

FAMILY: A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF RITUAL AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE KANSAS STATE FOOTBALL

TEAM

by

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## **Abstract**

“Family” is a sacred concept to the Kansas State football team. Calling a group of 100 plus players from across the nation and ten coaches a family is a unique concept when it is viewed from the outside. However, if you have been a part of the rituals involved in it, you understand. This research project examines the role of ritual in the “family” environment of Kansas State football and how that affects young men from different sociological backgrounds by interviewing 20 current and past players in the program. Though the findings showed that this culture affected all respondents in a positive way, it was also discovered that 4 particular young men who grew up with less family support were affected more than those who felt supported by their family from a young age.

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## **Dedication**

To my parents, for never letting me give up on anything and providing me with unconditional love and support which has helped me through countless obstacles that have been in my way on this journey.

## Chapter I - Introduction

### The Kansas State Experience

From little league sports all the way up through the professional ranks, coaches and managers try to instill the idea of a “Family concept” in every team. The thinking behind this is simple; if the players come together and are close with one another, they will win games because the team chemistry will be great. If they can somehow create a sense of “brotherhood” or “sisterhood” among the players, then they will have a chance to be very successful. Though this is applicable to all levels of athletics, things tend to get tougher once a player gets up into the higher levels. College and professional athletics are in their own class when it comes to time commitment, as the amount of time spent on the sport as well as other activities such as school greatly increases after high school.

Once a person hits the college level, sports are no longer just a hobby as they used to be, they become a full-time job and a struggle for many to try to balance their new loaded schedules with maintaining good grades to stay eligible, and completing their main goal of obtaining a college degree. From pee-wee all the way through high school football, the focus of the teaching isn't about the techniques that will help make them a better player. Though these things are important, the real focus is making sure that the kids learn about all the values that playing the sport lends itself to teach. Eitzen and Sage described it best in their book, *Sociology of North American Sport* (1986) by saying, “The objectives of most youth sports programs are to provide participants with an opportunity to learn culturally relevant sport skills and to develop attitudes and values about such things are the nature and the purpose of competition,

cooperation, sportsmanship, discipline, authority, and social relationships” (Pg. 96). If, as a coach, your team loses every game but the players still learn; discipline, work ethic, teamwork, etc., then you still have succeeded in your job because at that level it isn’t based as much on winning games. Instilling those values in children can change the way they act at that age, and many believe that can carry over in the way they act for the rest of their lives. To many, sports in these years are seen more as a hobby or teaching tool than anything. They provide a chance for kids to get together with their friends that they grew up with and have fun playing a game that they love, all while learning those valuable life lessons along the way, which is a great thing.

Once a player makes it to a college football program, things tend to drastically change for them. The “fun and games” of high school football are over. The typical college football player’s day will start at 6 a.m. and will basically be non-stop until 10 p.m. that night and when it’s over, go to bed so you can wake up and start over again. From weights/running, to class, practice, and study hall, it is easy to see how much of a change it is from the standard high school two hour practice after school and home by 6 p.m. routine. On a college football team, young men come from all over the country, many times moving a long distance away from their homes in order to attend a college. This can be a difficult transition for many of these young men as they are trying to find their way in a new environment with new people, tough workouts and school without the comfort of knowing that their family is nearby to support them. Because of this, teams across the country try to make sure that the student-athletes they bring in are as comfortable as possible. They provide the student-athletes with as much help as they are able to and try to ensure that each of them always has someone they can turn to with



any problems they may have. In short, college football teams try to create a “family” feel for their athletes. I thought it would be interesting to study this “family”, and to see what it was really like from the inside. In this research I set out to study a group that buys into the idea of creating a “Family” as much, if not more than any other team out there, the Kansas State football team. Though this group is often called a “family”, in reality, everyone knows that there is no way that a true family can be replicated. Instead, the Kansas State football team “Family” rather serves as a metaphor for a community with strong social cohesion which holds many of the traits that a family does.

Kansas State football has been built on the idea of having a “Family structure” within their program. This is apparent to anyone who steps foot into Manhattan, Kansas and attends a football game. From players sporting wooden blocks with “FAMILY” etched into them, to the games played in Bill Snyder FAMILY stadium, it is easy to see that this has slowly become the motto for the program, and one that has worked quite well through the years. “Family” has been something that Bill Snyder has been pushing since day 1 at Kansas State University, and he was sure that everyone in the state who wanted to be involved in that family, was.

“Family” has been such an important concept within the Kansas State program, because before Coach Snyder came on board as the head coach, Kansas State was a program that had been beat down, with several back to back losing seasons stacking up on top of each other. He was able to look past all of the losses, and see what kind of people were in the town of Manhattan and on the campus at Kansas State. People that “genuinely care about other people” to use Coach Snyder’s words to describe the Kansas State fans. Because of this, there

has been a loyal following at Kansas State University, one which hasn't wavered throughout the years.

If there is anyone who ever questions the loyalty of the Kansas State football fans, explain how it is possible that every Saturday the football stadium is sold out at 50,000 plus people in a town of an equal population (if the student population is included), everyone taking part in rituals such as doing the "Wabash Cannonball" during games, chanting and cheering their team on while sporting their silver and purple every game day. In regards to the level of loyalty the Kansas State students or "K-Staters" have for their school, head over to one of the graduation ceremonies every year and you will witness the Dean of the school leading the crowd in a ritual of doing "K-S-U" chant. As you can see, the tradition and ritual goes much deeper than just the Kansas State Football team, as the entire university, and fans in the state of Kansas, feel that they are a part of the Kansas State family, and they are.

Typically, college football teams could be described as a "melting pot" type atmosphere, and Kansas State is no exception. College teams are generally made up of a very diverse population, not only racially but in regards to social background as well. Getting those kids from different upbringings to come together and become close can definitely be a challenge, one that many coaches struggle with throughout their careers. Some kids grew up in single-parent homes with little to no money, working jobs in order to help support the family. Others grew up with both parents in the house and were able to just focus on going to school and playing sports. The range of diversity on a college football team is quite a remarkable thing as it is quite vast. There are guys on teams that have never played football with an African-American

teammate and vis-versa. Many people ask the question; how do you get a group of kids that grew up in such different atmospheres to come together and buy into the idea of being a “family”? These are the type of questions that I was looking to attack in this research.

Looking at this from a sociological point of view, I thought of Emile Durkheim’s work on ritual out of his book, “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life” (1965) and felt that it could connect to this pseudo-family type environment quite well. Ritual is such a large part of college athletics; from the praising of a totem (in this case, the Wildcat), to doing chants and cheers before games, a football team has many different rituals and sacred rites that are all used to bring a group together. I knew that looking at Durkheim’s book and connecting “ritual” to a sport was a bit of a stretch. However, when I really began to read further and take a good look into it, I was able to find all kinds of connections throughout. Bringing these things together, I was able to develop two research questions, which were; **what is the role of Ritual in the family concept of the Kansas State football team, and how does that affect Student-athletes from different social backgrounds?**

After doing some research of the topic, I realized that I was going to be conducting all of my own research for this project because I would be working directly with the Kansas State Football team. I thought that this would give me the unique opportunity of being the only person to do a study on the team, which I thought would be something a lot of people could take an interest in. My hopes were that in addition to fans of the program, that the players would also enjoy seeing some research done on them and their teammates because hopefully

they would learn to have a greater appreciation for the special program that they were able to be a part of.

