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The success culture of Nordic football: the cases of the national men's teams of Norway in the 1990s and Iceland in the 2010s

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ABSTRACT

Every now and then - but with surprising regularity - small nations break through to the international level in sports and attract the attention of the global sports world. This paper focuses on two such occasions in men's international football: the Norwegian national team in the 1990s and Iceland's national team in the 2010s. We conducted case studies of the two teams, which consisted of interviews, observation of games and published material. The key emerging themes were how sport successes in Norway and Iceland took place amid the developing professionalism of sport, and how both teams built on important elements from amateurism and professionalism in their successful sporting conquests. We argue that some of the team's characteristics were founded in a specifically Nordic mentality, which at the right time with the right message manifests in great achievements. Finally, the study follows the decay of the Norwegian national team in the new millennium and suggests that Icelandic football could face the same decline in results as Norway did 20 years earlier.

Introduction

One of the more surprising results in men's national team football, in recent years, has been the ascent of the Icelandic national team to the top of the international football scene. This success was highlighted in 2016 when Iceland qualified for the European Championship and reached the quarterfinals of the competition by eliminating England in the eight finals. The rise of this tiny nation – with a population of 330,000 – to prominence in the world's most popular sport attracted worldwide attention. The history of sports, however, is filled with similar successes of underdogs. The men's national team of Norway – from a country of around 4.5 million - attracted similar attention in the 1990s when it qualified for two World Cup finals and one European Championship final and reached second place in the FIFA ranking three times.

Iceland and Norway, with Denmark, Finland and Sweden, are Nordic countries. The Nordic countries share a tradition of social-democratic values, the welfare state and sports organization as a voluntary movement. Hallmarks of the Nordic welfare model are a large public sector, a generous and re-allocating allowance system and extensive state involvement in matters of human welfare (Bergsgard and Norberg 2010; Ibsen and Seippel 2010). According to Peterson (2008), the voluntary associations or People's Movements are regarded as the bedrock of the democratic system; participation in voluntary organizations has been seen as important in cultivating democratic citizens. This is manifested by extensive government support to voluntary sport organizations, both in the form of subsidies and by publicly financed sporting facilities (Bergsgard and Norberg 2010). The Nordic welfare model is noted for its universal and egalitarian principles. Voluntary organizations are thereby open to all (Peterson 2008). The principle of sport for all – especially in children's sports – is a natural consequence of this ideology.

A second characteristic of Nordic sport is its amateur ideology, inspired by English amateurism (Peterson 2008). According to Andersson and Carlsson (2009), the tradition of amateurism is probably the defining characteristic of Scandinavian sport. An important consequence of this impact is that up to the end of the twentieth century, professionalism was seen as something alien to Nordic sports (Peterson 2008). The amateur approach to sport applies to both Norway and Iceland. In Norway, football became professional in 1991, after being semi-professional from 1984 (Olstad and Goksøyr 2003). In Iceland, football still is at an amateur to semi-professional level. For this reason, Nordic sport policy has been ambivalent about elite sports. The strong focus in elite sports on competitions, results and performances could barely be reconciled with the idea of voluntarily organized sports as a sound, public health-oriented and broad 'People's Movement' (Bergsgard and Norberg 2010). Thus, elite sports were seldom accepted as an independent cultural phenomenon. Activities related to elite sports were instead legitimized in political rhetoric with reference to their ability to attract more children to sporting activities (Bøje and Eichberg 1994 in Bergsgard and Norberg 2010).

This paper focuses on two cases of Nordic success in men's football, where the cultural conditions were propitious at the time of national team successes: the Norwegian national team in the 1990s and Iceland's national team in the 2010s. We approach each nation's sport success as a form of cultural production, situated in its sociocultural, organizational and historical context and evidenced in how the teams play (see e.g. Fine 2012; Halldorsson 2017; Thorlindsson and Halldorsson Forthcoming). Thus, we argue that the sociological and organizational context can be conducive to a national team's sporting success - in the form of supportive culture and traditions - and that such cultural capital is more effective at some points in the development of these teams than at other junctures. The overall aim of this paper is to examine the teams' successes by investigating the sociocultural and historical context of football in Norway and Iceland.

