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The dream of social mobility: ethnic minority players in Danish football clubs

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The purpose of this essay is to inquire into the prospects of social mobility among young ethnic minority males who are at the start of their career in Danish football clubs. The essay is based on a local field study which involved interviews with 10 talented ethnic minority players, and eight coaches and club leaders in two ethnic minority clubs, three clubs that we refer to as transit clubs, and one premier league club in a Danish provincial city. Bourdieu's concepts are used to describe the players' chances of social mobility and the observed disparity between the prospects for ethnic minority players from a ghetto area and those from other parts of the city. According to Bourdieu, the players compete not only for a position in a particular football team but also for an improvement in their position within a stratification system (in this case, the field of football). The analysis shows that the possibility of social mobility is here dependent on whether the players' physical capital is acknowledged and converted into cultural, social and economic capital.

Introduction

Young working-class men have long regarded a career in professional sport as a stepping stone to upward social mobility, and a chance to enhance their social status and economic wealth.¹ Football, in particular, tends to recruit participants predominantly from a working-class background.² The high salaries are one of the reasons these youngsters are attracted to a career in soccer, but the myths surrounding top level sport and the apparent potential for dream fulfilment play a role, too.³

It is common for young people at school and post-school levels to identify with sporting personalities. Moreover, ethnic minority youngsters seem to be particularly motivated to establish a career in sport. Primarily, this is likely to be because sport is one of the few spheres which has provided black people with a chance of upward mobility. Secondly, success in top level sport is seen as an alternative to stigmatization in society.⁴ However, as Hoberman has pointed out, stereotypes of black physical superiority are enacted in sports.⁵ Moreover, studies have shown that racial discrimination is an integrated part of sport, for instance through stacking: the discriminatory allocation of positions in football and other team sports.⁶

In the long run only a tiny proportion of the ethnic minority youths who dream of social mobility will make a decent living out of sports. A sports career is often without financial security or structure, injuries can result in retirement as well as loss of income and even disability, and the career is short. Also, for ethnic minority players,

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there are remarkably few opportunities to progress into management or coaching positions. Maguire points out that even if some ethnic minority players succeed, the stratification structure (and cultural categorization) in the sports system may not change.⁷ Moreover, the players' social mobility may be transitory and last only while their talents are regarded as relevant to the specific clubs.

But, despite this cautionary note, there are plenty of studies that show that youths from households with low socio-economic conditions as well as those with minority status are highly motivated to follow a career in football. The literature points out, however, that it is not only the length of a football career that can dampen dreams of social mobility. According to Collins and Butler, children from socially deprived areas do not have sufficient support (social capital), to provide them with equal opportunities to perform in high-performance sport in England.⁸ Moreover, Eitle and Eitle point out that lacking cultural capital (in this instance not participating in culturally recognized classes and activities) results in an increased motivation to participate in sport among Afro-Americans, but this then means that they start becoming dependent upon sport for finding a career.⁹

This essay focuses on young males from ethnic minority backgrounds who are attempting to establish careers in Danish football clubs, and considers their chances of becoming more socially mobile. Bourdieu's concepts will be used to analyze whether the players have their football skills acknowledged and converted into the fundamental forms of cultural, social and economic capital that altogether enhance their social recognition.

Sports participation and mobility of youngsters from a ghetto area

The background for our current study is a survey of participation of 10–16-year-old youngsters in sports in a suburb of a Danish provincial city – a suburb that politically has been identified as a ghetto area.¹⁰ The inhabitants share low socio-economic living conditions and around half of the population have an ethnic background other than Danish.¹¹ The survey shows that immigrant and descendant boys in the area are very active in sports; 93.6% of immigrant boys and 89.5% of descendant boys, compared to 87.4% of the Danish boys from the same living area participate regularly in sports.¹² The most popular activity for these boys is football (75.2% of immigrant boys and 80.8% of descendant boys play football). The boys mainly play self-organized games around the streets and green areas of their neighbourhood, rather than going to a dedicated football pitch or attending clubs with scheduled training sessions and competition fixtures. Club leaders inside and outside of the ghetto area believe that there is a considerable pool of talent in the suburb and that it is a collective dream of the area, as well as for the boys individually, to become professional footballers.