I felt that this research would be important because the majority of the research that I had been able to find about athletics seemed to be all about youth athletics and how that had an effect on people later in life. There have also been countless books and journals written about team building, but most of those were written about athletics in, or leading up to high school. Though these are great, I wanted to look into a major division-1 University. I wanted to look deeper than explaining why athletics were good for kids when they were young, I wanted to see how that transferred over to a college football team. It was my goal to take a specific team and really go in depth on how a team learns to come together with people from all different avenues of life and become successful. Of all the college teams in America, Kansas State's "Family" concept makes this team a unique subject to study.

My research aimed to look into the Kansas State Football team in order to see whether or not the "Family" environment that is preached throughout advertisements was really true. Was the team, in fact, like a family? What effect, if any, does that have on kids from different social backgrounds? I was intrigued to see what my results would be in the end. From the beginning, I truly felt that my findings would indicate that the family atmosphere was going to have a huge impact on all of the student-athletes, but particularly the one's that grew up with less structure in their family support system. I felt this way because I knew that for a lot of the kids who didn't have much guidance growing up, they would probably be the people who would benefit the most from being in this type of situation. Sports are typically a good way to

help kids stay out of trouble when they are younger, so I wanted to take a look at that aspect as well. Taking all of this into account, I thought about the emotion that could be lost in the collection of this data. If I wasn't careful about how I chose to collect it, I could end up with an emotionless clump of information.

I decided on using interviews as my instrument for data collection because I wanted this research to remain very personal, and wanted to be able to capture all of the emotion possible. I considered surveying the team, but in order to boost my response rate, and get more thorough data I decided that interviews would be the way to go. I wanted to sit face to face with the players and coaches in order to get a feel for the emotion that some of the subjects were portraying, and surveys just wouldn't be able to do that as accurately. I decided on trying to research anywhere from 20-30 people which would include; players, coaches, and secretaries. I wanted to interview one or two coaches and secretaries, then use the rest of the spots for players so I could get a good feel for how the athletes felt, but also get some perspective from some people that had worked with a large number of student-athletes from different backgrounds throughout the years. Because many of the questions I was going to be asking were going to be considered "sensitive", I decided that the only way to find my sample would be for it to be completely voluntary. In order to spread the word about my research I put up a flyer in the locker room which gave the players the ability to seek me out if they wanted to interview.

In closing up my interviews, I ended up having 22 respondents. I had one coach and one secretary, as well as 20 players who took part. Though there were a few issues when trying to

find enough participants to take part in the study, snowball sampling aided me in clearing these obstacles and I was able to get enough participants in the end. In these interviews I was able to determine that the majority of the players expressed that the “family” environment had an impact on them. Many of the players were very interested to find out the results of the study which meant a lot to me because it meant that they were interested in the research while taking part, which was one of my goals from the beginning of this project. Of these players, I found that the ones that grew up with less structure in their family support system were, in fact, impacted the most. Many of the players I studied explained to me that they could have been considered “delinquent” in their youth, and that they were now able to be successful because of the Family environment they had available to them in their time at Kansas State University. I was thrilled to find out that my original inclination was correct, and excited about all of the information I was able to uncover during this research.

In the remainder of this thesis, I will explain in great detail the process in which I was able to attain these findings. First, I will review all of the relevant literature used in this research in order to give the reader a better grasp on the background of this project and to see exactly what I was looking for. From there I will explain in great detail the methodology that I used in order to investigate what the role of Ritual truly is in the family concept of the Kansas State football team, and how it affects Student-athletes from different social backgrounds. Next, I will move on to discuss all of the key findings I had in my research, and go into great detail on exactly what those findings mean in the broad scheme of things. Finally, I will provide a conclusion in order to tie all the loose ends and wrap up this project in the conclusion section.

## **Chapter II – Literature Review**

A number of different works have been done on the topic of sociology and sport. It is something that has been widely covered throughout the years and has been poked and prodded in almost every aspect. In this research, I looked to study exactly how a “Family” type environment on a football team could affect young athletes from different social backgrounds. In order to do so, I needed to consider a number of different things; background of the student-athlete, their experience at Kansas State, life experiences, etc. In order to do this, I needed to find a great deal of literature spanning from youth sports all the way up through professional athletics. In order to break it up, I decided to use two main themes:

1. Early life, Delinquency, and Sports
2. Team/Family Building/Ritual

### **Early Life, Delinquency, and Sports**

In my research, starting from the early years in a young athlete’s life was very important. It was important because I wanted to see where each of them came from as I believed that would have a lot to do with how they were affected by the family atmosphere on the team. Early on in a young boy or girl’s life is a very difficult and busy time for them. There are numerous things going on and in most cases, their calendar is usually quite full. Of the many activities that an adolescent has to do, some kind of sport is usually one of them. In 2008, 79% of boys and 69% of girls between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade participated in at least one sport in the United States (Sabo and Veliz, 2008). As Mark Vermillion explained in his book *Sport*

*Participation and Adolescent Deviance: A Logistic Analysis*, "Sports are the most popular extracurricular activities for adolescents..." (Vermillion, 2007:228). Many see this as being a positive thing, as sports are typically seen as an avenue for children that has a huge upside. In many people's eyes, sports can teach youngsters so many great values that are hard for them to learn elsewhere. Vermillion went on to explain, "Sport instills participants with positive social norms and values such as character building, developing social skills, teamwork, hard work, and self-discipline" (Vermillion, 2007:230). These are just a few of the many positive values that sports can instill in young minds. In *Sociology of North American Sport* (2012), Eitzen and Sage went on further to say that sports also: "Teach children how to cooperate, develop a sense of achievement which lead to positive self-concepts, promote and convey the values of society, and to teach sportsmanship" (Eitzen and Sage, 2012:73). The list goes on and on for all of the positive values that participating in youth sports brings with it. With these positive values, many different researchers have found that sports can be a good way to deter children away from delinquency or delinquent acts (Vermillion, 2007).

Childhood delinquency is a serious problem; luckily over the past 20-25 years it has been on a steady decline (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services 2006). Though it has been getting better, it is still something that can always be improved. One thing that many believe has been making a huge impact on keeping adolescents away from delinquent acts is involvement in sports (Brustad, 1996; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). One theory that has been used in many studies today is Travis Hirschi's social bond theory (Hirschi, 1969).



## ***Social Bond Theory***

In social bond theory, Hirschi stated that adolescents are capable of both deviant and conformist behavior, but that conformity is attained by adolescents controlling their delinquent desires. Eitzen and Sage explained that all societies have some level of conformity, but the amount that is required varies greatly from society to society. No social organization will tolerate total freedom by its individual members because if there isn't any conformity to some sort of laws, then anarchy will ensue (Eitzen and Sage, 2012). Two different levels of conformity exist in American society. The first is on a more macro level; the laws and customs of the entire nation. These laws are intended for everyone to conform to in order to keep order in the country, though many do not do so (Brustad, 1996; Eitzen and Sage, 2012).

On a more micro level, "...individuals tend to conform to the expectations of groups with which they closely identify: families, peers, ethnic groups, religious groups, and work groups" (Eitzen and Sage, 2012:54). In my research project on Kansas State, the level of conformity is restricted to players conforming to the rules and regulations of their sports team. Hirschi believed this would result in adolescents developing social bonds with "conventional institutional structures", such as schools. They would create these social bonds by participating in "conventional activities" at these schools, activities such as sports (Hirschi, 1969).

