regression model will be run to see if certain variables have more of an affect then others. Two hypotheses have been forwarded capturing these community and school characteristics. The first hypothesis claims players who are recruited to a NCAA Division I university will be from a public school located within a low income, urbanized, and predominantly Black community. The second hypothesis forwards the claim there will be 10 schools or less producing recruits consistently. Finally, the last hypothesis states the more productive schools will be public schools located within low income, urbanized, and predominantly Black neighborhoods.

While this study provides a number of insights into the landscape of high school football, there are number of limitations. The individual information (family income, home address, racial identity) for each player is unknown. Thus, while school and community information has been obtained who each individual is something we do not possess. With this being said, this study

does not claim to speak for the individual experiences of players but rather trends found across high schools who have had a player recruited.

## Chapter 4: Results

The section below has been organized to address the research questions stated above. Each research question has been restated and is followed with the appropriate results. However, prior to delving into the research questions a quick overview of the data is provided.

***Descriptive Data of Players.*** Over the 17 years data was collected (2000-2016), there was a total of 7,670 players included within the dataset. For the years 2000 and 2001, there were only 120 and 128 player profiles available. Further, there were a number of duplicate player profiles (74 players) and international players (4 players) who were removed from the data. These players came from 47 different states with Montana, Rhode Island, and Vermont each having the fewest (1) and Texas having the most (1,119) over the 17 years. The median number of recruits per state is 72 with a mean of 163. There are 994 counties and 2,871 zip code tabulation areas (ZTCA) represented. There are also 3,172 schools represented within this data set and 1,346 players from private schools while 6,342 came from public schools. Breaking down where players came from by urban locations, 2,803 players are from cities, 3,173 are from suburbs, 644 are from towns, and 955 players are from rural areas.

The players attended schools located in ZCTAs with populations of 23 up to 113,916 people (median = 29,025; mean = 31202.08; SD = 16561.76). The income for the ZCTA ranges from \$2,500 to \$190,096 (median = \$52,346; mean = \$57,763.61; SD = \$25,240.4). At the county level, players attended schools located in areas with populations of 2,398 to 9,815,605 people (median = 603,403; mean = 1,250,936; SD = 1,970,709), and an income range of \$21,798 to \$120,096 (median = \$51,596; mean = \$53,965; SD = 13,537.29).

***Descriptive Data of Schools.*** There are 3,172 schools appearing within this data over the course of the 17 years. These schools appear across 47 states with one state having 393 schools



over the 17-year period. The number of schools appearing every year (excluding 2000 and 2001) ranges from 404 to 433 (median = 419; mean = 417.7; SD = 8.67). Schools had a median of 1 player recruited every year with an average of 1.17. However, the most players a school had recruited in a single year is 10. When examining how many years a school had at least 1 recruit, the median is 3 years and the average is 3.5 years. The most years a school had a player recruited was 15 years. Further, the average number of recruits that came from each school is 2.42. One school had a total of 37 in that time period.

### ***Research Question #1:***

***What are the geographic, community socioeconomic, community racial composition, and school type (private vs. public) characteristics that constitute the high school football economic sub-sector in the U.S.?***

Table 4.1 below provides the breakdown of schools and the communities of these schools including the school population, percentage of students who identify by racial category, privately funded or publically funded, community demographics like population size (by ZCTA),

Table 4.1 School and School Community Characteristics for All Schools that Appear in the Dataset						
School Characteristic		Total Observation	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Total Number of Schools		433				
School Population Total		3,118	1,344.00	1,431.00	801.77	
Racial Proportion (% of Students Who Identify as...)						
	Black	3,172	12.20	23.38	26.60	
	White	3,172	50.89	47.27	30.42	
Public vs. Private						
	Public	2,741				
	Private	431				
Community Characteristics						
Community Type						
	City	998				
	Suburb	1,274				
	Town	336				
	Rural	521				
Educational Attainment (ZCTA)						
	Bachelor Degree or more	3,158	25.25	29.34	16.75	
Community Population Total		3,170	27,489.00	29,189.85	16,803.74	
Racial Proportion (ZCTA) (% of Individuals Who Identify as...)						
	Black	3,169	9.80	18.86	22.06	
	White	3,169	74.20	68.06	22.81	
Median Income						
	ZCTA	3,150	51,943.50	57,565.09	24,465.75	

percentage of population who identifies by racial category, income levels, and percentage of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher.

***Geographic.*** There is great variation from which individuals are recruited from including size of their communities. Population of size ranges from 23 to 113,916 people within a single ZCTA. Community types provide further insight into where the four market types are located. There are 1,274 schools located within the suburbs, 998 schools in cities, 336 in towns, and 521 schools located within rural areas.

***Community Socioeconomic Characteristics.*** The areas the schools are located within have varying income levels. Median incomes at the ZCTA geographic level range from \$2,500 (a small neighborhood in Baton Rouge) to \$183,656 with a median income of \$51,944. There are some areas that have 100% of individuals living in an area who have completed a university degree. Nonetheless, the average percentage of residents who possess a bachelor's degree or higher is 29.34%. However, the range for this variable is quite large suggesting a high level of variation in educational attainment across communities.