The cases

Norway

According to Larson (2001), until the early 1990s, Norway was a third-rate country in football terms. This is understandable; Norway is a country that has a relatively small population, is placed in the far north, and is traditionally a winter sport nation with an important part of its national identity linked to skiing, outdoor recreation and pole expeditions. However, in October 1990, the coach Egil 'Drillo' Olsen led his first match with the Norwegian national team against the World Cup quarter-finalists Cameroon. The Norwegian team won by an impressive 6-1, beginning the most successful years of Norwegian football (Holm et al. 1998).

In the last decade of the twentieth century, Norwegian football was competitive at all senior levels. The national team for men qualified in 1994 for the first time since 1938 for the World Cup finals, following up with making the round of 16 in the World Cup finals in 1998, and participation for the first - and so far the only - time in the Euros in 2000. The female national team won both Euros and World Cup in the 1980s and 1990s, and ended the period of Norwegian football success with an Olympic gold in Sydney in 2000. Even the U21 team won bronze medals in their European championships in 1998 (Larson 2001). The competitive results positioned the Norwegian team near the top of the FIFA rankings. From the starting point for this table in August 1993 until Drillo Olsen's retirement as national team manager in July 1998, Norway's average world ranking was 10th, and on three occasions peaking at second place (FIFA 2017).

Success for the national team coincided with strong international results from the leading Norwegian club side, Rosenborg BK, in the European Champions League. Rosenborg qualified for the Champions League eight years in a row, 1995-2002 (UEFA 2017). The highlight of these years was playing the quarterfinals against Juventus in the 2006/2007 season (Eggen 1999). In the national league, Rosenborg was nearly unopposed and won 13 consecutive titles from 1992 to 2004. Eleven of these titles were under the leadership of Nils Arne Eggen, who together with Drillo Olsen was the architect of this astonishing success for Norwegian football.

Iceland

In its first 65 years, Iceland's men's national football team had not had any real international success. The team had won the occasional game against better teams such as the 4-3 victory against the former Olympic Champion Sweden in 1954, but also experienced humiliating defeats, such as the 2-14 loss to Denmark in 1969. The Icelanders did not have any realistic chance of qualifying for the biggest competitions such as the European Championship or the World Cup finals. That all changed in 2011. The change was initiated by many factors (Halldorsson 2017), but it was the arrival of the experienced Swedish coach Lars Lagerbäck, who took over as the national team coach in October 2011 that marked the beginning of a new era in Icelandic football. At the time, Iceland was number 129 in the FIFA rankings.

The Icelandic national team made consistent progress under the management of Lagerbäck and later with his joint-coach, the Icelandic Heimir Hallgrímsson. The team reached the play-offs for the 2014 World Cup finals but lost to Croatia. Twenty-two months later, the team entered the history books for being the country with the smallest population to qualify for the Euros in 2016. The Icelandic team stunned the football world, not only by qualifying for the finals, but also by reaching the quarterfinals by defeating England. It is a big achievement for a small nation like Iceland to qualify for a major championship in a team sport like football – leaving larger and more prestigious nations behind – and the football team received a hero's welcome on its return to Iceland from the finals. Iceland reached its so far highest position in the FIFA-ranking at number 19 in July 2017 (FIFA 2017).

It was, however, the women's national team that first qualified for a major championship, the European Finals, which it achieved on three occasions; in 2009, 2013 and 2017, respectively. The Icelandic club teams have had limited success in European football where no team has made its mark in club competitions; no Icelandic club team has qualified for the Champions League.

Methods

This case study focuses on the men's national teams of Norway and Iceland during those peak periods, in the 1990s and 2010s, respectively. We approach these cases as both objects of study (a case within a real-life setting) as well as 'products of inquiry' (providing a description of the cases themes) (Creswell 2012, 97). We also took note of Howard S. Becker's question: 'what is this a case of?' where he implies that researchers do not really know their cases until the research project has been completed (Ragin and Becker 1992, 6). In other words, the research process is based on the interaction between ideas and evidence as the researcher goes back and forth between theory and data trying to accomplish understanding of social life and articulate theories.

We collect the data through multiple sources for the two aforementioned teams by relying on: (1) semi-structured interviews with coaches and players (three head coaches, three current players in the Icelandic team and one former player in each of the national teams); (2) conversations with people associated with the two teams; (3) observations of games played by the two national teams as well as league games in the respective countries; (4) published materials; and (5) our own experiences, as we grew up following our national teams.

