



The Boston Unity Cup Community Impact Report

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Women's Division Champions: Team USA



Men's Division Champions: Team Cape Verde

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Boston Unity Cup was founded in 2017 by the Boston Unity Cup Leadership Team - a group of local residents committed to expanding soccer access and equity throughout the city. The Boston Unity Cup is a city-wide adult soccer tournament designed to bring together Boston's diverse community around a shared passion for sport. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the outcomes associated with how the event promotes cross-community relations and acceptance of diverse cultures. Specific focus is on the influence of the event on cross-cultural perceptions, civic pride, social networks and social identity. Four focus groups were conducted with representatives from 10 of the 21 teams that participated. Audiotapes were transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis.

Overall, the findings indicated a deep appreciation for the diversity of the event that results from the design being a “world cup style” tournament. Players gained a sense of personal and group identity by representing a country throughout the weekend that they said was not typical of their daily lives. Competition proved to be an important element of this identity and a differentiator of the cup as compared to other cultural events.

There was universal support for the addition of the women’s bracket in 2019. Both women and men expressed how the bracket brought legitimacy to females in the sport and provided inspiration to younger players.

Players described how the Unity Cup allowed them to see a different side of Boston in regard to the diversity of the city, the number of good soccer players and the strength of coming together.

Though participants raised comments about the logistics of the event during the focus groups, that is not the intention of this evaluation. Participants were invited to log those comments in a separate survey sent by Unity Cup staff. The results of that survey are not represented in this report.

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Since 1990, the greater Boston area has grown by approximately 530,000 residents (Boston Indicators, The Boston Foundation, Umass Boston And The Umass Donahue Institute, 2019). This growth has been driven by increases in non-white immigrants, in turn greatly increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the city. Currently, twenty eight percent of residents of the city of Boston and nineteen percent of the region were born outside the US. Foreign born residents are coming in largest numbers from China, Vietnam, Central and South America (Boston Indicators, The Boston Foundation, Umass Boston And The Umass Donahue Institute, 2019).

The Boston Unity Cup celebrates the path that the city is on and provides a way for people to come together through a shared passion for soccer. Research has found that *trust* is generated when people participate in community sport organizations (Brown, Hoye, & Nicholson, 2014). When people who do not know each other come together through sport, there is a connection that may be powerful and difficult to explain. Organizations seeking to build community connections find unique opportunities through sport that may not be available through other types of gatherings.

It is useful to situate this report by introducing the concept of *Sport for Development* (SFD). This is defined as “the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialization of children, youths and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and conflict resolution (Lyras, 2007; Sugden, 1991, 2006, 2008 as seen in Lyras & Welty Peachy, 2011, p. 311). The Unity Cup staff are not claiming to generate impact in all these areas, but they are interested in tapping into the potential of the tournament to generate positive community interactions, connections and long term change. The theory (known as SFDT) that has grown out of research on SFD suggests that “through the development of a common sense of community, we can establish stability, coexistence, understanding and acceptance for what is different from us” (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Sternberg, 2003 as seen in Lyras & Welty Peachy, 2011 p. 324). In this report, *community* is the Unity Cup staff and volunteers, players, coaches, families/fans, sponsoring and supporting organizations. SFDT provides a framework for evaluating changes in community capacity over time; a challenging prospect that is critical to understanding impact (Edwards, 2015).

This report is not a full evaluation, but there is great potential to consider using Sport for Development Theory or another framework to evaluate the Unity Cup for broader social impacts, positive personal change and long term community benefits. This study is an initial attempt to identify what is meaningful and impactful to the inaugural participants of the program. The findings will be used for program enhancements and possibly longer term assessment.

EVENT OVERVIEW

The 2nd annual Boston Unity Cup tournament was held July 12-14, 2019 at Moakley Park in Boston. The park contains one large turf field and several grass fields where the tournament was played. It is located across the street from Carson beach in South Boston right off the highway and accessible by the Red Line MBTA.

The 2019 tournament included 505 participants (players and coaches). There were 20 mens teams (up from 16 teams in 2018) and a newly added women’s division including 8 teams. Overall, 21 countries were represented. Some of these teams practice with each other year round and some convene only for the Unity Cup weekend.