To explain how social bonding works, Hirschi came up with four elements that promote conformity over deviance. The four elements are:

**1- Attachment**

**2- Commitment**

### 3- Involvement

### 4- Belief

Hirschi explained that **Attachment** describes a connection between the adolescent and some other group and describes how much the adolescent cares for that group and its members. This group doesn't necessarily have to be a family, but could be a sporting team, class, or some other group of people (Hirschi, 1969). He goes on to explain that **Commitment** involves the expense of time and effort into something in order to provide for later on in life. An example would be getting an education and saving money for the future. **Involvement** refers to the number of hours that an adolescent is involved in a sport or organized activity. According to Hirschi, the heavier the involvement in these "conventional activities", the less time there is for delinquent behavior. Weber, Miracles, Rosicky, and Crow agreed by stating, "It has been suggested that sport teams and other programmatic activities might reduce delinquency by providing the delinquent prone youth with an opportunity for social bonding" (Weber et al., 2001:321). The final element, **Belief**, is the basic idea that teams have rules that are made in order to enforce social order. If an adolescent participates on those teams, and those rules are enforced, it is assumed that they will consider those rules as the "norm". If they consider these rules as the norm, then it is expected that they will learn many of the great traits and values that sports have to offer; teamwork, hard work, communication, etc. (Hirschi, 1969).

Using these four elements, Hirschi explained several different scenarios which could affect adolescents either staying out of trouble, or giving in to their delinquent desires. He explained that typically, youths who were strongly attached to their parents, committed to conventional

values such as taking their education seriously, and involved in conventional activities like sports were all less likely to commit criminal acts and more likely to stay out of trouble than their counterparts, who struggled with any of those scenarios (Hirschi, 1969). He went on further to explain that the weaker the groups that an individual is involved, the less the individual will depend on the groups and begin to depend purely on himself, creating his own rules to follow (Hirschi, 1969).

In a way, social bonding could be related to the concept of “socialization” on more of a micro-level. Socialization is described as, “...the process of learning and adapting to a given social system” (Eitzen and Sage, 2012:66). Socialization begins at birth and continues on throughout the remainder of a person’s life, but the adolescent years are said to be very important because that is where they should learn how society works, what basic rules and norms are, and how different groups follow them (Eitzen and Sage, 2012). Eitzen and Sage also explained an interesting topic dealing with socialization into sports. Family was cited as one of the most important factors in socializing children into sports ranging from the size of the family, its structure, its social status, etc. (Eitzen and Sage, 2012).

### ***Parents Making an Impact***

Typically, children tend to be like their parents, so if a parent values physical activity, or maybe is involved in playing sports while the child is growing up, then the child is more likely to get involved in sports (Martens, 1975). Parents also increase the likelihood that their children will be involved in athletics by playing sports with them from a young age, even if that involves something as simple as playing catch in the yard. Several studies have been done on North

American families, and the results have shown that around 75% of parents engage in some kind of sports activity with their children (Eitzen and Sage, 2012). According to Kanters, “With regard to sport, parents typically make the initial decision to enroll their children and have a significant impact on many of the positive outcomes of their child's sport participation” (Kanters, 2002:20).

In addition to this, research has shown that there is a positive relationship between parental encouragement and sport involvement (Brustad, 1996; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). Once the adolescent is involved in the sport, positive parental involvement becomes extremely important as Kanters explained, “As children grow older, feedback from parents continues to play a critical role in shaping their child's self-perception of their ability and enjoyment in sport.” (Kanters, 2002:24). It was found that over 90 percent of both male and female athletes indicated that their parents were either somewhat or very important in influencing their sport involvement (Sage, 1980). Typically the father is the most influential parent when it comes to socialization into sport for an adolescent, mainly because many times the father is the one watching sports on television growing up and they are usually the one that the child bonds over sports with, though these rates have changed quite drastically over recent years as women’s sports have become more popular and mainstream (Eitzen and Sage, 2012; Kanters, 2002).

Though some parents can be extremely supportive and helpful in their children’s athletic careers, others can be extremely demanding and can pressure the child too much at a young age and many times can become too involved in the child’s athletics (Eitzen and Sage, 2012; Kanters, 2002). In a study conducted by the *National Alliance for Youth Sports*, they found that

twenty-eight percent of adults claimed to have witnessed a physical confrontation during a youth sporting event involving parents, officials, and/or coaches (Eitzen and Sage, 2012). Many parents are said to be “living out their sports dreams” through their children, investing large amounts of money for private lessons, signing them up for traveling and club teams, sending them to sports academies, etc. (Eitzen and Sage, 2012).

### ***Coaches and Peers Taking the Lead***

Once adolescents get involved in sports, coaches can be another huge factor in the children’s young athletic careers. Though they are usually not responsible for getting the children signed up for sports in the first place, many times they serve as one of the most influential people in the adolescents early lives and in many cases, “...an extremely close, emotional bond develops between athlete and coach, a bond that frequently becomes the main reason for continuing involvement” (Eitzen and Sage, 2012:69). These bonds develop for a number of reasons, one of which is that coaches are usually seen by children as people who are socially admired, which leads them to take a great interest in what the coaches are teaching (Brustad, 1993, 1996). In many cases, the athletes also build great self-esteem by utilizing the sports skills that these coaches have taught them, which in turn makes them feel good about themselves. Coaches can play a major role in keeping the adolescents in sports throughout their lives, or at least instill them with a number of values and morals which they can carry on with them once they are done playing sports. Many former youth-athletes have said that they believe that their youth coaches taught them many important things about themselves and that

those former coaches are still considered to be one of the most significant adult influences in their lives (Eitzen and Sage, 2012).

Eitzen and Sage explained that in addition to coaches, an adolescent's peers can serve a very important role in the youngster's involvement in sports (Eitzen and Sage, 2012:68). Usually as a child is moving their way into adolescence, they begin spending less time with their family and more time with peers. When a child's friends are involved with sports, that child usually feels some pressure to get involved with those teams as well as they feel that they could be left out and lose some of those cherished social relationships (Brustad, 1996, 1993; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). While some children feel pressured to get involved in these sports because they don't want to be left out, others feel that they need to be involved in these sports because they need to feel a sense of belonging, and feel like they are a part of some structured group (Brustad, 1996; Feldman and Matjasko, 2005).

Many times peers become responsible for keeping a child involved in sports because when they are on a team together, much like with the coaches, emotional bonds can be formed among athletes for a number of reasons; fighting through obstacles together in the sport, spending time together outside of school, sense of brother/sisterhood, etc. (Eitzen and Sage, 2012). Many people play key roles in an adolescent's athletic career early on, each of which have their own job to complete. Whether it is parents, coaches, peers, or a combination of them all, in most cases children have a great number of people that are trying to steer them in the right direction, and it usually only takes one to make a huge impact on them and give them

the tools that they can carry on throughout the rest of their athletic careers, and ultimately the rest of their lives (Eitzen and Sage, 2012; Feldman and Matjasko, 2005).