***Community Racial Composition.*** There is also a great deal of diversity across communities at the ZCTA. The racial composition of these ZCTAs varies. The median percentage of individuals who identify as Black is 9.80 % with an average of 18.86%. Further, the median percentage of individuals who identify as White are fairly higher 74.2%, with an average percentage of 68.06%. However, when looking at the median percentages across ZCTAs, the mean percentage of individuals who identify as White is quite larger than individuals who are Black. Nonetheless, these ZCTAs have a varying degree of racial composition.

***School Type and Composition.*** There are 431 private schools and 2,741 public schools represented within this data. Schools ranged from a low of 2 students to 4,830 students with a median of 1,344 students. The median percentage of students who identify as White is the highest at 50.89% while the percentage of Black students is 12.20%.

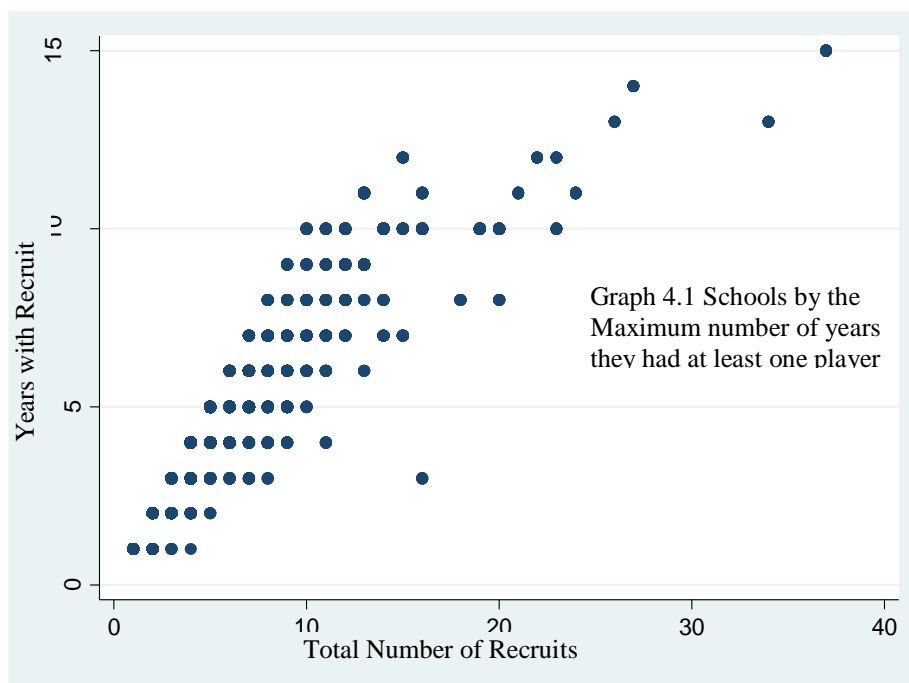
## Market Types

### ***Research Question #2.***

#### ***How many schools are producing consistently? Are there levels of production?***

In order to construct the market type variable, the maximum number of years a school had a recruit was determined. To further distinguish schools the total number of recruits each school produced in total across all years was also determined. Placed on a scatter plot, as the Graph 4.1 below shows, a natural division of the schools is evident.

As shown in the Graph 4.1 there appears to be three levels the data separates out into. On the Y-axis, the number of years is shown providing three delineations which provides the natural separation of the data by 0 to 5, 6 to 10, and 11 and more years. However, the bottom row of dots



represents one year in which those schools had a player recruited. Therefore, four types have been created; there is the *1 and done market* types or the schools that only appear once over the 17 year period. This type is composed of 1,751 schools or 55.2% of the data. They span across all 47 states with one state having 182 of these *1 and Done* market types. (11.94%) are private. Schools in within this market type produced a minimum of 1 player and a high of 4 with a median of 1 player being recruited.

There are 1,255 (39.56%) schools that fall within the classification *low production market* types. The *low production market* is any school that produced at least one recruit over 2 to 5 years. This market type had 4,033 players recruited from schools within this classification. They span across 42 states. One state consists of 185 of these market types, however the median number of these types per state is 14.5 and an average of 29.88. Schools within this market produced a minimum of 2 players with a high of 16 players and a median of 3 players.

The *high production market* type consists of 153 (4.82%) of the schools. A school is classified as a *high production market* when they had at least one recruit in 6 to 10 years. This market type accounts for 1,517 players who were recruited in this time period. This market type only ranges across 26 states. The minimum number of recruits these schools produced was 6 and the high was 23 with a median of 9 players were recruited from these schools.