The survey has also given us access to geographical information about the places where the youngsters participate in sports. We found, for instance, that only around 30% of the groups made up of descendants and immigrant boys and girls participate in sports outside the ghetto area. For various reasons, ethnic minority youngsters seem to be more restricted in their spatial movement compared to ethnically Danish youngsters of the same age and from the same living area. This has implications for those wishing to pursue a career in football as there are relatively few sports clubs in the ghetto area and none offer top level football. Moreover, the few football clubs that do exist tend to be ethnic minority clubs where the Arabs, Turks, Kurds etc. meet. So, it

is a fundamental premise for boys who dream of becoming professional footballers that they must travel outside of the area (where they feel at home) and into football clubs, where ethnic Danes are the majority.

Thus the essay enumerates the challenges facing young male football players from ethnic minority backgrounds, living in both the ghetto area as well as other parts of the city, who would like to become professional footballers. The players' geographical mobility to Danish football clubs are considered as attempts to obtain social mobility.¹³

Method

Through the survey we have identified a number of clubs that ethnic minority boys often frequent when developing their football careers. These include two ethnic minority clubs in the ghetto area, three clubs that function as transit clubs and the city's premier league club. Initially, we contacted an experienced coach and club leader in the principal ethnic minority club in the ghetto area and the officer of talent development in the premier league club. These key informants were interviewed along with six experienced coaches from the aforementioned clubs, all of whom had worked with ethnic minority boys. The key informants also helped us to identify 10 talented players with ethnic minority backgrounds. In so identifying 'talent' we follow in the wake of Bourke. Bourke, who suggested the concept of pre-elite talent, recruited her informants by asking key personnel in the context of origin and destination to identify young talented football players by evaluating their playing potential.¹⁴

In our study, the players' ages range between 14 and 21 years. According to theories of career transitions in sport, the players are at key stages in their talent development, investing in the possibility of, and moving into, high achievement and adult sport.¹⁵ In other words, the youngest players we have interviewed are moving into the world of elite sports and all that entails in terms of demanding practice, while the oldest players are making the transition from youth to senior sport.

All of the players have a Muslim background but their religious practice varies widely (as was illustrated during Ramadan). Moreover, their minority backgrounds are also varied with players having Bosnian, Turkish, Palestinian and Iranian descent. The young players can also be further divided into two groups since five of them live in the so-called ghetto area while the other five live in other parts of the city. This provides us with an opportunity to compare the challenges facing football talents who are based in an ethnic minority neighbourhood and have low socio-economic conditions with those who come from a more privileged background.

All 18 interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour and a half. In the interviews we used two semi-structured interview guides for coaches and players, respectively. The interviews were transcribed shortly after the meetings, which meant that information from earlier interviews could be used to inform the later discussions. The fact that the under-representation of ethnic minority players in Danish top-level football is criticized in the Danish media might have made the coaches and club leaders tight-lipped. Moreover, the ethnic minority players might have been reluctant to talk to us about the challenges they meet since in most cases they were interviewed in their present clubs after a session of training. A further factor to take into consideration is that both of the interviewers (the authors) are Danish academics and are therefore considerably different from the players. Still, our interest in the single informant and the challenges that they faced created a positive relationship with the

players and coaches alike, and it is our general impression that the interviews gave us relevant and valid information.

Theory of social mobility

Theoreticians of social mobility distinguish between *intergeneration* mobility, that is when children move to higher or lower classes than their parents, and *intrageneration* or career mobility which describes the possibility for individuals within a generation to improve (or not) their social standing.¹⁶ It is the latter that is relevant for us. A theory of social mobility for our purposes must be able to explain what constitutes social mobility in a sports career and the ways in which the chances of social mobility vary for specific athletes. We have, therefore, chosen to apply Bourdieu's classical social theory of concepts of field, habitus and capital.

From Bourdieu's perspective social mobility is a change of position within a stratification system. In other words, social mobility has to do with the chances that individuals with a specific habitus and capital have to improve their position in a specific social field. In this case, the athletes struggle to achieve a literal position on the field in a sports game but also to become acknowledged in a specific social context.

In his work Bourdieu has argued on several occasions for a sociology of sport and he has also compared social life with sports.¹⁷ When interviewed by Wacquant, Bourdieu drew an analogy between a social field and a game. From his perspective, the two things differ only by the fact that unlike a sports game the social field is not created deliberately and the rules are often not explicit.¹⁸ In both situations there is, however, strong competition between individuals or groups, and in both instances the ultimate aim is to win.