WOMEN'S TOURNAMENT BRACKETS	
GROUP A	GROUP B
USA	China
El Salvador	Colombia
China	Brazil
Guatemala	Honduras

MEN'S TOURNAMENT BRACKETS			
GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D
UAE	Cape Verde	Sudan	Brazil
Mexico	Nigeria	Vietnam	Ireland
Jamaica	China	Angola	El Salvador
Pakistan	USA	Somalia	Haiti
Ethiopia	Colombia	Guatemala	Denmark

The event began on Friday afternoon with the opening ceremony attended by players, fans and town officials. Throughout Saturday multiple 7 vs 7 matches were scheduled each hour. Knock out rounds of the top 3 teams from each bracket were scheduled for Sunday. The final men’s and women’s matches were at 4:00 followed by a closing ceremony with Brazilian drumming and a parade of flags. In all there were 66 games played over the weekend.

In addition to the tournament, 2019 festivities included a youth jamboree run by the New England Revolution community coaches for ages 6-16 that emphasized soccer skills and small sided games. Approximately 25 children participated in drills and scrimmages. The coaches opened the clinic by saying they wanted to encourage more “pick-up soccer” among kids similar to the pick-up basketball games seen on courts around Boston.

2019 featured 6 sponsors, 2 media partners, 8 organizational partners, and multiple City Departments including the Mayor's Office. In addition to this support, there was a Resource Fair of city organizations devoted to servicing Boston's immigrant and multi-cultural communities. Twenty five participants represented these organizations at tables on Saturday. The event was staffed by 60+ volunteers from city departments, Boston high schools, local soccer organizations, and community members.

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

Four focus groups were conducted after the tournament to explore participants’ experiences and perceptions of the Boston Unity Cup. All 15 focus group participants played or coached in the 2018 or 2019 Unity Cup tournaments. There were 4 female and 11 male participants

representing 10 country teams. They expressed a range of abilities and levels of passion for the sport. Some said that soccer was their whole identity and they spent whatever time they could playing, watching or coaching. Others described themselves as less serious, but still loved the sport.

This evaluation is guided by two research questions:

- What are the unique ways that the Boston Unity Cup brings ethnic and cultural groups together through soccer?
- How, if at all, does this event have a different impact for multi-cultural, multiethnic Boston area residents than other celebrations (arts, music, food and cultural festivals)?

These questions led to the development of the following measures and focus group questions (sample below):

Measure	Sample questions
Cross-group perceptions	In what ways did the event bring together different people from your community?
Civic pride	How, if at all, did this event give you the opportunity to express/showcase pride about the country you represented?
Program related questions	How have the resource provided during the event influenced you or others from your community?
Social identity and network	What role does soccer play in your identity? Did you have connections with people from other cultures before the Unity Cup? Do you feel you have expanded your social network through this event?

FINDINGS

The feedback from the focus groups is presented here according to six emergent themes. Each theme is explained and then reinforced with examples of the players' own words taken from the transcriptions.

Theme: Deep Appreciation for the Cultural Connections

Players indicated deep appreciation for how many diverse cultures assembled with the common goal to play soccer during the Unity Cup. When asked about their favorite moment players expressed the ways that everyone came together during the weekend.

- Different background, different friends just coming and enjoying the park. Everybody was there. Everybody was excited.
- Everybody has their own flags. People laughing.
- I always like post game because you just play a game and you're competing with someone. A lot of people you don't know, and then last year we all took a picture with

the opposing team. So, we did that this year, and it was really nice to share contact information and just meet people.

- ✚ It's a great way to represent that melting pot of the U.S. You had all the countries and then their supporters.
- ✚ It was gritty, it was tough, it was well fought. We squeaked out the victory and then at the end of the day, we both didn't do too well in our other two games. So, by the time the end of the day came, we decided to meet up and we ended up striking up a pretty good conversation with the captain of their team. And, so, we're going to meet, actually on St. Patrick's Day morning, for a one off game between Ireland and Denmark.
- ✚ It's the fact that you got to see more countries in the tournament. Actually the games are really intense. I remember we played you guys, Sudan, we had to beat you guys in order to go on to the second, the knockout stage. That was a really good game, because you guys were a tough opponent. Yeah. The competition was really great.
- ✚ It was great, it was great. Bringing, I just love the idea too, bringing all these nationalities and teams playing together in one week. And, seeing each other, meeting and talking about soccer, is just beautiful.

Players also re-connected with people they knew only through their soccer network. All but one of the participants in this study found out about the Unity Cup through existing teammates, friends or family. It's a time when people come to reunite.

- ✚ One player said when he came to the Unity Cup he realized several players he knew from his weekly pickup games in East Boston. He said that he moves around a lot for work so whenever he moves to a new city he immediately tries to get connected to local soccer leagues.
- ✚ Actually...I saw a kid [who] used to work for me at the camp in the tournament. He was playing for another team. You know? So, we bonded again on the game. He went off to college. He became a worker. He lives in East Boston, and he was playing for a team. It was a Portugal team, I think. So, then that's how we...We lost, I lost his contact. He lost my contact. And then we met at the game.
- ✚ And we had a really good moment at the end of the Brazil game where we had just found out that...I was at the Women's World Cup in France. I had just found out that two members from the Brazil women's team that I played with at the Unity Cup were also at the final as well.