When looking at the broad scheme of things, a player's coaches and family can complement each other quite nicely. Typically, a player's family provides support to athletics, and the coaches provide the player with the training necessary to be successful. However, under certain circumstances, coaches can take over the family role. One example of this would be if a player does not have a supporting family background, he would likely consider the team as his family, and a good coach would recognize this and act accordingly. Another example would be if coaches create the family feel regardless of anything as a unique ritual, which is the case at Kansas State where the family environment has been created for all types of backgrounds. When the players arrive at Kansas State, they are met with a new family that is there to support them in their new environment, which plays a factor in their success.

Social bonding is very important when looking at college football teams. College football teams are made up of young men from all different types of backgrounds, some of which can involve delinquent pasts (Bacon, 2013; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). A player's background can tell coaches a lot about that student-athlete, and Coaches need to know what kinds of backgrounds their players came from in order to know what their needs or areas of interest will be in order for them to be the most successful they can be. Though coaches tend to look for players who have clean records, there are times when they will take a young player that was a bit misguided and give them a chance to prove that they are done with that kind of life (Bacon, 2013; Brustad, 1996). In my particular research, I felt that finding out the players' backgrounds was extremely

important because I wanted to see what kind of impact a “Family” environment would have on young men that grew up with some problems with delinquency.

### **Team/Family Building Rituals**

Many children who participate in youth football eventually grow up to play football in High school. Once they compete in high school, a select few are determined to be good enough to play at the next level; college football. According to NCAA research in 2013, there were 1,086,627 high school football players in the United States (See Appendix A). Of these players, it was estimated that only about 70,147, or about 6.5% of them would make it to play at an NCAA institution (NCAA, 2013). These numbers include all divisions associated with the NCAA, so it is assumed that they are even lower when looking at Division 1 college teams. If a player is good enough to get invited to play on a college football team, their view of the game is sure to be tested, as things seem to get exponentially harder at the next level (Bacon, 2013).

College football teams are an interesting group to study, as there aren't many groups out there that are similar. It is rare to find a group of people that are from such different backgrounds, brought together into one collective group in order to stand side by side and go to battle with one another (Bacon, 2013). One of the main challenges for any college football team is for the players to learn to cooperate with one another, and build bonds with other players that are competing for the same jobs every day (Eitzen and Sage, 2012; Bacon, 2013). In general, everyone on a Division 1 team is a good player, and many times a lot of the players' egos factor into how close a team will get as many of the guys think they are the best on the team, causing arguments to break out (Carron, Colman, Wheeler, & Stevens, 2002). It is at this



moment when a good coach really has the opportunity to bring in their own system to make an impact.

In order for coaches to be able to convey their rules and instill the traits and values they want in their players, they must first come up with their own system in order to figure out what they want their program to be based on, and what they want their own coaching philosophy to be. Once they have done this, they need to present it to their staff so that they know what is expected from themselves as well as from the players (Bloom et al., 2003; Carron et al., 2002). One model that stands out in many studies on team building is Dave Yukelson's model. Yukelson came up with a multi-faceted approach to conduct team building in sports, which included seven suggestions for ways that coaches can impact team functioning (Yukelson, 1997). They were as follows:

- 1) Get to know athletes as unique individuals
- 2) Develop pride in group membership and a sense of team identity
- 3) Develop a comprehensive team goal setting program
- 4) Provide for goal evaluations
- 5) Clarify role expectations
- 6) Set aside time for team meetings
- 7) Establish a player counsel

As Bloom, Stevens, and Wickwire explained, "The coach plays an invaluable role in the development of the team" (Bloom et al., 2003:129). As you can see in the plan listed above, it is very important for each coach to construct this sort of system. Within this plan, there always

needs to be some sort of goal program which lines out what exactly is expected from their players. This goal program is then given to the players, and it usually spread throughout the entirety of the program in order for the coach to make clear what his/her intentions are (Carron et al., 2003; Eitzen and Sage, 2012; Yukelson, 1997). Two examples of this type of goal system are John Wooden's Pyramid of Success (See Appendix B) and Bill Snyder's 16 Goals for Wildcat Success (Kansas State Football, 1989) (See Appendix C). Both of these examples show a great number of traits and values which these coaches expected from their players, both of which have had very successful careers.

Bill Snyder's 16 goals (Kansas State Football, 1989) are as follows:

1. **Commitment**- To common goals and to being successful.
2. **Unselfishness**- There is no "I" in team.
3. **Unity**- Come together as never before.
4. **Improve**- Every day...as a player, person, and student.
5. **Be Tough**- Mentally and physically.
6. **Self-Discipline**- Do it right, don't accept less.
7. **Great Effort**
8. **Enthusiasm**
9. **Eliminate Mistakes**- Don't beat yourself.
10. **Never Give Up**- Never, Never, Never.
11. **Don't accept losing**- If you do one time it will be easy to do for the rest of your life.
12. **No Self-Limitations**- Expect more of yourself.

13. **Expect to win**- And truly believe we will.
14. **Consistency**- Your very, very best every time.
15. **Leadership**- Everyone can set the example.
16. **Responsibility**- You are responsible for your performance.

As you can see by Bill Snyder's "16 Goals for Wildcat Success" (Kansas State Football, 1989), there is a clear idea of what Coach Snyder expects from his players, just as there is in Coach Wooden's Pyramid of Success. Coach Snyder presents his team with these goals every year, and expects the team to memorize them so they can constantly have them on their mind every day when they are going through their routine whether that involves school, weights, practice, etc. Goal number three is one that sticks out; UNITY. This is one of the most important goals on the list, as all football teams should strive to become united as one, which as explained earlier can be a trying task for any coach.

### ***Creating a Cohesive Unit***

Throughout many different research studies, it has been found that team cohesion, or building unity, can be a crucial element in the development of a team of people working together, and it's almost always on every coach's goal list (Bloom et al., 2003; Bacon, 2013). Cohesion was defined as, "A dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs" (Bloom et al., 2003:129). This can connect back to what Eitzen and Sage described as "conformity" in a way, but rather than explaining the act of everyone coming together and conforming to a specific set of rules or laws, cohesion is

referring to the group coming together in order to achieve a common goal like winning a ball game (Bloom et al., 2003; Carron et al., 2002). The key thing to notice here is that in almost every aspect of a football team, the common factor is the process of doing things together as a group, no matter what they are (Carron et al., 2002).

Coaches all have their own style when it comes to coaching their team, and each of them usually has a specific approach on team building which they try to put in place in order for their team to become as close as possible, which can be quite the challenge at the college level. (Bloom et al., 2003, Carron et al., 2002). Typically, coaches want their players to buy into the idea of having a “close knit” or “cohesive” group, because traditionally, those groups that have been close have been the teams that have won the major games (Bacon, 2013; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). The thinking behind it is, if the players are close with each other and trust each other off the field, the feelings will reciprocate on the field and they will be able to play as one strong unit with no weak links in the chain (Carron et al., 2002; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). One way that teammates become extremely close with one another is by facing some adversity together (Bacon, 2013). Whether it is facing the media during a bad season, or dealing with a scandal somewhere on the staff, when players are put into the position where they have to stand together with the “us against the world” mentality, they truly learn that their team is something very special (Bacon, 2013; Carron et al., 2002). Connecting to Emile Durkheim’s work on ritual, cohesion on football teams could be sparked by taking part in ritualistic activities together. Chants and cheering to support teammates when they are tired, singing the fight song, practicing together, eating dinner with each other, all of these things are ritualistic

activities which help bring together the “tribe” and make them a closer knit group, which is the overall goal of any coach.