In Bourdieu's perspective gaining social mobility is concerned with an individual's advancement through accumulating capital and, equally importantly, having that capital acknowledged by peers in a specific social field. In other words, it is no good having capital if it is not acknowledged by others in a way that benefits one's social position. In this case, our informants are footballers, who have accumulated a physical capital that we will define below. What is interesting here is whether their physical capital is acknowledged in the field of football and converted to the fundamental forms of cultural, economic and social capital. From Bourdieu's perspective, it is both the composition and the sum total of the capital that determines an individual's chances of social mobility, which explains why not everyone has an equal chance of social mobility.¹⁹

The quest for capital

For this study, the most important form of capital is what has been called physical capital or bodily capital.²⁰ Bourdieu does not use these concepts; instead he talks about embodied capital as a sub-division of cultural capital.²¹ This essay would argue that the ethnic minority players have embodied a physical capital that is not immediately linked to the cultural capital that is acknowledged in the field of football.

Our starting point for analyzing the ethnic minority players' chances of having their capital acknowledged and converted so it results in social mobility is Schilling's definition of physical capital:

The *production* of physical capital refers to the *social formation* of bodies by individuals through sporting, leisure and other activities in ways which express a class location and which are accorded symbolic value.²²

Physical capital is a form of capital that we must engage in physical activity to obtain. It is, for instance, power, speed and agility. As Schilling points out above, physical capital is affected by our particular social position and can be acknowledged in a way that enhances its value. In our analysis, we question whether the ethnic minority players have their physical capital acknowledged in the field of football and whether they are able to convert their capital into forms that enhance their chances of social mobility.

Bourdieu has defined three fundamental forms of capital; namely economic, social and cultural capital.²³ Economic capital is money and property rights while social capital in short is social network. The definition of cultural capital is a bit more complicated. Cultural capital can exist in three forms; embodied, as long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; objectified, in the form of goods such as books, pictures etc.; and institutionalized, for instance as academic qualifications. Particularly interesting for us here is the embodied form of cultural capital that must be accumulated personally and over time can become what Bourdieu calls culture, cultivation, *Bildung*.

The possibility of obtaining social mobility through a football career is linked to the players' opportunities of converting their physical capital into the fundamental forms of capital. First of all, the question is whether the players' physical capital can be converted into cultural capital (in this context to learn to behave according to the more or less explicit rules of a Danish football club). Secondly, the question is whether the players' physical capital can be converted into social capital; that is the building of social relationships with fellow team members and a wider network that can support the development of their career. Thirdly, there is the question of whether it is possible to convert physical capital into economic capital (for instance by gaining financial funding for training and ultimately by winning a contract that gives access to a steady salary).

Taking into account Bourdieu's view that it is the sum total of the capital that determines an individual's chances of social mobility, it was essential for this study to consider not only the players' physical capital, but their opportunities to convert this into all three forms of fundamental capital. Previous studies have focused on young football players lacking development of cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications, and there have been numerous discussions about players focussing on their careers rather than following through with their education.²⁴ This essay considers all the forms of capital that are relevant for the social mobility of young ethnic minority players who hope to follow a career in professional football.

The field of football

The current organization of football as a particular sports discipline in Denmark can best be understood when it is defined as a sub-field of Danish sport in general.²⁵ A sub-field that is defined by its own logic, rules and regularities.²⁶ Football in Denmark is underpinned by the logic of competition, but it is also governed by ethical rules and regularities for the development of the field. Together this creates a stratification system that affects the evaluation of the capital of the ones who enter the field.²⁷

The logic of competition is expressed in the fact that football players generally are divided into teams and levels with possible promotion or relegation. This has been reinforced in recent times following the professionalization, albeit rather late, of football in Denmark in 1978. Media coverage and commercialization also reinforces the logic of competition as fundamental for the football clubs and coaches, who must produce results to sustain the interest of the media and support from sponsors.