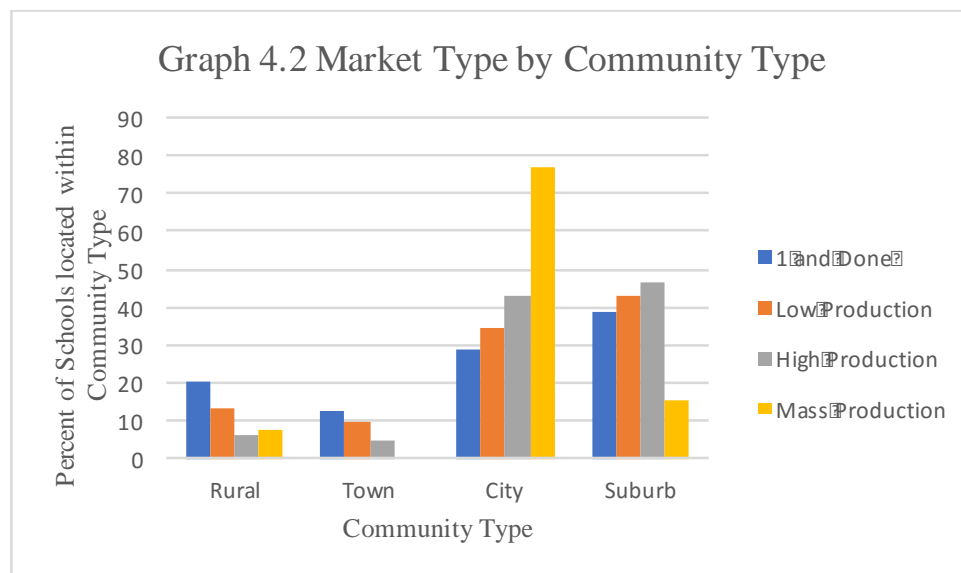
There are 13 (0.41%) schools classified as *mass production market types* across 7 states. Two states (California and Florida) have 4 markets while the rest each have one. These 13 schools produced 284 players in the 17-year time span. The minimum number of players produced from schools within this market type is 13 with a high of 37 and a median of 22 players.

There are 7,670 players recruited within this time period of which 23.94% were recruited from *1 & Done* markets, 52.58% from *low production markets*, 19.78% from *high production markets*, and 3.7% players were recruited from *mass production markets* during the 17-year span. However, the rate of players produced by the various market types shows that while the *mass production markets* produced a small percentage of the overall recruits, they produced 284 players in total or an average 21.85 players a school. Similarly, the *high production markets* are composed of 153 schools but produced 1,517 players or an average of 9.92 players per school.

### ***Research Question #3:***

***Are there differences in the market types across geographic regions?*** The *1 and Done* market types are located within rural communities (20%), towns (12.32%), cities (28.76%), and suburbs (38.93%).

However, as graph 4.2 shows the more productive a market they are more likely to be



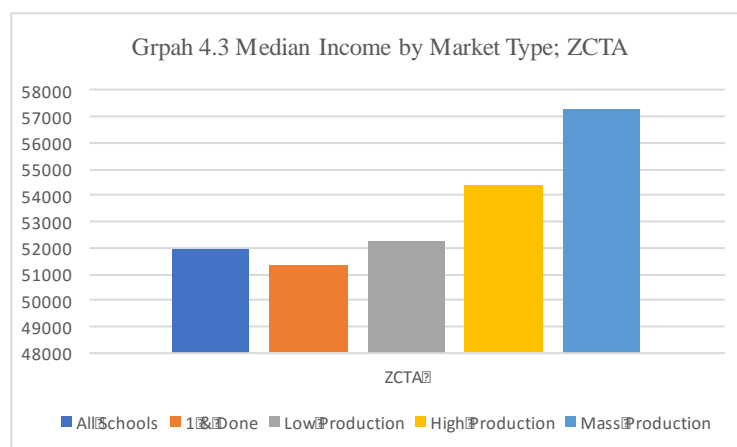
located within a city or suburb. There is a gravitation towards cities (34.41% for *low production*, 43.05% for *high production*, and 76.92% for *mass production*) and suburbs (42.77% for *low production*, 46.36% for *high production*) the more productive the market type.

Areas where *1 and Done* market types are found to have an average ZCTA population of 27,613 people while the *mass production markets* are located in areas that have an average of 42,949 people.