Players typically respond to becoming a united team in a positive way for a number of different reasons, the most obvious of which is that when they come together, they generally win more games (Bloom et al., 2003; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). In an article entitled, *On Becoming a Team Player* (2001), James T. Scarnati explained some of the other benefits for the players that were derived through teamwork. They were described as follows:

- 1- **Guardianship:** Isolation in the workplace is replaced by a family of people with common interests. The individual never stands alone. The team provides reassurance and guardianship to its members.
- 2- **Status:** Groups provide each member with prestige and recognition. Successful groups engender a sense of pride in their accomplishments that is widely recognized.
- 3- **Learning:** Belonging to a team is a learning experience. Individuals experience a wide range of new ideas and skills when interacting with team members.
- 4- **Self-esteem:** Team membership can provide individuals with a sense of worth. Being a team member provides a sense of accomplishment along with fulfilling a need for growth and status.
- 5- **Fellowship:** People enjoy regular interaction with individuals who have similar interests and goals. Teams provide a social, as well as a professional opportunity to make friends.

- 6- **Power:** Teams are often empowered to accomplish tasks not available to individuals. Provided with the proper authority, teams exercise power. Often people achieve their personal goals through group efforts.

As you can see from the list, players achieve many great things through teamwork; self-worth, a sense of family, achievement of goals, etc. (Scarnati, 2001). Coaches are constantly looking for new ways and new techniques to incorporate into their team building model in order to be successful, and it is their job to ensure that their players are provided with this type of environment to compete in if they want to truly have the best shot at achieving that success (Eitzen and Sage, 2012). Though there are a number of different ways to build a cohesive team, the “family” concept has been the best recipe at Kansas State. With everyone on the team treating each other like they would treat their real family, there becomes a level of trust and commitment to one another that trumps any other team building method out there.

### ***Winning Above All Else***

It’s no secret that in today’s sports, college coaches have to win if they want to keep their jobs (Eitzen and Sage, 2012). It should come as no surprise that people want to win games, especially the coaches. In today’s sports, in the United States in particular, we have built up the importance of these sporting events and everyone expects their team to win. There is a huge emphasis on competitive success which starts as young as youth traveling sports, where failure is not an option and winning is everything. This notion is magnified even more in an arena like college football, because at that point many of the players have been playing football for well

over ten years and have been taught all that time that at the end of the day, winning is the most important thing (Bloom et al., 2003; Eitzen and Sage, 2012).

In regards to coaches, Eitzen and Sage said the following:

*Coaches do all they can to socialize their athletes with the value orientation that winning is the most admired achievement in sport. They reinforce winners with praise, honor, and status. Numerous re-enforcers are used to illustrate that the primary goal of sports competition is to succeed (to win). Coaches also do all they can to instill in their athletes the character traits that they believe will produce winning teams (e.g., loyalty, enthusiasm, initiative, self-control, confidence, poise, hard work, and ambition) (Eitzen and Sage, 2012:55).*

Due to the amount of media coverage skyrocketing in regards to college football, college football players are seen as famous figures in today's society as they are able to be seen all across the world on television (Bacon, 2013). It is up to the coaches to make sure to keep their players under control in this type of situation, as they are there to lead their young men and teach them how to do things the "right" way (Bacon, 2013; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). Coaches have seen the same kind of treatment as they are now signing multi-million dollar contracts and have their face plastered all over the country and sometimes even the world, in magazines, on billboards, etc. (Bacon, 2013; Bloom et al., 2003). According to an article in Newsday newspaper entitled *Special Report: College Football Coaches' Salaries and Perks are Soaring*, "The nation's 25 highest-paid football coaches at public universities are paid an average of \$3.85 million a year in guaranteed money..." (Baumbach, 2014). The rise in media attention has transformed

college sports, particularly college football, into a multi-billion dollar business (Eitzen and Sage, 2012).

With this rise in media attention and huge amounts of money being poured into these schools, expectations for teams to compete for championships are at an all-time high, putting coaches under massive amounts of pressure for their team to perform (Bacon, 2013; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). Many coaches are having their morals tested as they have to try to find a way to continue to make sure that their players know that they still care about them, and ultimately that they are in the business in order to help them grow as young men and learn to be men of great character. Some coaches have cracked and given into the temptations that come with making millions of dollars, and others haven't let the money change them and have stayed the course that they set out on from the beginning, the course of molding young men to be the best they can be on and off the football field (Bacon, 2013; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). The importance of winning highlights the need for successful team building methods, including the use of rituals.

### ***Using Ritual to Come Together***

Looking at this from a sociological point of view, college football could be easily connected to Emile Durkheim's views about "Ritual" from his book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1965). Eitzen and Sage agreed explaining, "Sport is a secular, quasi-religious institution that uses ritual and ceremony to reinforce the values of society, thereby restricting behavior to the channels approved by the custom" (Eitzen and Sage, 2012:9). According to Durkheim, ritual is organized around sacred objects in order to provide people with meaning,



which then in turn binds them to a community (Durkheim, 1965). Within this community, members participate in specific rites which help integrate individuals into one-on-one relationships and also helps the community come together as a whole (Durkheim, 1965).

This perfectly describes the elements of a football team previously explained earlier in the paper. The “sacred objects” for a football team could be describing the team mascot, championship trophies, or bowl rings. These objects give players a meaning and immediately bunches them into a group together as they are now all a member of the same team and are competing for a common cause. Once they are put together in this group, they then begin to participate in specific rites; lifting weights, practicing, and meeting together on a daily basis, which in turn draws them closer together individually, and as a whole.

Durkheim went on to explain that every group possesses three things; a system of beliefs that define the difference between the sacred and profane, a moral community (tribe/clan) that enforces the system of beliefs and norms, and then a set of rituals or collective behaviors which provide a specific place for emotion and the generation of symbols for the group (Durkheim, 1965). In this case the system of beliefs that define the difference between sacred and profane could be the team rules and goals of the football team. The rules and goals line out what is accepted and not accepted on the team, which allows the players to know what they need to do at all times.

The tribe or clan in this case is obviously the whole team, ranging everywhere from the support staff, to players, to coaches. Within this tribe/clan, each person has their own specific role. The coaching staff is in charge of guiding their players to do the right thing, however they

can only do that to a certain extent. At some point they are going to have to trust their group leaders (captains/player representatives) to be the ones to enforce the beliefs and norms of the team.

In regards to rituals and specific behaviors on a team, every team has their own rituals and there are typically a vast number of them on each team (Bacon, 2013). Whether it is a set of chants, prayer, or even something as small as hitting a sign on the way out of the tunnel, each team has their own individual set, some carried on from the previous teammates they learned from, and other new ones that are created every season.

Kansas State football can perfectly illustrate a great number of these theories on building a close team. All of the players on the Kansas State football team were brought together in order to play the game of football; however, many did not realize the type of commitment they were getting themselves into. All of the players got into playing football for a number of different reasons: something to do, to stay out of trouble, because their parents made them, etc. Regardless of those reasons, they made it to the college level, which is a hard thing to do. Each of the players became a part of the collective Kansas State “Family” when they signed their National Letters of Intent, though they had some work to do before they could call themselves true wildcats. The longer they are around the program, the more integrated they become in the “Family” and the closer the bonds with their “brothers” become. It is through ritual that these bonds become stronger.