Theme: Expression of Pride and Identity

Players expressed how powerful it was to come together to “represent a flag”. They expressed the difference between who they are in the US and who they would be in their country of origin. The tournament allowed them to be proud of their heritage and their present communities.

- ✚ What it means to be Irish in Ireland, and what it means to be Irish in America, I think is great, but two completely different things.
- ✚ And, it was just like you gave them this feeling of representing their country, even though they are not [there].... Maybe, they have never felt it before.

- ✚ Here in the U.S, if you would allow people to pick names, they always like pick funny names. And, then it's just friendly. But, having names like, Ireland, Sudan, the United States of America playing against each other, they just want to win.
- ✚ There was an Irish guy that was a Dublin guy that was on our team, and he put his arms around us, and we were all standing in a circle. And, he goes, "There's a few people in this group that have been able to wear this Ireland jersey before. They've either represented their country in Olympics, or some sort of international sport at any level of professionalism." And he goes, "Right here, right now, we're in a park in Boston and you're wearing your flag. And, you got to wear that flag with pride.

Some players emphasized the power of unifying the Boston community

- ✚ A lot of us have citizenship here but there's a lot that don't, and it doesn't matter. It matters in the community you're representing, not necessarily always the country in my case. What I was representing and what I was proud of was the diversity and what we represented in Boston. Coming together.
- ✚ Yeah. It brings us together. That's what gives us strength. I mean it's...I don't know when I'll run into you on the street, but we saw each other at the tournament. We see each other here, and soccer did that. The government didn't. Soccer did.
- ✚ I think it's also in America right now there's a lot of people that are struggling to find pride in America because there is a lot of...There's a lot of turmoil. There's a lot of hate and yeah a lot of negativity. And especially representing the U.S. our whole team had a lot of difficulties with that.
- ✚ I learned a lot with this tournament. I've been playing soccer for and from Boston for over 25 years, and I'm still playing, but most of the times I've played with my community. We played in Boston, too, in the league, but it can be different from people from Boston or Cambridge or from anywhere, but it is a league played every year. But this one is completely different. That's the sport, I guess. A lot of time you get together with people you don't know.

Somewhat related to identity is the way the tournament inspired the next generation to play soccer and to see how a community can come together and celebrate difference. The 2019 addition of the youth jamboree gave players the chance to include their kids in the cup.

- ✚ That was unexpected to me. They did it the first year it wasn't as big, but this year it was [better] because they had the kids from the Valeo football club, the East Boston side came, and some of the kids from Newton also. It was pretty good too, cause then they got to see Revolution training.
- ✚ I think that's the impact that such a thing would have on each community of Boston. The Irish community, or Mexicans, or Sudanese, or Somalians. When you have kids are part of Boston, growing up in Boston, feel accepted and then see potential of one day playing in such a tournament, their families come to watch, the city comes to watch.

Theme: The Cornerstone of Competition

Participants indicated the role that competition played in their interest and satisfaction with the event. When they were asked to compare the Unity Cup to other cultural events they had

attended in the city they said that the Cup draws different kinds of people and gives people reasons to interact. They felt there was a much higher level of connection because of the physical involvement that competition requires.

The competition was driven by the “world cup” design of the tournament. Half the participants felt really strongly about having teams made up along country lines. They felt that was what created good competition and pride.

- ✚ “If you want my people to come and play I need to know that I’m coming to play straight soccer. It’s the competition of the countries that makes the tournament. You have to have ties [to the country] to play. Representing your colors.”
- ✚ ...representing the country is also a good feeling. That's where you are originally from, but at the same time, at the end of the day, we're all Americans. But also, it gives you a good feeling when you ...brought the name of the country back to the winning championship.
- ✚ That is the drive for the tournament. Having something to work for year after year.
- ✚ But it forces people to intermingle, whereas other events you may not talk to people in a different group or in this case team. But the competition, the post-game rituals that we had, it all kind of was a structure for us all to connect.
- ✚ And there's physical interaction. And you are literally going to interact
- ✚ We faced Angola, it was a tough game. We almost got in a fight. Then right after the game, we moved on to the next [inaudible 00:10:24]. They came and they cheered for us. You would think that's not going to be the case. Once you walked out of the field, it was just a game. Now everyone is nice with each other and supporting each other.