The case study highlighted similar cultural themes in the two cases. In the findings section, we focus on how the sports successes of Norway and Iceland took place amid each country's progression in sport from amateurism towards professionalism and how both teams struck a balance of important elements from the two opposing ideologies (amateurism and professionalism) in order to secure these successes.

Findings

From amateurism to professionalism

Modern sports were formed from the amateur ideals derived from early nineteenth century England (Collins 2013). Amateurism can be presented as an ideal type in which sport should be played for its own sake, it should not be controlled by professional expertise, and sport should be played in a 'gentlemanly' way (Dictionary of Sport and Exercise Science 2006, 11; Collins 2013, 31). Those amateur ideals, which were present to different degrees in different countries, waned with the rise of capitalism in the mid-twentieth century in most of the biggest European countries and well as in the USA. Collins (2013) argues that the end of the twentieth century saw the end of amateurism in sport in general where no major sport described itself as an amateur sport.

The professionalism that replaced the amateur approach to sport was built on the creation of professions - both for practitioners, various administrators and coaches - which in form, content and objective are very similar to other professions (Peterson 2008). A stark contrast can be drawn between the amateur and professional ideals of sport in that sports

has moved from being approached as play to being approached as work. Halldorsson (2017, 62) has described this transformation as follows:

The change from amateur sports towards professional sports represents an ideological shift, transforming relatively unstructured play without specified objectives to a more systematic form of play, resembling conventional work and involving more precise future goals that could be shared among players. This transformation towards professionalism is characterized by an increased emphasis on paid coaches, staff and players; the building of specialized sport facilities; and systematic talent development, which consists of sport specialization, standardized training and the utilization of scientific research from fields such as physiology, nutrition, psychology and business.

Thus, the ideology of sport shifted from unstructured play, based on fair play and intrinsic rewards, to a rational, systematic and standardized, extrinsic-motivated work and a winat-all-cost philosophy.

However, sports in the Nordic countries were defined by amateurism until the late twentieth century (Andersen and Ronglan 2012). According to Peterson (2008), amateurism impeded the process of professionalization of sport, which we know from other parts of the world. Hence, it is probably not a coincidence that Sweden, Denmark and Norway experienced improving results in football because of those transformations. Although Sweden achieved international success after the Second World War by becoming Olympic Champions in 1948 and finishing third in the 1950 World Cup and second in the 1958 World Cup (arranged in Sweden), professionalization did not begin for real until the Swedish Football Association abolished the amateur rule in 1967 (Peterson 2000). In the 1970s, Swedish club football achieved remarkable results in the European Cup with Malmö FF, followed up by IFK Göteborg in the 1980s. In the 1994 World Cup, the national team took home the bronze medal. In Denmark, the regulation of amateurism was lifted in 1978 (Gammelsæter 2009). The Danish men's football team was internationally recognized as 'Danish dynamite' at the World Cup in 1986 and became European Champions at Euro 1992.

Norwegian sports were affected by these new methods and the process of professionalization - as demonstrated in full professional football from 1991 (Olstad and Goksøyr 2003). In the late twentieth century, Norwegian athletes were generally successful. Central to this growing international success was the foundation of the Norwegian centre of elite sport, Olympiatoppen, in 1988-1989 (Augestad, Bergsgard, and Hansen 2006). The function of Olympiatoppen was - and still is - to coordinate a variety of deliverances needed for elite athletes and national teams. The organization offers professional competence in fields such as medical support, sport physiology, sport psychology and sport coaching. The foundation and centralization of elite sport in Norway coincided with a professionalization both on and off the football field. Even though the men's national team - unlike the women's - never have had a close connection to Olympiatoppen, the significance of the increasing professionalism this elite centre brings into Norwegian football cannot be underestimated.