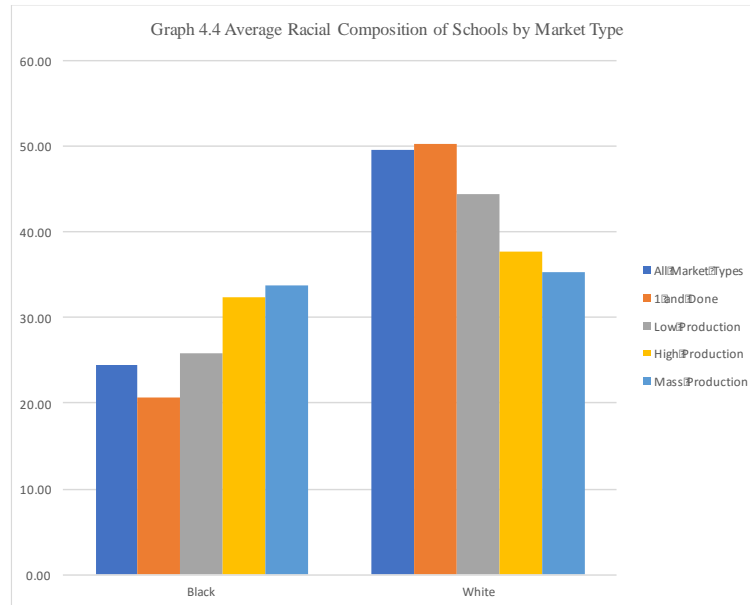
**Research Question #4:**

***Are there differences in the market types across community socioeconomic characteristics?***

A similar pattern occurs with the ZCTA and county level median incomes. As graph 4.3 shows the level of income for the area the market is located rises substantially as the market type becomes more productive. The *1 and Done* markets are located within reasonably wealthy neighborhoods as the ZCTA median income sits at \$51,345 and ranges from \$14,631 to \$190,048. In comparison to the *low production markets* are located in areas that have a higher median income of \$52,244, but what is not captured in graph 4.3 is the considerably lower floor of \$2,500 and a lower ceiling of \$160,000. Nonetheless, as the market type increases in productivity the median income of the area also increases.



**Research Question #5:**



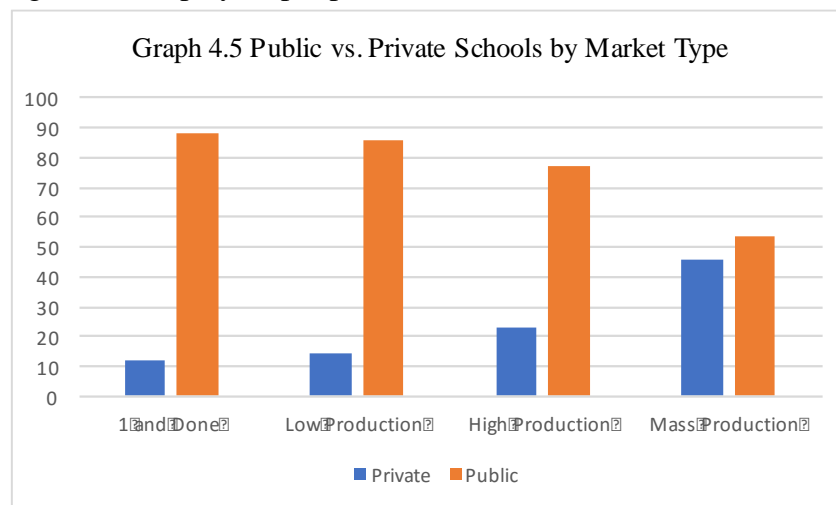
***Are there differences in the market types across schools?***

As expected with increased population there is also a positive association between market type and the student population size of the schools. If the school is classified as a more productive market it has a higher student population on average. Further, as graph 4.4 shows, it appears the more productive a school is, the share of White students in the student body is lower (35.22% for schools classified as mass production compared to 50.24% for schools within 1 and done schools), on average, in more productive market types while the number of students who are Black is higher (33.76% for schools classified as mass production compared to 20.76% schools classified as 1 and done). This trend is also true when examining the ZCTAs' population where these schools are located. There is a lower share, on average, of people who are White (48.48%) as schools become more productive while the average share of individuals who are Black is higher (28.91%) within ZCTAs.

The share of private schools is higher the more productive the market type. Graph 4.5 shows as the market type encapsulates more productive schools the proportion of schools that are private increases from 11.94% within the *1 and Done* market types and trends towards a larger

proportion (46.15%) of private schools composing *mass production markets*. Although, the proportion of private schools rise as the markets become more productive there are still relatively few private schools in comparison to public schools overall. Within the *I and Done* market type 209 private schools are represented, 181 within *low production*, 35 within *high production*, and 6 within the *mass production markets* respectfully.

The number of players produced at private schools within the *I and Done* market type is 223 (average of 1.07 players per private school within the *I&D*) while 1,613 (average of 1.05 players per public school within *I&D*) were produced at public schools. 610 (average of 3.37 players per private school within the *LPM*) players were produced at private schools within *LPMs*, 396 (average of 11.31 players per private school within *HPM*) at *HPMs*, and 117 (average



19.5 players per private school within *MPM*) at *MPMs*. Public schools within the *LMP* classification produced 3,423 players (average of 3.18 player per public school within *LMP*), the *HMP* classification produced 1,121 players (average of 9.5 players per public school within *HMP*), and the *MPM* classification produced 167 players (average of 23.86 players per public school within *MPM*).

#### ***Research Question #6.***

***Are there differences in the market types across community racial characteristics?***



When examining the racial composition of the ZCTAs of the market types, the same trends are noticeable. As the market type becomes more productive we see a higher mean percentage of individuals who identify as Black while the mean proportion for individuals who are White is lower, on average, but still remains the highest percentage represented.