Amongst the competition, most players spoke of the vibe as friendly

- ✚ this was just regular soccer, good competition. Everyone competed to the best that they can. Yeah, you're going to have shout and push, but no one's going to punch someone.
- ✚ there's definitely like a friendly rivalry amongst the teams

Theme: Viewing Boston in a Different Way

Some players were surprised at the seriousness of the tournament and how many people came out to play.

- ✚ The way it opened for me is how serious it got, because there was a lot of soccer players. I didn't think Boston has so many [soccer players]
- ✚ I remember when I played in high school it wasn't really a sport, it was just pick up, there was no actual real good schools. And the good schools that played in our division was because they only had one type of nationality. Madison Park, when I was playing, it was all Cape Verdeans. Burke, all Haitians. High Park, same thing. East Boston, all Colombians. Then Dorchester, where I was from, had a diverse team. Vietnamese, African American, white, Hispanic, Guatemalan, stuff like that. It was kind of weird when I was growing up, but now that it kind of expanded throughout the years and I grew up, you get to see the diversity just come in. I say, Oh wow.

- ✚ How are we [US Mens soccer] so far behind if we're so diverse, in the sport of soccer? and it's just mind blowing, because we look at the other teams like the U 16, 18, they're all minorities, all from different countries and they all have talent too.

Players from Boston and those who new to Boston commented on the diversity of cultures that came out for the tournament

- ✚ “I think for me, being from Boston, I was aware of that amount of cultures, but I still haven't seen it in one place. That was the difference in that specific tournament.”

In other words, this player knew there were these many cultures in Boston but was surprised to see them all in one place. Another player new to the city said, “I think being new to the city, I didn't realize how many cultures Boston had, I guess.”

Several players referenced a large African country tournament that is held annually in the US and Canada. They commented that they had never been to a tournament that represented so many different countries/continents.

- ✚ Usually the community is one community. It's geared towards the African community or the Western community. This one was including everyone. Yet it was welcoming. So, that's the difference. It almost felt like a world cup.

Theme: Unity Cup is Unique Among Cross-Cultural Events

The Unity Cup appears to possess some unique dynamics as a cross-cultural event in Boston. When players were asked how they would compare this to other cultural festivals many of the said it was a completely different thing because instead of looking from the outside at a different culture they are there to express *themselves and their team*.

- ✚ Well, I just think that Unity Cup brings out a different type of person. Like, it brings out a soccer player that may be defined by what country they're from. But, they just want to play. I think that, just speaking from me, like I wouldn't be huge on going to a food festival or an arts festival or something. But, if it's a soccer, a football festival, I'm there.
- ✚ There's a different level of interest and commitment when you are on a team. “Yeah, I mean I think generally the people that were present at Unity Cup, generalizing, aren't cut from the same cloth necessarily that would be at those other types of cultural festivals you mentioned
- ✚ And, like, when you go to an Irish or a Greek festival, you're there to sort of, almost look in and see how that culture does it. Where, in this tournament, the Irish can be as Irish as they wanted, the Sudanese could be as Sudanese as they wanted, and the Americans, and everyone got to be themselves, turned all the way up and outward facing. And, it was awesome to see. Especially with the parade of nations, which I'm sure we'll talk about later. Or, some countries brought their music with them to the final day and their flags and their fans, and it was awesome. I'm sure there wasn't even a single... I think it was just everyone so proud to be with their

- ✚ Well, the difference on this one is the challenge that you want to win. The other ones there's no competition that you can win in a food festival. So, or a music festival. The thing is... you [are] in it first to have a good team in there.

Some teams have people hailing from different countries who are adopted to represent a different flag.

- ✚ We ended up picking up a couple of extra players who then were adopted Danes for the tournament. Which was great actually

Theme: Support for the Inclusion of Women

In 2018 the teams were given the option to be co-op though there were not many women involved. One female participant reflected that when she played in 2018 on a primarily men's team she did not feel as welcomed as this year on her all-female team.

- ✚ Playing on an all-women's team in 2019 was more inspirational and empowering; it's just more inspirational. It's more kind of your game. It's more empowering, and so the fact that they made a whole women's bracket was incredible and extremely necessary.

Female respondents felt that there was mutual support and validation for women's soccer throughout the weekend as evidenced by the spectators.

- ✚ The support was from both ends. Girls supported the guys and the guys supported the girls. It was fun. Usually the girls feel they don't get credit, but when it was time for the guys to play the girls watched and when it was time for the girls to play the guys were all lined up and I was like 'oh wow'. The support was real on both ends.
- ✚ I mean having the women's tournament kind of solidifies the existence of these women players that you may not know about.
- ✚ I'm really glad there was a women's tournament to show some of my girls I coach.