The professionalization of sport also depends on abstract expert knowledge (Seippel 2010). This expertise is of value both internally in the profession and externally for the social status of the professions. More specifically, a state of full professionalization entails successful jurisdiction, meaning that groups of actors are legally and legitimately the only group allowed to perform certain tasks. As an example, the profession of football coaching on elite level requires a UEFA pro-licence. The same group of professionals will also have strong influence on the education legitimating this profession and research securing its knowledge base (Seippel 2010). In Norway, legitimating the profession was expressed by the foundation of the Norwegian Football Coach Association in 1986, with Drillo Olsen as one of the first members of the board. The Association collaborated with the Norwegian Football Association to advance the development of Norwegian football (Morisbak 2012). As early as the 1970s, the Norwegian Football Association developed a programme of coach education. After 1980, the number of educated coaches increased by more than 1000 per year (Morisbak 2012). At the same time, the football association invested in large-scale talent development. The player development model is based on regional teams with regular training sessions conducted with the best regional players at age 12-16, and from the age of 15 these players become a part of the selection process for the national youth teams. All these factors contributed to replace 'cheerful amateurs' with more professional coaches and leaders in Norwegian football.

However, those features of development towards professionalism in sport did not start to take place in Iceland until the turn of the twenty-first century (Halldorsson 2017). The development of Icelandic football rests on several actions and influences. First, the Icelandic football association (KSI) initiated the building of all-year football pitches with artificial grass and indoor football halls - partly paid for by grants from the European Football Association (UEFA). Second, at the turn of the century, football in Iceland became a year-round sport – until then athletes had played football in the summer and sports like team handball or basketball in the winter. Third, the Icelandic Football Association started an education programme for coaches. Iceland now has the highest number of UEFA-accredited coaches in Europe per participant. All coaches in Iceland are paid employees (but most of them work only part-time as coaches). Fourth, through regulations from UEFA, Icelandic clubs were obliged to put players under contract, shifting the paradigm of Icelandic football from play to work - similar to the Scandinavian countries in the 1980s. Fifth, with more money coming into Icelandic football - both from UEFA and through the globalization of football - the top league in Iceland has become a semi-professional league, where players are under contract and get paid some amount for playing – although most of them also work outside of football. Sixth, player (and coach) migration to and from Iceland increased. After the Bosman ruling in 1995, more Icelandic players started to play abroad (Magnusson 2000). By joining professional teams, the Icelandic players learned more about the methods of how to play, train and take care of their bodies. Those ideas and methods spread to other Icelandic athletes, re-establishing the sports culture in Iceland (see Halldorsson 2017). Likewise, the number of foreign players playing in Iceland increased. Finally, these developments resulted in more specialists in coaching, physiology, physiotherapy, psychology and training starting to work within Icelandic football.

The increased professionalism of Icelandic football was instrumental in bringing the men's football team to the top of the international scene and contrasted with the way in which sports were traditionally played and organized in Iceland. 'These are like two different worlds', argues former national team player and current staff member of the Icelandic team Þorgrímur Þráinsson. He added that, 'The players I played with [in the 1980s] were no worse in football than those we have today but what was lacking then

was the discipline and the "know-how" of the game which exists today. The 'golden generation' of players that formed the victorious Icelandic 2016 Euro team, grew up in the new and more professional environment of Icelandic football than their predecessors and benefitted from increased sports expertise, all of which made it possible for them to reach new heights with the Icelandic national teams (Halldorsson 2017). The arrival of Lars Lagerbäck as coach of the Icelandic national team in 2011 instilled a more professional approach to the Icelandic team in terms of team preparation and more systematic and disciplined play, and in the Icelandic Football Association (KSÍ) in terms of organization of the team environment.

It can be argued that the emergence of the Norwegian football team in the 1990s and the Icelandic team in the 2010s to the top-level international football scene took place at a similar stage in the professionalization process of the two nations. Those transformations were built on the same elements of stronger organizational structure, more focus upon coach education and player development, better facilities for training with the construction of artificial turf pitches (and indoor football halls), and a stronger belief in scientific principles for training and preparation. In both Iceland and Norway, we find what Chalip (1996) has called 'focusing events' that facilitated changes leading to a more professionalized football. Thus, the organization of football in the two nations became more institutionalized. Peterson (2008) underlines in this respect that the concept of professionalism also includes a strongly specialized organization where rationality, efficiency and predictability determine both organization and the actual sporting activities. In the following parts, we look into the playing style and the organization of play in the two teams.