In fact, the logic of competition also underlies many of the strategies pertaining to elite level football since the aim is to optimise talent development, the education of coaches, facilities etc, so that the competitiveness of Danish football will be reinforced. Recently, the Danish Football Association (DBU) started a licence scheme for youth football under which clubs are awarded an A+, A or B licence; depending on their facilities, coaches' level of education and expertise, milieu to talent development, etc.²⁸ The teams are then delegated to play in a specific league so that the logic of promotion and relegation is suspended in order to promote talent development. It is our impression that the regulation of development is becoming increasingly important in Danish football and that it may have the potential to create more opportunities for clubs to invest in the development of talent from ethnic minority backgrounds. But, there is still some way to go since many of the coaches in youth elite football are volunteers and/or former players. DBU's coach training programme has a shortcut for former Division 1 and Premier League players, which doesn't include tuition on working with ethnic minority talents.²⁹ In addition, the coaches are influenced by the logic of competition since winning is the most obvious way for them to demonstrate their skills as a coach.

In addition to the logic of competition, football in Denmark is governed by rules that manifest themselves both in the football culture and in individual games. This 'ethical code' provides a culturally specific way of understanding the game. The DBU's code includes 10 ethical rules of the game along with guidance on more general sporting etiquette such as the acknowledgement that the success (and in more abstract terms, reputation) of the team is dependent on the effort and behaviour of the individual on and outside of the field. The code is an attempt to make a number of rules explicit that to some extent are already implicit norms in the field, and to make these rules count for all of the players, coaches, club leaders, referees etc.³⁰ The rules have to do with showing respect, avoiding provocation and doping, protecting the game from racism and corruption, following the rules, accepting defeat, performing well in terms of social behaviour, sharing your knowledge of the game, taking responsibility, knowing the consequences of your behaviour, and showing that football is about feelings, excellence and honesty. Many of these rules are directly opposed to the logic of competition or what Møller has characterized as the crucial code of winning and losing in sports.³¹ So, what actually happens is that club leaders and coaches will emphasize the ethical code verbally, but on the pitch the rules seem to become more negotiable. Overall, the ethical rules can be seen as norms for the cultivation of the game which are emphasized by the persons in charge of the players' socialization.

Later in our analysis we will describe how the norms of team sports behaviour, in particular, function as a specific cultural capital in the field, and that the coaches from Danish football clubs often find that the talented young males with ethnic minority background lack this capital. The coaches and club leaders we interviewed can be seen as key representatives of the field of football. In the daily training of youngsters in various clubs the coaches are the administrators of the logic of competition, the overseers of development and the regulators of the ethical rules.

Physical and cultural capital

The starting point for our analysis is ethnic minority players' physical capital, which is challenging to describe since it is held in the form of embodied skills. In the interviews we have asked the players to describe what they are particularly good at on a football field, while the coaches were asked to describe what it is that makes the ethnic minority players that they know talented. The answers are remarkably consistent. Both the players and the coaches point out that ethnic minority players in general possess speed, (ball) technique, power and that they perform well individually. The convergence in this description might be due to fact that the coaches (and we as interviewers) contribute to a categorization of ethnic minority players as a uniform group, and the players themselves mis-recognize this cultural categorization and therefore reproduce it. In Bourdieu's words, a symbolic violence that is accepted because it is not recognized as violence.³²

The coaches also noted that ethnic minority players often get to participate in talent training in football clubs at a later stage than ethnically Danish players.

Generally the ethnic minority players are very technical, they are also very fast. However, they lack a good understanding of the tactics – also virtually none of them have had the opportunity to follow an elite training programme from a young age and so they tend to be lacking in coordination and tactical game play; this is definitely something that the players need to work on when they arrive in the junior and youth teams. (Peter)³³

Besides pointing out speed and technique as skills of ethnic minority players, the coach above also mentions skills that he feels are lacking; that is tactical understanding of the game and coordination, which the players seemingly do not possess as part of their physical capital. To understand this observation we need to remember that for Bourdieu embodied capital is a form of cultural capital and it is a form of capital that takes time to accumulate. In other words the physical capital that young males with ethnic minority background possess from playing many self-organized football games cannot automatically be converted into the cultural capital that is considered as appropriate in club football. In particular, the players from the ghetto area often get to the football clubs relatively late – in their teenage years – compared to their ethnically Danish teammates, and this apparently has an impact on their physical training as noted above, but it also seems to affect their cultural understanding.