Kansas State football is no stranger to rituals, as they are bound together through the practice of them. Rituals have important functions for the community as they are what hold the

tribe together. Durkheim argued that totems are at the core of the ritual around it, and that ritual behavior defines the boundaries of the community and when people perform the ritual, they build unity with one another, experiencing a sense of belonging together (Durkheim, 1965). At Kansas State, all players hail the mighty Wildcat (their totem). They perform rituals such as working out, running, practicing, eating, and cheering together, which in turn are what help bring them together and make them feel a sense of belonging. The coaches, who act as “Fathers” on the team, help the players by guiding them, and disciplining them when necessary in order to make sure that they are doing the right things. The players learn from their mistakes, and many times work through them with their teammates, which in turn builds more bonds. Before a football game, when the team is doing a chant together in order to prepare themselves, the closeness is undeniable. They all look each other in the eyes and know that they can fully trust their “brothers” that they will fulfill their duties on the field and give their all in order to win the game and to glorify the Wildcat. Because of the tremendous stress to win games, the “Brothers” come together closer than ever, because they all want to fight towards the common goal of calling themselves a National Champion.

## Chapter III - Methodology

### Determining the Data Collection Method

When initially setting out to collect data, the first task was to determine what type of data collection method would be the most effective. Because no previous research had been done on this topic before, an interview method seemed to be the logical choice. This type of collection method seemed to be the right choice for the research topic data as it would allow a human dimension to be brought in for more personal responses than other methods. Using interviews would allow the opportunity to ask some of the participants to further elaborate and expand on many of the questions rather than just giving single word answers, which is also something a different type of method would not be able to do as effectively.

In reviewing different types of interviews, I decided to use standardized interviews which are discussed in Bruce Berg's book entitled "Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences" (2001). According to Berg (2001), "The *standardized interview* uses a formally structured schedule of interview questions. The interviewers are required to ask subjects to respond to each question. The rationale here, of course, is to offer each subject approximately the same stimulus so that responses to the questions, ideally, will be comparable" (Pg. 69). After reading this passage, it was confirmed that standardized interviews were the correct choice for this research since each of the participants would be asked the same set of questions in order to have comparable answers. Though their answers had the ability to be diverse based on their upbringing, they would still all be on the same path in regards to what the question was inquiring, and as a result, they would be able to be compared to each other.

The next step in collecting the data was to line out a time frame which would allow enough time to collect a sufficient amount of data. In order to get a realistic number for this time frame, it was imperative to find out how many subjects would need to take part in the study. A conclusion was reached that the study could include no less than 20 interviews and no more than 30. This seemed to be a solid sample for the research because it was roughly about 20% of the Kansas State Football team's population, which would give an accurate depiction at the conclusion of the study. Figuring in that there would be anywhere from 20 to 30 subjects, there would need to be at least a one to two month window to conduct these interviews and compile the data.

### **Selecting the Population**

When selecting my sampling method, making sure the research subjects' anonymity and confidentiality was protected was the most important aspect of this research, followed by having a solid response rate. Finding the most efficient sampling method that would take these three things into account was a must, and therefore led into creating a flyer to hang in the football complex (See Appendix D). The flyer explained what the study was, how it would be conducted, and gave the student-athletes some contact information in order to setup an appointment if they chose to participate. Hanging up a flyer was the most effective way to get student-athletes to participate because it was hung on a board that they saw every single day, it was clearly stated what the study included so it could spark the interest of some of the players and they would feel like taking part. This was a great approach because this way none of the players would be put on the spot and have to commit to doing the interview face to face,

and they would have complete freedom to either contact the interviewer to set up an appointment to interview on their own time or to choose to ignore the flyer completely and go on with their day. Since volunteering was up to the student-athletes, response rate could be an issue. The biggest threat in doing a voluntary study is that the researcher is putting a lot of confidence in other people to contact them to take part in the study.

Another potential obstacle researcher's face during the sampling process is not being able to offer any type of incentive to any of the participants in order to boost the response rate. Typically, during their studies, many researchers utilize the process of offering some sort of incentive to the participants in order to hopefully give them more of a reason to take part in the study and therefore improving the response rate. Though this is a great practice that many feel has a positive effect on the response rate, working with college student-athletes presents challenges in regards to this tactic. There are a number of NCAA rules that are very detailed and one of them clearly states that no student-athlete can receive any sort of "benefits" that are not offered to the rest of the general population purely based on their status as a college student-athlete. Unfortunately, the only reason any of the participants would be involved in this study was because they were college student-athletes so offering the participants some sort of incentive would be considered an "impermissible benefit".

Because this study was directly connected to the student-athletes, it was predicted that they would be more interested to find out the results as anyone. The thinking here was that as long as it was made clear as to what the research was about, there would not be any problems getting volunteers since the topic was based on their team. Though the level of confidence that

there would not be any problems getting volunteers for the study was high, a back-up plan was put in place to be safe. Reverting again to Berg's book, snowball sampling was the answer in regards to the back-up plan. According to Berg (2001), "Snowballing is sometimes the best way to locate subjects with certain attributes or characteristics necessary in a study. Snowball samples are particularly popular among researchers interested in studying various classes of deviance, sensitive topics, or difficult to reach populations. The basic strategy of snowballing involves first identifying several people with relevant characteristics and interviewing them or having them answer a questionnaire. These subjects are then asked for the names of other people who possess the same attributes as they do" (Pg. 33). This was determined to be a great way to increase the sample population in case there were issues getting participants for a couple of different reasons.

The first reason it would be helpful is because it would be a great way to get some other student-athletes involved that may have passed over the flyer in the first place, as they might listen to their friends/teammates more than they would trust reading a flyer. It would also help because it would allow the researcher to be able to tell some of the participants what type of traits and characteristics were desired, and they would have a better understanding of their teammates than anyone would so the sample population could be greatly improved for each of the social backgrounds that were desired to study. If enough volunteers still did not come forth, and snowball sampling on the team did not produce enough extra participants, the other safety net would be turning to snowball sampling of former players for help.

If both of the previous methods failed to provide a decent sized population, asking some of the current players to get in touch with some of Coach Snyder's former players could be the answer. Though they were not currently on the team, it was a safe assumption that these players were "cut from the same fabric" as many of the current players were, meaning that they had many things in common with regards to their upbringing. There would be some former players that grew up extremely poverty stricken, some that would have grown up wealthy, and others that would fill all the gaps in between just like there would be on the current football team. Basically, there would be a good chance of getting former players that came from "all walks of life". In using former players, there was a confidence that they had been taught the same values and lessons that the current players were taught from Coach Snyder, which would give assurance that there would still be an accurate representation of the "family" concept at Kansas State football that was being sought out. In order to make sure the results were as accurate as possible, if former players needed to be utilized, it was determined that they would have had to have played within the past three seasons. In doing this, the current players would be able to use their connections and get in touch with former players within the past three years. Chances are they would have been former teammates and probably still had a relationship with them, which would help in the snowball method because they would know what kind of social background the former players had.