How the teams play

At the peak of their success both the Norwegian team in the 1990s and the Icelandic team in the 2010s were built on similar playing characteristics: playing a disciplined and organized defensive football - based on a pragmatic approach, and exhibiting their 'Viking fighting spirit' and effective teamwork - built on the showing of strong characters. These are the hallmarks of teams which are making the best use of their limited resources.

The Norwegian team and the Icelandic team played a similar style of football. This style consisted of a thoroughly organized zonal defence, playing with low risk, a direct style of attack - mostly in the form of counter-attacks - and having a great emphasis on the structural and relational organization of the team on the pitch. This philosophy of football arises from scientific principles (Wilson 2008; Hjelseth 2009). Since the success of the English coach Herbert Chapman in the 1920s and 1930s, this style of play has been an important part of contemporary football. According to Giulianotti (1999), Chapman was the first manager in modern football who based his development of players and team on industrial deskilling. Hence, Giulianotti (with reference to Davies 1992) pinpoints him as the first manager with a Fordist style, founded in Chapman's view on how techniques to speed up industrial production could be used equally well to speed up the production of goals (Giulianotti 1999). In the pragmatic playing style, winning is all that matters (Wilson 2008). Pragmatism in football implies playing in a more 'reactive' style instead of being the team dominating with the ball.

The Norwegian ideologists of the football success in the 1990s, Egil Drillo Olsen and Nils Arne Eggen, have the philosophy of direct football in common (Olsen, Eggen, and Ulseth 2010). In Norway, Drillo's playing style is defined as 'efficient football' (Olsen, Semb, and Larsen 1994), and since the 1990s has been the be-all and end-all for football discussion in Norway. For Norwegians, the pragmatic and efficient style of play is familiar, since its fundament is the English football identity and playing style. As we know, England is the birthplace of professional football (Collins 2013) and according to Olstad and Goksøyr (2003); Norwegians are probably the biggest anglophiles in the world when it comes to football. Following the style of football from English pragmatics, Archetti (1998) defines the Norwegian style under Drillo as an exaggeration of the English way of playing. Archetti points out that Norwegians have an abiding and authentic passion for the English style of play, from the collectiveness and physicality, to the tactical discipline and the honest masculinity in the Englishman's game (Archetti 1998).

Iceland follows a similar tradition. Icelandic football has been under the great influence of English football and has adopted the traditionally English way of playing (Kuper and Szimansky 2014). With the appointment of Lars Lagerbäck as head coach of the Icelandic team in 2011, the structure and organization of the team – on and off the pitch – improved dramatically. Under Lagerbäck – and his joint coach, the Icelandic Heimir Hallgrímsson, – the Icelandic national team has become extremely disciplined, well prepared and organized. This is evident in training, according to staff member Þráinsson:

The coaches say at all meetings that we have the best defense in the world and they use statistics to prove their point. At team practices, the team goes through the same drills and movements again and again until the players learn them perfectly. It is repetition, repetition and repetition.

This could have been said about Drillo Olsen's national team 20 years ago. Hence, the appointment of Lagerbäck as manager for the Norwegian national team in February 2017 can be seen as a desire to revitalize Norway's success criteria from the 1990s (Telseth 2017). There is a commonality between the Norwegian team in the 1990s and the Icelandic team today, both in making the players believe in their teams' strengths and in using scientific principles to make the team better organized. The latter point was closely related to Drillo Olsen's extensive use of match analysis of both the Norwegian team and its opponents in the 1990s (Larson 2001). As a student at the Norwegian School of Sport Science in the early 1970s, Drillo Olsen had already started to analyse football matches. In his Master's thesis about goals in football, he applied statistical analysis to examine what was the most efficient way to create goals (Olsen 1974). His findings revealed that there was a greater chance of scoring when the opposite team's goalkeeper started with the ball than if your own keeper starting with it. This result implicates higher efficiency in goal scoring after winning the ball from your opponents than attacking with a possession-based style of play. This approach has been a basis for both Drillo Olsen's and Lagerbäck's management, characterized by their mastery of this way of playing pragmatic football. Their respective national teams have been able to exploit its competitive advantages, based on organized play, strong teamwork and physicality, for instance, playing long balls to a strong attacker, being physical and hardworking, and focusing on set pieces, long throw-ins and well-executed corners and free kicks. The teams have in this respect played to their strengths.