This is reinforced by the fact that the football skills of ethnic minority talents are described in a way that links their physical capital with common stereotypes about young males with immigrant background: ethnic minority players cannot control their temper, they are aggressive, etc. Below a coach describes what he sees as the difference between ethnic minority players and ethnically Danish players:

If we have a bunch of [ethnically] Danish footballers and a group of second generation immigrants, the Danish kids find it easier to become team players, whereas the immigrants are more individualistic and more self focused; I can do it, I will do it, and that is a problem. (Esben)

Here the coach seems to think that being individualistic and self-centred is an internal cultural characteristic of immigrants. The coach's preference for team players can be interpreted as a consequence of the logic of competition: all players have to perform well to win the game. At the same time this can be understood as a product of the

ethical code of behaviour according to which all players should be team players. The key point is that ethnic minority players' physical capital is not seen as complete. Even though some of their football skills are highlighted as extremely good, it is the skills that are associated with a process of cultivation in the clubs that are presented by the coaches as inadequate. Ethnic minority talents must learn not to focus on their individual competence, they must downplay their individual will and temper, they must take turns, both on and off the playing field, e.g. when collecting balls and water etc.

In particular, it is our interviewees from the ghetto area who identified as not having the informal education that would provide them with an understanding of the unwritten rules, or etiquette, of a Danish football club. For example, there is an expectation that in cases of absence from training, a player will send their apologies. Also, the coaches have their own expectations concerning appropriate behaviour. For instance a coach considered an ethnic minority player's apology for absence, because of a family birthday, as a lack of interest in the football team. Young males with an ethnic minority background living in other parts of the city are more successful at converting their physical capital into cultural capital. They seem to have a better basic understanding of the style of behaviour expected in the football clubs. This brings us to an analysis of the players' social capital.

Social capital

Here the question arises as to whether young males with an ethnic minority background can develop a supportive social network for their football career. Being able to convert physical capital into social relationships with teammates, coaches, club leaders, etc. could provide the players with a chance of enhancing their social status. Several of our informants living outside of the ghetto area such as Furkan, Nenad and Hakan were already acquainted with some of their teammates and have quickly become part of the social network surrounding their football team. Their relationships with teammates also provide them with precedents for the ways to relate to the coaches and club leaders. In some cases, the fathers of the players also contribute to the development of their son's social position. For instance, Ceyhun's father has become involved in voluntary work in the club and thereby has gained social respect that his son also benefits from.

For our informants living in the ghetto area the establishment of social relationships in the clubs is a bit more complicated. Maahir and Onur are examples of young males with ethnic minority background who feel alienated. Onur mentions that he has not mastered the language and therefore does not understand the instructions as fast as his Danish teammates. Meanwhile Maahir says:

I have sometimes played with players from the national team, players who have a contract and so on. But I always felt like a foreigner when I was with these players. That is how I felt, anyway. (Maahir)

Maahir expresses the feeling of being different from the ethnically Danish majority in such a way that it remains unclear for us whether he is stigmatized by others or himself. Scambler and Hopkins distinguish between enacted and felt stigma and points out that felt stigma is complex because it refers to a fear of stigmatization.³⁴ Here, a fear of stigmatization seems to be a central part of the explanation why Maahir does not develop social relationships with his teammates.

Players like Maahir and Onur have moved between different transit clubs and premier league clubs (in and outside the city) without settling down and establishing a social network that can support the development of their football career. Also Osman, Gamal and Semih seem to have kept very close ties to their family, friends and minority group. Some of our oldest informants, Semih and Maahir, have returned to an ethnic minority club in the ghetto area. The feeling of belonging is a common motive for participating in ethnically separated clubs, where one shares manners, habits and language with his teammates and often also with the coach.³⁵

A coach in the ethnic minority club describes their role in evaluating things when footballers, such as the informants described above, return 'home' after playing for one or more of the city clubs.

Of course when we say to our players that they can move to a different club, we always leave the door open so that they can come back. When they do come back I always have a little chat with them and ask them why they have returned. When they tell us the reasons it is nearly always because they feel isolated. (Amin)

Our informants from the ghetto area often feel alienated and without social relationships in the majority clubs, whereas the players living in other parts of the city are more likely to develop social relationships in the clubs. A supportive social network seems important for the players' persistence in their football career.