The men said they enjoyed having women involved in the tournament.

- ✚ Yeah, it was great having the women's and I mean, I think that it also just adds a whole different dynamic to it. If you have just a men's tournament, it's a little bit of a different vibe.
- ✚ Oh, of course it matters for us. But, I'm sure it matters for women more, to have their own tournament. Because, if you are a woman, or a girl, going to watch this event and you would be saying, oh, I'm coming tomorrow to *watch* it, it's going to be different than, I'm coming tomorrow to *play*.

One female said she thought the men were happy to have a female division because they could play harder on a male-only team, "most of the players, they didn't put as much pressure when the girl had the ball." However, the men denied this claim and said the US Women's national team has showed the world how tough women play. The timing of the Unity Cup and the US Women's National team victory provided additional inspiration.

- ✚ And winning the championship for the U.S. women's tournament changes some of the rhetoric going around

One group of men initiated a conversation about how to grow the number of female teams. They said that Somali women play more basketball than soccer, but this tournament brings awareness of the sport to females. The men discussed how to build teams of women from multiple countries that could rotate representing different countries.

- ✚ Maybe put two countries together if there were like eight, ten or eight. Sometimes just put them together and make them like sixteen teams. I mean sixteen players, and they can just substitute themselves. But choose one flag one year, and the next year choose another flag.

Theme: Desire for the Growth and Sustainability of the Tournament

There is evidence that players are thinking about the growth and sustainability of the Unity Cup over time. They want to commit to this tournament year after year. Their commitment is fueled by the desire to improve their standing in the competition and make soccer more visible in the community.

- ✚ When [the players] see that type of support, they're willing to invest more in the city, willing to give more. They're also willing to give back into their own community, who are part of the city. That's what we [the coaches] actually had to invest time on, rearranging and our strategy on how you're running the team, so we can be better and be more organized so we can compete more and show up, represent ourselves better. Maybe this year we haven't had as many supporters as we could have, but I'm sure next year it's going to be completely different.

There were many discussions that spun off into what could be done in the future to enhance the community building capacity.

- ✚ Maybe, this year or for future years,... One guy should bring a flag, and then the Chinese set up a tent beside us. And, maybe encouraging some sort of an Olympic village, or a Unity Cup village, where every country has the ability to put up a tent. Maybe, have some elder statesmen of the community run the grill, or run some sort of a thing. And, that could be something.
- ✚ Our first year we lost all the games. The second year we actually did a lot better, because we kind of knew each other. That was the best thing about it. And I know what's expected from the first year, so kind of prepared the team in a way.
- ✚ In two or three years from now, if the marketing is right, you may need a stadium.
- ✚ Because these are people who are part of the city, they're playing, and each nationality has part of it. If the marketing is done right, it could be a great way to bring the community together.
- ✚ I work with other communities a lot in the U.S. and overseas in many ways. It's not easy to put something like this together and it takes a lot of effort. But the benefit of this, especially from what I've seen so far, it will be huge. I think the one suggestion I would

have is try to reach more to people, with specific people in specific communities. I think that would connect the city with the communities even more.

Players shared specific examples of community connections that resulted from the tournament.

- ✚ I had some extra uniforms and I was talking to the Cape Verdean women's coach, manager and we ended up donating a lot of equipment to his youth program, the following week. So, that was something I guess that... I mean, those conversations started at the Unity Cup,

One of the players representing Ireland called the Irish Consulate to get help recruiting players for the cup. They posted it out to their community and developed a team. Then members of the consulate came to see the Unity Cup and invited the players to St. Patrick's weeks activities.

CONCLUSION

This report highlights the voices of the Boston Unity Cup players and coaches. The themes from their stories bring light to the important space the tournament fills as a cross-cultural event in Massachusetts. As a community run event, the players see that they can have influence on the future of the tournament. In the space of two years the tournament nearly doubled in size, added a women's bracket and has inspired players to want to support the growth and sustainability of this tournament for the future. They came to the focus group as a gesture of their interest and commitment. The competition derived from a strong sense country pride, the support for the inclusion of women and the appreciation for the diversity of Boston are the unique ways that the Boston Unity Cup brings ethnic and cultural groups together through soccer.

The tournament represents a unique kind of cultural event that draws people together as active, visible contributors rather than passive spectators. It has the potential to increase the cultural sensitivity of players so that they may understand and participate fully across differences. Rather than looking from the outside in at someone else's culture, they are looking for the best ways to represent their skills and their culture with the ultimate goal of winning.

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“What I was representing and what I was proud of was the diversity and what we represented in Boston.”