The scientific approach and pragmatic play arrived in Scandinavia with the English managers, Bob Houghton in Malmö FF and Roy Hodgson in Halmstad BK. They revolutionized Swedish club football in the 1970s, with close attention to planning and organization

(Andersson and Radmann 1999; Peterson 2000). This Fordist influence in Swedish football led to the distinction between 'joyful football' ('the Swedish way') and 'systematic football' ('the English way') (Andersson and Radmann 1999). The result of these distinguished models was 'the Svenglish model' (Peterson 2000), which in many ways personified itself with Sven-Göran Eriksson, highly acknowledged by his appointment as manager for the English national team in 2001. The Svenglish model found its way to Norway through Sven-Göran Eriksson's former assistant in IFK Göteborg, Gunder Bengtsson, who in 1983 and 1984 was the head coach for the Oslo club Vålerenga. According to Goksøyr and Olstad (2002), the Svenglish model of Bengtsson - based on systematic football and hard discipline - influenced Drillo Olsen's managerial style, so there is a distinct connection between Drillo and Lars Lagerbäck. Drillo claimed, when asked about similarities in their football philosophy, 'I do not know him that well but I do not know anything we disagree on'. Lagerbäck has cited the impact of Houghton and Hodgson upon his management style. In *The Telegraph*, Lagerbäck stated that when Bob Houghton and Roy Hodgson came to Sweden in the 1970s he was close to them because they brought something new (Bascombe 2016).

The 'primitive' football of Norway - and later Iceland - has had its critics (see e.g. Olstad and Goksøyr 2003). However, the coaches of those two teams understood that this was the only rational way of playing with such limited resources. The Icelandic national team coach Hallgrímsson retorted: 'If we were to play like Spain we would only be a lousy imitation of Spain and we would never achieve anything'. Drillo Olsen claimed on several occasions that Norway could not play like Brazil (Archetti 1998). The former Norwegian coach recently stated, 'The discussion in football about entertainment and aesthetics is mostly bullshit. Football is about winning and this is all about efficiency' (Thelen 2017). With this statement, Drillo Olsen reiterates the ideological line from Houghton and Hodgson. As Peterson (2000, 3) asserts:

Despite their inceptively very weak position, Hodgson and Houghton held an ace card in that their system was undeniably rational and effective. Because football is by definition a result-directed activity, this was, in the long run, a decisive factor.

Hence, results and pragmatism outweigh aesthetics for small and under-resourced football nations.

Team character

It can be argued that neither the Norwegian nor the Icelandic team had world-class players. According to Icelandic joint-coach Hallgrímsson, 'we don't have world-class players so we have to make up for the lack of skills in other ways'. Playing systematic and organized football is one way to compensate, but will not make a team competitive on the top-level international stage; small nations also need to build on teamwork and a collective fighting spirit.

Both the Norwegian and the Icelandic teams were built on similar characteristics in terms of team character. Internationally, Norwegian players were acknowledged as hardworking, professional, and physically and mentally strong. Many players had the traits associated with team captains. Drillo Olsen stated that the national team in the 1990s had many resourceful players, and it was important to create a team culture that was based on these players. The former national player in the period of Drillo, Øyvind Leonhardsen claimed that mentally strong, humble and hardworking players combined with an extreme intensity in the pressure play and a strong will to beat far more acknowledged football nations and

players, explained the success of the national team. 'To beat them, we understood that we had to run more and fight harder', Leonhardsen stated.

The Icelanders, as a nation, greatly value showing good character in sport, where good character consists of showing pride in playing for the nation, a strong fighting spirit, good teamwork and team morale, which among the players as well as in the national discourse is termed as 'playing with their hearts' (Halldorsson 2017; Halldorsson, Thorlindsson, and Katovich 2017). Icelandic footballer Alfreð Finnbogason states: 'I feel it is obvious when the Icelandic players meet in the national team that we come to play with our hearts for our nation'. These elements that build on having strong character in sports foster friendships among the players and result in effective team cohesion and teamwork on and off the field. 'I think the mental side is our biggest strength, we never give up' observes national team player Ari Freyr Skúlason. The coaches of the Icelandic team realize the importance of such character attitudes: 'We select such types of players for the national team. I think we couldn't do much if we didn't have players who give the extra effort', notes Hallgrímsson. Such themes of character have been central on many Icelandic national teams in other sports (Halldorsson 2017; Halldorsson, Thorlindsson, and Katovich 2017). In fact, it is a cultural trait of Icelandic athletes (Halldorsson 2017).