Relevant here is Portes' idea that social capital can have both a positive and negative side,³⁶ and Putnam's distinction between bridging social capital – outward looking and crossing social cleavages, and bonding social capital – inward looking and reinforcing identities in homogenous groups.³⁷ In this case it is the bridging social capital that can contribute to the development of social relationships between minority and majority youngsters. The bonding social capital occurs both with a positive and negative side: positive in reinforcing the identity of ethnic minority youngsters once they return to ethnic minority clubs, and negative in the sense that it reinforces the isolation of ethnic minority talents.

Economic capital

The last part of our analysis has to do with whether the boys are able to convert their physical capital into economic capital. The challenge here is first of all whether young males with an ethnic minority background are able to raise the economic resources to develop their football career and in the longer run gain a contract with a regular salary.

First of all, economic capital is particularly needed for the players living in the suburb (the ghetto area) because many of them have low socio-economic resources. For instance:

You can see because of my background – my father works in a factory and my mother is unemployed, and I have 3 or 4 brothers already, it is difficult anyway, this just is the way things are, regardless of whether I am the world's best footballer. (Onur)

As described above, Onur is resigned about his socio-economic situation and family support. In contrast, the family of another informant, Serdar, has moved from the countryside to a city apartment very near to the premier league club. Before the move the family used a lot of resources transporting their son to the daily training. As Kay points out, family support for children's' sporting talent can be both practical

(providing finance, time and transport) and emotional.³⁸ Successful players such as Furkan and Serdar have a lot of support. Their families encourage them in difficult times and share the joy over their achievements.

Some of the subjects of our interviews were able to win economic funding as a result of their physical prowess. For instance, some clubs would arrange transport to training, or ignore the fact that they have not paid their membership fee. This kind of practical support is important for the young players' development, and ultimately their chance to improve their economic standing. So, for example, some of the players living in the ghetto area have been invited to attend test training for a short period in premier league clubs in other parts of the country. Given this opportunity, Osman, who is young and has a supportive family, was able to take advantage of the opportunity, whereas Onur only managed to arrange his transport the first couple of times. Moreover, due to the low socio-economic conditions of many young males of ethnic minority background, many are required to work for family businesses from a young age. For instance, Maahir was responsible for one of his family's shops while playing in a premier league club. Later he was offered the opportunity to move to Sweden and train with a Swedish club, with the prospect of receiving a contract, but he could not leave the family's firm. However, this may have been an excuse for a lack of willingness to move to another country where he might feel even more alienated from the majority society.

But, in turning down this invitation he also missed one of the crucial opportunities for ethnic minority talents to convert their physical capital to economic capital through obtaining a contract. One of the players living in the city, Serdar, holds a contract and another one, Furkan, thinks he ought to have a contract. Furkan and several other players suggest that there is a discriminatory practice taking place.

When I think of the contract and such like, it's as if we Danes with different ethnic backgrounds need to be twice as good as the [ethnically Danish] Danes in order to get a contract. (Furkan)

Furkan's statement might be due to the fact that he feels deselected (or not fully acknowledged) as a football player or that he is simply not skilful enough. The interviewer asked Furkan's coach if he thought it was realistic for Furkan to expect to get a contract? The coach answered:

Yes, I think so – well maybe. But he has to show that he is worth it – and I think he knows that. On the other hand I know of some coaches who say that if he doesn't play his part in defence, they won't use him at all. (Henning)

Interestingly, Furkan's possibility to convert his physical capital to economic capital (in the shape of a contract) is dependent on him proving that he can perform within the informal rules of team sports behaviour. Here it is helping out the defenders and in more general terms understanding the game's etiquette of taking turns, performing before enjoying, proving instead of telling your worth etc. that is pointed out as inadequate and seemingly will lead some coaches to deselect the player. This is paradoxical, since Furkan and other ethnic minority players are very dependent on their coaches' investment of time in developing their talent and crave acknowledgement from their coaches.

In spite of the fact that talent development is becoming more regulated in Danish football, our material indicates that club leaders and coaches are reluctant to allocate

contracts to ethnic minority talents. Following the logic of competition, it is too risky and lengthy for them to invest in the development of ethnic minority players since it involves an investment of time to educate them into club culture, while they are under constant pressure to prove their success as coaches. Several of the coaches admit that they might tend to choose an ethnically Danish player rather than one with an ethnic minority background because then you know what you get. Moreover, most of the coaches have a background as volunteers or football players and seldom a professional education relevant for working with young males from ethnic minority backgrounds. As one of the club leaders says, it takes resources (both economic and professional) if the clubs are really to make progress in their work with ethnic minority talents.