In addition to the players, Coaches and Secretaries would be interviewed as well. These interviews were significant as well to see what they had to say about the "family" concept at Kansas State football. Being such integral parts of the team (family), it would be interesting to see what their thoughts were on the matter as well. They had been around many different



student-athletes throughout their careers so it was implied they could give some good feedback on how kids from a variety of social backgrounds could be effected differently. The office secretaries often act as “mother figures” with many of the players as they have the opportunity to be around them so much, and many of the players are a long ways away from home so they don’t have that mother figure in their everyday life. The secretaries could have some great input for this study because they know so many of the players on personal levels and have been around the program for a long time, so they had probably had the chance to counsel some of the student-athletes through the years. It would be interesting to see whether they believed that the social background of the kids had an impact on the way they reacted to the family environment of the team.

In addition to the secretaries, the coaches had a lot to bring to the table as well. The coaches on the football team act as a “surrogate father figure” to the student-athletes. They are very much involved in the player’s personal lives and keep in close touch with the parents of the players on a weekly, sometimes daily basis. Because of this, they could have some great insight on how a kid’s social background could have an impact on their reaction to the “family”.

## **Writing the Interviews**

### ***The Coaches***

Once the strategy for how the population would be collected was in place, the next step was to write out the interview questions. For this part of the study, there would be two different sets of interview questions; one for the student-athletes, and one for the coaches and secretaries. In creating the coaches and secretaries interviews (See Appendix E & F), the first

step was to come up with some different themes to split up the questions into. For these themes, I chose;

- Background
- Family Feel
- At Kansas State

These three themes were chosen because they would give me the ability to not only ask the coaches and secretaries questions about their experiences at Kansas State, but also to ask them about experiences elsewhere (if applicable). Learning about their background was important because I wanted to know how long they had been in this field, as well as why they got into it in the first place. This was an important aspect of the interview because it could have the ability to show what kind of people they were, and whether or not they really bought into the “family” concept. The section entitled “Family Feel” was important, particularly because it provided the opportunity to ask the coaches and secretaries questions about their jobs in a general sense. Kansas State did not have to be mentioned in this section at all, it was about asking them questions regarding their jobs and what kinds of responsibilities they thought their job came with. Questions about the “family” concept in athletics in general were prevalent in this section as well, again, without having to bring up Kansas State at all. These questions were extremely helpful because they would allow me to see what their thoughts on the topic were from a broad sense, rather than just here at Kansas State. It also gave the coaches and secretaries the opportunity to share some of their experiences at other schools, if they had any. This was significant because it would give me a general sense of what some other programs are

like, and if there were other programs out there that had the same kind of feel that there is here at Kansas State University.

The third and final theme used was entitled “At Kansas State”. This theme contained the most important questions, because they were all about the Kansas State football team, which obviously was the target group to study in this research. I was able to ask the coaches and secretaries direct questions about the team and see how they truly felt about the dynamic of the team, which was crucial information in this study. Overall, I felt that these questions would give me a great opportunity to see what the team was like from the perspective of people that had been around not only student-athletes for a long time, but particularly Kansas State student athletes.

### ***The Players***

After writing the Coaches and secretaries interviews, the next step was writing out the Player interview questions (See Appendix G). A lot of things had to be taken into account in order to get the questions right. First off, it had to be determined about how many questions to ask the players. There was a certain amount of information that needed to be gathered, but the interviews also could not be too long because then the interview subjects could get bored and a lot of the personal effect that was desired could be lost. On the other hand, the interviews needed to be long enough and include enough questions to provide enough information to be helpful.

Due to the fact that the target size of the population was about 20-30 subjects to interview, it was determined that each of the interviews should have about 50 questions. This

seemed to be the right number where there would not be too much information to where there would be information crossing over each other, but also long enough to where there was a sufficient amount of information provided. It was also assumed that a number of questions that would be asked would allow the people being interviewed to expand further on them, in fact, the interviewees expanding further on the questions was encouraged because their answers were expected to be as thorough as possible. Though the questions asked were decided to be kept quite vague, it would be the job of the interviewer to try to get the most information possible out of each answer. Going into this project, it was determined that the subjects should have the chance to explain their answer in their own way, without having too much guidance from the interviewer. Because of this, the questions were split up into four major themes, in order to make sure that they questions were not too specific on one topic.

The four major themes were;

- Prior Life Experiences
- Feeling of Belonging
- Loyalty to the Program
- Staying on Track and Graduating

In choosing these themes, I decided to choose four themes that would have a lot of influence on the student-athletes. Within each of these themes, I also decided split each of them up into subthemes. For Prior Life Experiences, I included subthemes; Family In-Depth and Athletics Growing Up (anything before K-State). Feeling of Belonging had subthemes; Recruiting Rituals (Prior to K-State) and Team Building/Family Rituals (At K-State). For Loyalty to the

Program, the subtheme was; University Rituals. Finally, for Staying on Track and Graduating, the subtheme was: Education Rituals.

When starting out with choosing these themes, Prior Life Experiences seemed like the best starting point. This was the opening theme because it lent the opportunity to ask some questions about the student-athletes' upbringing. Being able to get a feel for each of the subjects' family atmosphere growing up was very important in the study; family dynamic, financial stability, etc. In addition to their upbringing, I also wanted to ask some questions about their athletic careers before Kansas State to see what kind of teams they had played on growing up, and what the dynamics were on those teams. The thinking here was that it would be important to have a basic idea of what kind of environment each of the student-athletes came from. When coming into this study, seeing where each of the student-athletes came from was extremely important because that would have a huge impact on their attitude coming into Kansas State, being away from whatever support system they had their whole lives and finally being on their own for the first time.

After learning about their past, I moved on to my next theme: Feeling of Belonging. This section of the interview mainly pertained to the players' time and experiences at Kansas State. This would be one of the most important sections of the interview, the "meat and potatoes" of my interview so to speak. It was here that I would be able to ask the guys about some of their recruiting experiences. Asking the student-athletes about their recruiting experiences was important because it would give me an idea of how being recruited by Kansas State was different than other schools and also what their personal experience was while being recruited.

Possibly the most important part of this section was getting to hear first-hand what kind of comradery there was between the players on the team, and if they would really consider it a “brotherhood”. This section would lend itself to cover the players’ relationships with the other players, coaches, secretaries, etc. The family concept would be under the microscope in this section and, the players would be asked whether or not they believed that existed on the team. It would be interesting to see what kind of atmosphere the players thought there was on the Kansas State Football team, and whether or not they felt they had a role on that team.

That led to the next section of the interview: Loyalty to the Program. In this section, it would be important to ask the players some questions about the Kansas State football experience. Mainly, we sought after what the players thought about the fan support, university and game day atmosphere, and what their level of loyalty was to the program not only currently, but also what it was like before they had been a part of the program. I wanted to see if that level had changed after being exposed to all of the great things this program and University had to offer them, thinking that it would be important to hear why they felt the way they did about Kansas State Football, whether those feelings were good or bad. It was thought that this section would undoubtedly be one of the sections that would draw the most emotion out of the guys, thinking that once they got started talking about the support they had from fans, fellow students, etc. that they could get caught in the moment and expand on their answers.