***Research Question #7: Does geographic, socioeconomic, and school characteristics predict a school's market type classification?***

When these indicators are placed in a multinomial regression to determine how they predict one variable's influence on a school's likelihood of being classified as a particular market

Graph 4.6 Multinomial Logistic Regression - Market Type, School, and ZCTA Predictors						
			Number of Obs.		3,022	
			LR chi2(36) =		343.54	
Log Likelihood =			Prob > chi2 =		0	
			R2 =		0.0658	
	Low Pro		High Pro		Mass Pro	
	RRR	P> z	RRR	P> z	RRR	P> z
Public School (=1)	0.429	0.000	0.125	0.000	0.022	0.000
Total Student Population	1.000667	0.000	1.001	0.000	1.002	0.000
Percentage of Black students	1.007	0.016	1.025	0.000	1.062	0.035
Percentage of White students	0.999	0.755	0.999	0.930	1.027	0.197
Town	1.239	0.204	1.751	0.286	0.00	0.984
Suburb	1.093	0.47	1.888	0.096	0.442	0.525
City	1.079	0.574	2.161	0.047	2.858	0.359
Total ZCTA population	1	0.99	1	0.882	1	0.188
Percentage of Black residents	1.013	0.017	1.015	0.173	0.988	0.666
Percentage of White residents	1.006	0.176	1.008	0.405	0.985	0.541
Bachelors or higher	1.007	0.095	1.009	0.319	0.935	0.057
Median Income	1	0.208	1	0.835	1	0.142
Constant	0.236	0.002	0.007917	0	0.0004	0.001

type, there are a number of statistically significant predictors. This includes school type predictor (public or private), the total student population, the percentage of students who identify as Black, and whether the community type is classified as a city.

When holding all else constant, when a school is public the risk of it being classified as a LPM is 0.429 times compared to a 1 and done school. The risk of it being classified as a HPM is

0.125 times when compared to 1 and done school and 0.022 times of being classified as a MPM type.

For every 1 unit increase in the total population of the school, when controlling for all other variables, the risk rises by 1.001 times for a school being classified as a LPM school, 1.001 times for a school being classified as a HPM, and 1.002 times for a school being classified as MPM. When holding all else constant, when the percentage of Black students within a school rises by 1 unit a school is 1.007 times more at risk of being classified as a LPM, 1.026 times more at risk of being classified as HPM, and 1.062 times more at risk of being classified as a MPM when compared to a 1 and done school.

Racial characteristics at the ZCTA level are statistically significant when determining the risk of a school being classified in a certain market type. When a ZCTA has a 1 unit increase in the percentage of Black residents, a school is 1.013 times more at risk of being classified as a LPM and 1.015 times more likely of being classified as a HPM. There is no racial predictor that is statistically significant when comparing 1 and done schools to schools within the mass production market.

The only time community type is statistically significant is when comparing HPM schools to 1 and done schools. When controlling for all other known predictors, a school is 2.161 times more likely to be located within a city and be classified as a HPM school when compared to a 1 and done school in a rural school.

### **Chapter 4 Summary**

A variety of univariate analyses and a multinomial logistic regression statistical model were completed within this section. Overall, this data spans 17 years and has collected information on 7,670 players who were recruited to a NCAA Division I university. These players

attended schools located in 47 different states (including DC), 994 counties, and 2,871 zip code tabulation areas (ZCTAs). These players were recruited from 3,172 schools the majority of which were public school. Most players were recruited from suburban schools with cities being the next largest community type. It appears players attended schools in communities of varying wealth and racially diverse areas.

As this study is seeking to understand productivity of schools, separating them based on the consistent production of at least 1 recruit a year four types were created. There are the 1 and done, low production, high production, and mass production market types. Looking at the differences between these types, schools that are higher in productivity appear to be within cities, have higher income levels, and see a smaller share in the percentage of individuals who identify as White and a larger percentage of individuals who are Black. Further, as schools become more productive there is a rise in percentage of private schools. When these variables are placed in a multinomial regression model, and 1 and done schools are used as a reference market, there is an increased likelihood schools will be classified as a low production, high production, and mass production market when they are a private school, when a school has a larger total number of students, and when the share of Black students is greater. Schools located within cities have a higher risk of being classified as a high production school. In the next section, these results will be discussed in relation to the research questions, hypotheses, and the theoretical framework discussed above.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The purpose of this research project has been to explore and analyze the landscape of high school athletics particularly interscholastic football with the intent of understanding the production of high school football recruits within a theoretical approach conceptualizing the players as products sold within markets. It appears there is a great diversity among schools where athletes are being recruited from, however if the school is a private school, located within a city, has a higher percentage of students who are Black, and has a larger student population seems to increase the productivity of a school. These findings simultaneously support while also contradict the cultural narrative surrounding football within our society. Further, the number of schools consistently producing recruits is significantly higher than hypothesized.