However, while the Norwegian teams wanted to win by all means necessary, the Icelandic teams also wanted to show what Goffman (1967) called winning 'the character contest'. Making the nation proud came first; winning came second (Halldorsson 2017). It is important to bear in mind that though Norway is a small nation, its population is 14 times Iceland's. A tiny nation like Iceland cannot be expected to win against bigger and more prestigious nations in terms of the final score, but its players can always show more 'heart' and win the character contest. Thus, winning the character contest came to be expected of Icelandic national teams (Halldorsson 2017).

In this respect, Lars Lagerbäck argues, 'The Nordic countries for me have always been more successful because of team effort. Their organization as a team, working as a team, instead of using their individual skills'. Both the Norwegian and the Icelandic teams emphasize teamwork and thus become more than the sum of their parts – which is especially important for small nations. Nils Arne Eggen – the former Rosenborg coach – highlighted his strong emphasis in the team and the collective through his statement, 'Go on the pitch playing your best, but even more important, go out there and make your teammates better' (Eggen 1999, 226). Part of establishing team effort is based on each player's attitude and sense of responsibility. Lagerbäck made the following comment to *The Telegraph* about this combination of individual responsibility and team thinking in Icelandic players (Bascombe 2016):

In Iceland, they adapt to team organisation very well. It's the same in the other Nordic countries. But they have something here in the character, and you can feel it in the society too: they're used to taking care of themselves in a way that is more strong here. Their attitude, their way to adapt, they work hard, it's been really easy to coach this group of players.

This statement indicates that national teams' characteristics are culturally produced. Thus, teams from small nations – with scarce human capital/resources – have to maximize their strengths and to minimize their weaknesses. In the cases of the successful Norwegian football team in the 1990s and the Icelandic football team in the 2010s, these strengths were based on organizational play and the players' character and teamwork. Due to their lack of talented footballers – compared to the world's best players and teams – both teams focused

on how to play when they did not have possession of the ball. This was also what the coaches of the Icelandic teams instilled. As Iceland's player, Skúlason says:

If you take statistics from our last 20 games, you see how much the players move, run and fight. For instance, we don't have much possession of the ball in our two matches against Holland but they hardly create any chances of scoring. That shows the work ethic in the team.

Discussion

In this paper, we have argued that the achievements of the Norwegian team in the 1990s and the Icelandic team in the 2010s were facilitated by increased professionalism in the football cultures of the two nations prior to their major achievements, and by the local, cultural and amateur way of engaging in sports. Peterson (2008) argues that one of the key reasons for the achievements of the Scandinavian countries in sports is that the sport system is a blend of 'democratic' and 'competitive' fostering, in other words, a combination of amateurism and professionalism. Thus, despite the increased professionalism in Icelandic football it was, and remains, in this developmental stage and lacks many of the methods and structures that are in place in professional sport (Halldorsson, Thorlindsson, and Katovich 2014; Halldorsson 2017). There are, for instance, no high-tech laboratories in Icelandic sports, no hidden technological innovations, hardly any systematic talent identification programs and no genetic searches for potential talent, and little emphasis on early sport specialization (Halldorsson 2017). All of these methods have been used extensively in the world of professional sports (Beamish and Ritchie 2006; Collins 2013).

According to Halldorsson (2017), sports in Iceland still emphasize honour, fair play, friendships and intrinsic rewards (see also Halldorsson, Helgason, and Thorlindsson 2012; Wieting 2015). Icelandic football – based on play rather than work – deviates in this sense from top-professional football (Halldorsson, Thorlindsson, and Katovich 2014). Only recently have Icelandic players begun receiving monetary incentives for representing the national team, but they are paid much less than players are on the opposing national teams. Thus, it can be argued that the main contrast between Icelandic football and European football is that some important elements of the amateur ethos are still in place in Icelandic sports, but not necessarily so in the opposing teams (Beamish and Ritchie 2006; Halldorsson, Thorlindsson, and Katovich 2014; Halldorsson 2017). In this sense, we can describe Icelandic football as a successful mixture of play and work, an ideal equilibrium of amateurism and professionalism.