Summing up

Seen from our perspective, young males with low socio-economic and ethnic minority background do not have a good chance of promoting their social mobility through a football career. First of all, their often self-acquired skills of speed, technique, individual performance, etc. are seen as inadequate, since these skills have not been accumulated together with an understanding of Danish football playing style and club etiquette, and several coaches think it would take too long to change this behaviour to make it worth their while. Secondly, several of the minority players find it difficult to develop social relationships with teammates, coaches and club leaders, who could equip them with a supportive social network and an enhanced social status in the field. In fact, the players from the ghetto area tend to feel like outsiders and instead return to their original social networks. Thirdly, young males with ethnic minority background often have few economic resources and the coaches are wary about allocating contracts to talents with an ethnic minority background.

As pointed out earlier, it is the composition and sum total of one's capital that underpins social mobility. In the case of the young footballers under discussion, the players' physical capital must be combined with the relevant cultural capital (the etiquette of the football club) and social capital (supportive social network), which altogether seem to enhance the players' persistence and chance of obtaining economic capital and thereby attaining social mobility.

To account for the fact that ethnic minority players' capital is composed in a way that does not seem to enhance their social mobility, it is relevant here to sum up the difficulties the concept of ethnic capital, which is defined as:

the whole set of ethnic characteristics – including culture, attitudes, and economic opportunities – that the children in particular ethnic groups are exposed to. I want to argue the obvious: ethnic capital influences the socioeconomic development of children.³⁹

What is interesting here is that George Borjas, the American researcher of migration and social mobility, points out that the capital young males of ethnic minority background possess is not always a benefit, but may in some circumstances have negative effects. Within a specific ethnic environment (ghetto or city, poor or more privileged, and more or less encompassing) they acquire a set of ethnic characteristics that influence their chances of obtaining social mobility. In Bourdieu's words, young males with ethnic minority background are equipped with a distinct habitus that is difficult to change.

Even if some of the ethnic minority talents are successful, it does not mean that the chances of social mobility for ethnic minority players as such are enhanced. The most successful player, Serdar, describes how his success developed after he, with support from a coach, went through a period of cultivation: learning how to contribute as a team player and downplay his individual performance. Other studies have also shown that the success of ethnic minority players might not create bigger variety in the field; but rather reinforce the cultural categorization or underemphasize differences in heritages.⁴⁰

Moreover, the possible social mobility that ethnic minority talents can obtain as football players is transitory, since it is their physical capital that is the source of their acknowledgement. Some of the players might manage to convert their physical capital into an understanding of the team code, into influential social relations or economic wealth. Still, it is a fundamental problem for all football players that their careers are short. These problems are reinforced for ethnic minority players since they do not have precedents for taking over coaching or management positions in Danish football clubs.

Concluding perspectives

Even though we do not see good prospects for social mobility in our study we cannot dismiss the possible pattern breaker and the fact that some players might even develop their skills better under resistance. For example, the French football player Zinedine Zidane was brought up in an underprivileged area with working-class parents from Algeria. As France's highest-paid athlete he has become a symbol of the hopes of integration of ethnic minorities in France but he has also remained a contradictory figure in public discourse.⁴¹ As Maguire has described, ethnic minority players (in his study on Afro/Caribbean black Britons) can and have become socially mobile as a result of either contest or sponsored mobility evident in professional soccer.⁴² Maguire points out that black working-class athletes need sponsored help to a greater extent than their middle- and upper-class counterparts. It is also our impression that ethnic minority talents from low socio-economic conditions and ghetto areas would need substantially more help than ethnic minority youngsters from a more privileged background.

Even though Bourdieu with his set of concepts attempts to integrate our understanding of the ways in which social structures are present in, and developed through, practice, he has been criticized for giving too little attention to the agency of the individual.⁴³ An agency of the individual football player that our analysis has shown must be supported, for instance, by the coach's willingness to make a more long-term investment in the development of ethnic minority players. Moreover, Bourdieu developed his set of concepts in Algier within the frame of the French class system and there is therefore a tendency that analysis inspired by Bourdieu does not cover social change and thereby gives very negative prospects for social mobility. If the chance of social change is to be available for young ethnic minority males like those interviewed for this study, football clubs and other sponsoring institutions seem to be crucial agents of change that can contribute to the field by developing explicit policies for managing the training of ethnic minority players, setting up talent schools in ghetto areas, and employing personnel that are qualified to work with young males from ethnic minority backgrounds.