While this study has a number of limitations, it is believed this is the first step towards better grasping and understanding where players are being recruited from and if there are certain common characteristics enveloping these areas. From the number of research questions posed and based on previous literature several hypotheses were created. The research questions constructed included an exploration into the geographic, socioeconomic, and school characteristics of all schools as well as determining if any of these characteristics were more salient in predicting the likelihood of producing more recruits. It was speculated there would be 10 or fewer schools who produced players consistently every year, schools would be located in low income, urbanized, predominantly Black communities and public schools, and finally, schools with these characteristics would be classified as more productive. The results to these questions and the hypotheses will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

There is a pervasive cultural narrative within our society painting collegiate football and basketball players as hailing from low income, urbanized, predominantly Black communities and

schools. However, a number of recent studies show this cultural narrative maybe a cultural myth. Dubrow and Adams (2015) examined the socioeconomic and family structure of players who were in the NBA. They found players were more likely to be in the NBA if they were from higher socioeconomic families. Alison et al. (2016) examining the likelihood of a player being drafted to the NFL found players who came from lower income, predominantly Black neighborhoods were more likely to be drafted to the NFL than Black players who were not. Indirectly, Alison et al. also showed the number of players coming from higher income neighborhoods was greater than players coming from lower income neighborhoods. Farrey (2017) found the percentage of first generation college athletes across all sports had diminished from 2010 to 2015.

This study has found players who were ranked within the top 500 recruits on 247sports.com from the years 2000 to 2016 attended schools in a wide variety of community backgrounds. For instance, zip code tabulation areas, which encompass approximately 39 blocks on average, have an average Black resident population of 24.46% while the average percentage for White residents is 49.53%. These two numbers stand in contrast to national statistics as the nation is still predominantly individuals who identify as White (77.1%) and currently roughly 13.3% individuals who identify as Black. The number of schools located within suburban areas is 1,274 compared to 998 within cities. Overall, these suburban schools also out produced the number of players the city schools did. These ZCTAs are lower than the national average for individuals who have received a bachelor's degree or higher. According to the U.S. Census 33% (Ryan and Baumann, 2016) of Americans now possess a bachelor's degree or higher whereas the average percentage for individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher by ZCTAs within this study is 29.34%. Further, the median incomes for the ZCTAs within this study are significantly

higher than the national median income per person. According to the St. Louis Federal Reserve the national individual median income is currently at \$30,240 per person, while this study found the ZCTA median income per individual to be \$51,944 per person (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2016). The school characteristics also provide some insight into the diverse communities' players are being recruited from as it appears players are being recruited from larger public schools. To note, the number of private of schools within this data is higher than the national average. Currently, private schools compose roughly 10% of all schools across the country. Within this data set private schools represent 14% of all schools. Further, students from private schools compose 9% of pre-K to high school students nationally. Within this study approximately 18% of all players recruited came from private schools. While this study did not delineate school types such as charter schools, boarding schools etc. future research should examine how school type may affect a school's likelihood of being classified as a more productive school. Further, there are a number of states that have adopted school choice initiatives. States' educational policies affect the production of a school.

While none of these findings strikingly contradict, or confirm the results of previous studies they do provide interesting insight into the landscape of interscholastic football. Based on these results it appears players are not only being recruited from low income, predominantly Black, urbanized communities and schools. Players are being recruited from a wide variety of neighborhoods based on socioeconomic and racial characteristics. However, it could be as Farrey (2017) discusses, many player's families will send their kids out of their community in order to receive not only a better education but also a better athletic education improving their opportunity of being recruited. More research needs to be completed in order to determine if there is an increase in particular school types or community types over the 17 year span.

Nonetheless, these statistics begin to show those matriculating from high school into university do not only come from low income, predominantly Black, and urbanized communities. This may be a result of what Dubrow and Adams (2015) and Farrey (2017) discuss as the increased specialization and training at a younger age. While athletic opportunity was seen as a viable option for socioeconomic uplift in previous generations, in order to participate at the highest levels today may take starting from a particular socioeconomic status to be able to tap into early training and athletic development. It appears using this snapshot of various community and school indicators players are being recruited from middle class, racially diverse, urban / suburban areas. This challenges the cultural narrative surrounding collegiate football which often paints players as being from low income, urbanized, predominantly Black neighborhoods and schools. This cultural narrative may be a cultural myth perpetuated as it fits within a larger national imagination of who and what a person of color is and where they come from. This data suggests football players do not fit within that myth and a more nuanced conversation regarding who is participating in this sport needs to occur.

As stated previously there are a number of lists developed by internet bloggers and sports writers compiling who they believe to be high school powerhouses and factories across the nation. This study has sought to systematically determine schools who have been consistently productive. Operationalizing the production of schools by having at least one player recruited to a NCAA Division I university a year, four types were created. These four types included schools that appeared once, 2 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, and 11 or more years. While there were only 13 schools within the mass production market type (11 or more years), the number of schools within both the high production (6 to 10 years) and mass production market types (166 schools) was significantly higher than hypothesized.

The characteristics of these types shed further light on where players are being recruited from. For instance, the 1 and done schools tend to be located within schools composed of more students who are White whereas the student racial composition of schools becomes more diverse as the school becomes more productive. The same holds true when examining the ZCTAs racial composition. Interestingly, the median income levels rise as the school becomes more productive.

These schools, whether they are private or public, are known for their ability to matriculate players to the next level as the data shows they have established themselves as a market. Therefore, the players who are able to compete at these schools are consistently transformed from athletes into products eventually bought and consumed at the collegiate level. These markets have been able to refine their ability to manufacture recruits. This study has shown there is an abundance of schools producing collegiate football players consistently across this country. Further research needs to be conducted to continue to understand where these markets are, if the number of these markets are growing, and the effect this has on the players, who are high school students, holistically.