Similar cultural conditions were in place in Norway in the 1990s. Full professional football from 1991 allowed players to use more time for training and recovery. Even though professionalization and institutionalization accelerated towards the 1990s, still the Norwegian players' participation in sport was founded in the amateur ideology, because they were culturally shaped into the voluntary Norwegian sport model. As one of the leading Norwegian players in the 1990s, Erik Mykland, put it, 'I never dreamed of being a professional player or something like that, I just played football because it was fun, and the years from when I was seven to seventeen were the most fun' (Rem 2000, 33). However, after Norway's success in the 1990s and the professionalization and institutionalization of sport in general and football in particular, commercialism took centre stage (Gammelsæter 2009). Increased professionalism requires extensive financial resources (Peterson 2008) and with more money involved, all the stakeholders compete for their interests in the marketplace. In the last decade of the twentieth century, Norwegian football went through a period of changes characterized by clubs and players moving from 'family harmony' to 'industrial relations' (Gammelsæter 2009). Tuastad (2017) draws an equivalent conclusion when studying myths and realities of the Scandinavian sport model – using Norwegian football as a case study – claiming there is a clear discrepancy between conceptions and realities regarding adult football, while the current model describes the realities of children's and youth football fairly accurately.

Furthermore, the success of the Norwegian national team and Norwegian football brought more professional players than ever into the 'big leagues'. In the 1998/1999 season, 22 Norwegians played for English Premier League clubs (Bratland 2015). Being professional in a big league means earning a lot of money and involvement with agents and other stakeholders in future decisions. Playing for the national team becomes a showcase for an athlete's career more than playing for pride and 'playing with heart'. Increasing success means increasing opportunities and by implication a stronger emphasis on the individual than on the collective and the team. The former national player Leonhardsen – who played his 86th and last match for the national team in 2003 - underlines this argument, saying, 'I felt it was more fun the first years with the national team. There was a stronger collectivism those days'. In line with this increasing individual success through the 1990s, several situations arose in the following decade involving Norwegian 'star players' reflecting organizational and collective challenges for the structure of the national team; players fighting each other, players who publicly criticize the style of play, and players who do not want to play for the national team anymore. Thus, along the way the Norwegian national team lost its comparative advantage in terms of team spirit and teamwork, over some of its more professional opponents where the important elements of the collectivism gave way to a more individualistic emphasis on playing football. Accordingly, the Norwegian national team has not reached similar heights since the turn of the century and in July 2017 Norway fell to number 88 on the FIFA ranking, its lowest ever (FIFA 2017).

Currently, Iceland is at the top of its game, having had constant success since 2013. However, the dangers of the increased professionalism in Icelandic sports are beginning to appear in Icelandic football. Before Iceland's qualification campaign for Euro 2016, the players agreed to split the bonus payments (for qualifying for the European Finals) equally among all members of the qualification campaign team (this was the first time that the Icelandic players received substantial bonuses for playing for the national team). After the team qualified for the European finals, some of the players wanted to renegotiate the bonus payments and divide the payments according to the amount of time each player was on the field. This caused a stir in the Icelandic camp and took some time to resolve. This is probably the first time in Icelandic sports where athletes quarrelled over the distribution of money.

Concluding remarks

Comparing the cases of Norway and Iceland shows that at the heights of both nations' successes, the organization of sport and professionalization of football were not fully developed. Though both teams benefitted from increased professionalism – in and around the teams – they were built from amateur and democratic sport systems, where the players' attitudes were formed around friendships, national pride and the attitude of 'playing with the heart'. Thus, in this respect, Iceland can learn some important lessons from the decline of the men's national football team of Norway. Iceland could share Norway's fate if it loses

its most important asset, its heart and soul, to a more professional, commercial and idolized sports culture. If that happens, Iceland risks vanishing from the top-level international football scene as quickly as they appeared on it.

Our findings suggest that the importance of this balance between the ideologies of amateurism and professionalism is generally ideal for small nations to excel in international sports. However, we cannot conclude from our two cases that this balance was the case of other Nordic nation's football successes in the past decades. Further analysis on the sport success of other Nordic nations - or small nations - would have to address those cases in those terms in order to generalize on these findings.

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