For the moment, however, we must conclude that the dream of social mobility that drives so many ethnic minority talents, particularly those from low socio-economic

conditions, is not likely to be fulfilled in Danish football clubs. It is, as Maguire argues in a wider context, a myth that sport enhances social mobility.⁴⁴ A myth that is linked to the idea that sport is good and has the capacity to integrate ethnic minorities.⁴⁵

Further research must be done to inquire into the (at the moment mainly implicit) strategies of integration in Danish sports clubs, reflecting the surrounding society ethnically. Danish club leaders and coaches tend to expect ethnic minority players to adapt to their clubs' cultures. However, with the growing number of football migrants and the presence of ethnic minority players, the clubs may yet be challenged to develop their management strategies to work in a multicultural context.

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Notes

1. Carrington, 'Social Mobility', 3.
2. Eitle and Eitle, 'Race, Cultural Capital', 133; Collins and Buller, 'Social Exclusion', 425.
3. Bourke, 'The Dream', 406.
4. Carrington, 'Social Mobility', 11–12.
5. Hoberman, *Darwin's Athletes*, 5.
6. Various studies cited in Woodward, 'Professional Football Scouts', 358–61.
7. Maguire, 'Sport, Racism and British Society', 95.
8. Collins and Buller, 'Social Exclusion', 438.
9. Eitle and Eitle, 'Race, Cultural Capital', 141.
10. Programbestyrelsen, *Programbestyrelsens strategi mod ghettoisering*, 8.
11. Epinion, *Evaluering af Urbanprogrammet*, 39f.
12. Agergaard, 'Unge idrætsdeltagelse og integration', 8.
13. Bell, *Middle Class Families*, 164.
14. Bourke, 'The Dream', 400.
15. Bloom, Coté and Stambulova, cited in Wylleman, Alfermann and Lavalée, 'Career Transitions in Sport', 10.
16. Bell, *Middle Class Families*, 21.
17. Bourdieu, 'Sport and Social Class', 819f; Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 156f.
18. Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation*, 98.
19. Munk, *Social mobilitet*, 11f.
20. Schilling, 'Educating the Body', 653f; Wacquant, 'Pugs at Work', 65f.
21. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', 243.
22. Schilling, 'Educating the Body', 654.
23. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', 243; Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation*, 119.
24. Eitle and Eitle, 'Race, Cultural Capital', 123f; McGillivray and McIntosh, "'Football is My Life'", 371f; McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh, 'Caught Up', 102f.
25. Agergaard, 'Dualities of Space', 261–2.
26. Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation*, 104.
27. Munk and Lind, *Idrættens kulturelle pol*, 24.
28. 'DBU Licenssystem – til gavn for spillernes udvikling'. http://www.dbu.dk/print/print_news.aspx.
29. According to a telephone conversation with Peter Rudbæk, manager of education in DBU.
30. 'Etisk Kodeks – for fodbold organiseret under Dansk Boldspil-Union', 1, edition December 21, 2006. http://www.dbu.dk/print/print_page.aspx..
31. Møller, 'What is Sport?', 12–13.
32. Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 84–5.

33. All names of informants have been changed and detailed information about the informants' club affiliation, age etc. is not given due to the issue of anonymity.
34. Scambler and Hopkins, 'Being Epileptic', 33.
35. Elling, De Knop and Knoppers, 'The Social Integrative Meaning', 422.
36. Portes, 'Social Capital', 1f.
37. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 22.
38. Kay, 'Sporting Excellence', 156.
39. Borjas, *Heaven's Door*, 148.
40. Burdsey, "'One of the lads'?", 764.
41. Dauncey and Morrey, 'Quiet Contradictions of Celebrity', 303.
42. Maguire, 'Sport, Racism and British Society', 95–6.
43. Emirbayer and Mische, 'What is Agency', 964.
44. Maguire, 'Sport, Racism and British Society', 94.
45. Krouwel *et al.*, 'A Good Sport', 167.

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