Based on the multinomial logistic regression model performed to determine which predictors increased the likelihood of a school being classified as more productive compared to a 1 and Done school, having a higher Black student population and being in a larger school are the only indicators that increase the likelihood across the market types. Being a private school increases the likelihood of being classified as a more productive market type and being in a city increases the likelihood of being classified as a high production market type compared to a 1 and Done school. An understanding of these results could be the one forwarded by Farrey (2017). There is a growing Black middle class and there is a growing trend of parents placing their kids



in training and development at an earlier age which is a significant cost. Therefore, these results may suggest those players who are being recruited from private schools could be from middle class families who are able to place them in better academic and / or athletic schools. Stunting the ability of this study is the fact the individual player information is not known. Thus, individual information regarding socioeconomic, geographic, and racial background is limited.

Performing a preliminary content analysis of the most productive schools provides some insight where this study falls short. St. Bonaventure High School is a private catholic school located in Ventura, California. As listed on their website the school is composed of 550 students of which 41% are Caucasian and 3% are African American. Examining the team for football it appears roughly 50% of the team is African American. St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida is a private Catholic high school. They consist of 2,190 students of which 51% are White and 9% are Black. Unlike St. Bonaventura HS, they do not have a photo of their football team readily available on their school website. However, an archived photo was obtained for the 2014 varsity team. The team again appears to be 50%, if not more students who are Black. As one last example, Buford High School located in Buford, Georgia is composed of 1,210 students of which 14% are Black students and 58% White students. The Buford High School team appears to be roughly 30% composed of Black students. On each high school website their athletic identity, particularly football, was a prominent feature.

For the two private schools, athletics and the atmosphere created round athletics appeared to be marketing tools for the school. Further, all of the websites highlighted players who have been recently recruited to play at the collegiate level. What these websites do show, is the prominence of these athletes at these schools. Therefore, it appears these schools have embraced their athletic identities including their ability to matriculate athletes to the next competitive level.

These schools are advertising their ability to produce top products to be used by universities. However, these were quick analyses of which further research needs to be conducted.

It is important to reiterate this athletic-market economy conceptual model does not position individuals as existing within an exploitative state. Rather, the athletic-market economy is forwarded as a conceptual model for understanding the transformation of individuals into commodities within the athletic world. If fair compensation is provided in return for the use of these commodities or if individuals willing participate within these markets with the intention of pursuing certain goals there is nothing inherently problematic with these relationships. It is when unfair compensation or forced capitulation to the system is present these relations become problematic.

While this study is limited in the inferences it is capable of making it does provide a number of insights. Players are being recruited from a variety of community and school types from across the nation. When these schools have higher percentages of Black students, are in larger schools, are private schools, and are in urbanized areas they tend to be more productive. Nevertheless, the amount of schools producing players regularly is significantly higher than the anticipated number (10) of schools hypothesized. While there are those schools who produce players at an exceptional level (almost every year), there are 166 schools consistently producing a quarter of the football players recruited to NCAA Division I universities. Thus, this study does add context that markets have formed over time and some schools are producing a large portion of recruits within the top 500 recruits every year.

With increasing media attention in the form of recruiting websites, ESPN and other networks broadcasting nationally televised games, apparel companies providing sponsorship deals, the commercialization prevalent within the professional and collegiate levels appears to

have seeped into the interscholastic ranks of football. This study does not purport to suggest the number of productive schools is related to these, nor is this study inferring there has been a rise in the number of these schools. This study is the first step in understanding the answers to those questions. There is a higher number of markets than anticipated producing players consistently across the country.

### **Conclusion**

Despite high school athletics cultural importance within our society there has been little work investigating interscholastic sports in a nuanced fashion, especially as athletics has become increasingly more commercialized. High school athletics, especially basketball and football, are no different. Athletic apparel companies are sponsoring schools, ESPN and other major networks are broadcasting nationally televised games, there are entire websites and magazines devoted to covering high school basketball and football. There have been some ethnographic explorations into high school sports. However, these schools were regular schools competing with the players who matriculated into school through the community. There has been little conversation regarding the schools who are receiving these sponsorships, having their games televised, who have their players appearing on recruiting boards the most. The purpose of this study is to begin the exploration and analysis of the interscholastic landscape of football to tease out if there are schools exceeding others at producing top talent. This is viewed as the first of many steps towards gaining a better understanding of elite high schools, the high schools that transform their players into commodities.

Using a theoretical framework couched within economic sociology, the argument of high school athletes as labor, who are bought and sold in markets, was forwarded. Marx's definition of estranged labor, "labor produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as a

commodity” (Marx, 1994 pg. 59). This transforms the laborer into a commodity as the individual is valued for their production rather than their humanity.

Within a market oriented society, like American society, products and services are administered on markets. According to Aspers (2011) there are a number of key components to a market including, an exchange, competition among three or more actors (buyer and seller), clarity of the market’s purpose, market culture, clear value for the products, and the market’s existence over time. As it has already been established players are the commodity being bought and sold, there is an exchange when a player is given a scholarship in order to perform at the next level, there is clarity the market is about the acquisition of players, and players have a clear value. The last component needing to be determined is whether there are markets existing over time. Using data acquired from 247sports.com player information was obtained for the top 500 recruits over 17 years. Attaching U.S. Census, American Community Survey, and National Center for Educational Statistics data, school and community characteristics were determined. This information showed there were numerous schools consistently producing recruits. These schools were classified into four market types in order to determine if there were differences in these schools and the communities these schools are located within. Overall, recruits are coming geographically, racially, and economically diverse locales, however if a school is private, if a school’s student body has a large percentage of Black students, if a school’s total student population is higher, and if the school is located within an urban area they are likely to be more productive.

These findings both support and contradict previous literature and the cultural narrative surrounding football. While more productive schools may have higher percentages of Black students, overall students are being recruited from schools with high percentages of White

students. Further, as schools become more productive the share of the market becomes increasingly composed of private schools located in urban ZCTAs with high median incomes. This may suggest these high schools are able to attract talent from within a local area or region rather than being constrained to a school district or neighborhood. Therefore, players competing at these schools may already be transformed into products, being used to help these schools achieve athletic success. On the other hand, it is entirely possible players who are attending these schools are from these areas and as Farrey (2017) argues the growing Black middle class and increasing importance of early training may be leading to a decrease in matriculation from high school to university for players in lower socioeconomic positions. Unfortunately, this is only speculation as a major limitation of this study is not possessing individual player information. Nevertheless, there are sustained markets producing NCAA Division I football players consistently and at a high rate. This is the first step in what will hopefully be many in better understanding the landscape of interscholastic football.

### **Implications Policy and Practice**

This study was stunted by a lack of information on a number of levels. While it is not expected high schools would collect information on individual students, having comprehensive graduation rates and or academic success indicators for both private and public schools would provide more insight into the quality of schools players are being recruited from. Further, providing other information regarding extracurricular activities and who is participating in those activities would be of significant benefit. Therefore, the policy implications recommended are not for schools specifically but rather the government agencies tasked with collecting and managing these data. Asking for and ensuring comprehensive data is collected can provide extensive opportunity for researchers to begin looking across schools to determine indicators

leading to differing school experiences. Further, a private company such as 247sports has an immense opportunity collect and manage data on the players they are reporting on. While a highly-concerted effort needs to occur to ensure proper ethics are followed in collecting and managing this data, the collection of socioeconomic, family structure, family residence, and racial characteristics would be valuable information for continuing to understand the patterns of youth participation in a commercialized age.

Along the same lines, there is a deficit in research and documentation regarding the history of high school athletics. Particularly, documenting the years between the inception and official corporation of high school athletics to the presents. The National Federation of State High School Athletic Associations (NFSA) should take the time to explore how interscholastic athletics have changed over the last 100 years. Further, state athletic associations and the NFSA should form a committee to investigate and better understand the commercialization of high school athletics.

This study has shown there are a number of schools producing NCAA Division I collegiate football players consistently at high rates. Although, producing significant numbers of athletes is not problematic, coupling this information with the knowledge top universities routinely admit athletes who are academically incapable of being admitted, calls into question the educational commitment these high schools have to their players. The NFSA and state athletic associations have an obligation to ensure these schools are preparing these athletes academically as well as athletically. Within this study, 166 schools produced at least one recruit a year for 6 or more years. Collectively these 166 schools produced approximately a quarter of the 7,670 players who were recruited. It is important these schools are monitored to ensure educational and holistic development is occurring. Therefore, it is recommended the NFSA and

state athletic associations implement and administer a holistic development survey to students who participate for high producing schools (if not all schools). Vierimaa, Erickson, Cote, and Gilbert (2012) provide a youth development measurement framework for sport for development programs. They forward a 4Cs (competence, confidence, connection, and character) approach to measuring holistic development through a number of different measurements. This would not only provide a starting point for understanding the pressures students experience regarding their roles as an athlete, but also provide insight into what these educational institutions are doing to ensure their students are developing holistically.

### **Future Research**

There is a need to determine if and how the landscape has changed over time. Have the number of private schools increased or decreased over these 17 years? Have the community types changed over the 17 years? Have the racial demographics of the communities' players are recruited from changed over time? Have the number of markets increased or decreased over time? There is also a need to begin understanding how the commercialization of interscholastic may have had an effect on the number of high productive and mass productive schools. There is little known about these highly productive and mass productive schools. Beginning to understand some of the characteristics of these schools was the goal of this study, however there is much more to learn. Within this study, a brief content overview was provided of a couple of the schools classified as a mass production market. A proper in-depth content analysis of these schools would provide vital information about these schools, their relation to athletics, and the role their athletes play within their school community.

While there have been a couple of ethnographic studies completed following football and basketball teams, these were average schools, not known for their athletic dominance. In-depth

studies examining high productive and mass productive schools provides a unique opportunity to determine the culture of a highly productive athletic department but also the intersection of the educational environment and the repercussions of such a relationship.



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