The final section of my player interviews was another important one: Staying on Track and Graduating. This section was important to include in the interviews because it is assumed

that the ultimate goal for any College student-athlete is to get their degree by the end of their college career. Sometimes along the way there may be some athletes that think they only came to that school to play their sport and they don't take the classroom seriously. For the most part, student-athletes take the school part seriously and work hard to attain their degree. One thing that coaching staffs all across the country try to stress is, at the end of the day everyone isn't going to go pro and make millions of dollars. The only thing that matters after you are done playing a sport in college is whether or not you attained your degree, plain and simple. That being said, this section was used to ask a wide variety of questions in order to see what each of the student-athletes' educational backgrounds were, what their time was like at Kansas State off the football field, and to see if they felt that they had help in the classroom when they needed it (tutors, counselors, support from coaches, etc.).

### **Conducting the Interviews**

After the interview questions had been written and revised, it was time to conduct the interviews. At the conclusion of the interviews, there were 22 participants that took part, which met the goal of having 20-30 people interview. Of those 22 participants, 12 were current student-athletes, 8 were former student-athletes (within the past 3 years), 1 was a secretary, and 1 was a coach. In regards to the players, 10 were African-American, 9 were Caucasian, and 1 was Polynesian (See Appendix H). There were some problems in regards to getting enough volunteers for the study, so I was forced to use snowball sampling of both current and former players in order to ensure I had enough participants. Initially, there were only 7 current players who contacted me in order to take part in the survey, which clearly was not enough as my goal

was 20+ participants. These 7 participants were asked to contact some of their fellow teammates that they felt would be interested in taking part in the study, which yielded another 5 participants. Now having 12 participants, I asked them to do the same with former teammates in order to boost my population further, and they were able to come up with 8 more people which gave me 22 total (including 1 secretary and 1 coach). Snowball sampling proved its worth in this case which was very encouraging and helpful. I suspect that the lack of participants could have been due to the players not taking notice to the flyer hanging in the complex, though this is not certain.

I began conducting my interviews on May 16<sup>th</sup>, and continued interviewing all the way until July 11<sup>th</sup>. As I predicted, it took almost two months to conduct all of my interviews as I had some obstacles stand in my way (lack of volunteers, etc.). The interviews took anywhere from an hour all the way up to just over two hours, depending on how much information the person being interviewed felt like sharing. The shortest interview I had was 1 hour and 3 minutes, while the longest interview I had was 2 hours and 17 minutes, which a wealth of information was shared during that time.

When conducting the interviews, comfort for the person being interviewed was of the utmost importance. I decided to conduct the interviews in one of the secluded staff rooms in the football complex. This area was chosen purposefully because I knew that it would be a place that the student-athletes could feel comfortable that their teammates wouldn't walk in on them mid-interview. I also set up times to interview them when there would be no other players around in order to boost the feeling of confidentiality as well.



When the interviews were concluded, I had a great feeling about them overall. I felt like there were only two of the student-athletes that were not fully engaged in the questions as much as the others. But, even their interviews gave some good information, they just did not evoke as much emotion as the others did. I was very pleased at the interest level of the rest of the student-athletes that took part in the interviews, as they seemed intrigued as to what the findings were going to be at the end of the study. This was my intention from the beginning. Though there were some struggles initially getting volunteers, I felt as though everyone who took part was genuinely interested in the study. There were no drop outs during the interviews, and no one refused to answer any of the questions, this was a positive because it let me know that I did not include questions that were too sensitive of topics for them, which was a goal from the beginning.

## Chapter IV - Results

Coming into this research project, I was very eager to find out the results from the very beginning. I was curious to see how the players truly felt about their team, and wanted to know their thoughts about their Kansas State “Family”. Being a former player, I knew that this Kansas State “family” had made such a dramatic impact on my life and, I was confident that I was not alone. Playing at Kansas State has changed a number of people’s lives by changing them from naive kids who don’t truly understand the value of hard work, into men who don’t take things for granted and know that the best way to achieve your goals is to work hard and earn every bit of success. Playing for Coach Snyder has allowed each of his former players the opportunity to see what can happen when you do things the right way, and truly buy into the idea that working together as one, a group can accomplish anything they put their minds to, as long as they work hard enough.

When starting the interview portion of the research, I was expecting to find that most of the student-athletes would feel the same way that many of Coach Snyder’s former players did. I knew that some of the younger players probably wouldn’t understand it as much as the older players because they wouldn’t have had as many experiences to show them otherwise, but nevertheless I was expecting the majority to explain that they had a positive experience at Kansas State and that they felt that they had a support structure in place here like nowhere else, one that truly felt like a family. In my research, I found that there were **three main themes** that stood out among the interviews. They were; **Different in the Beginning, Coming Together as One, & Finishing What we Started.**

## Different in the Beginning

As a football player at Kansas State, one word is engrained in your mind the second you step foot on campus for your recruiting trip; **FAMILY**. A lot of teams preach it, say that they are a family and that players will feel like they are important at their school because they will be treated like a brother or son. In some cases, the prospective student-athlete's parents will hear the coaches talk about a "family" environment and will respond very positively to it. Typically, parents like to hear that the team is like a family because they want their kids to go to a place where they know they will be comfortable and won't be on their own if something bad were to happen. Many times the use of the concept of "Family" works because as coaches, they are typically dealing with a group of prospective student-athletes that come from a wide variety of backgrounds, each of whom has a different past in regards to their actual family. Though many schools may just use this concept as a recruiting ploy, Kansas State football takes it very seriously and is sure that each of their players feels like they are surrounded by people who truly care about them from day one.

In starting my interviews, I wanted to get a good idea of what kind of background each of the student-athletes were coming from. I decided to do so because I felt that it was important to see the differences that a "Family" environment could have on players from different situations growing up. I wanted to look at several different aspects of their childhood environment; who their guardians were, what their living situation was financially, whether they had support, etc. I thought that all of this would be important because it would allow me

to get a feel for how dramatic of a difference it would be for them to have an environment like Kansas State football in their lives.

I felt that coming into a program like Kansas State could be a shock to some of the student-athletes who grew up without a strong support system because they would immediately step into a situation where they would have four or five people on top of them making sure they were doing the right things at all times. They would get into the routine and be a part of all of the rituals involved to bring the team together, and it could be extremely different than anything they had ever been a part of. They would also immediately have more than a hundred new teammates/brothers that they would be thrown in the mix with and expected to befriend and trust. Heading into the research, I predicted that the “Family” concept would affect the student-athletes from families with little to no support much more dramatically than it would affect the players that came from a supportive family environment. After completing the research, I found that my prediction held true, but it was nowhere near as dramatic of a difference as I thought it was going to be.

When looking at the twenty student-athletes I interviewed, seven of them expressed that they had grown up with both parents in the house, five said they grew up with a step-father or step-mother, six said that they had grown up with just one parent involved in their lives, and two said that they grew up with grandparents as their guardians. Looking at these numbers, you can see that there is quite a wide variety of living situations for each of the Kansas State student-athletes growing up. Though many of them grew up with different situations in regards to who their guardians were, that doesn't mean that they had different

situations when looking at the level of support that was offered to them by their guardians, whomever that may have been.

When asked about what kind of background they came from in an interview, one player, who we will call “Jim” responded, *“My family is well off. I grew up with both parents. My Dad owns his own business and my mom is high up in her company so I never had a job while I was in high school. I was able to focus on getting good grades and excelling in sports. I was really lucky to be able to do that” (Jim).*

One of Jim’s teammates, “Brian”, when asked the same thing responded, *“My parents do ok for themselves. I never felt like we were poor or anything. I worked jobs because I wanted spending money to do things with my friends, and my parents wanted me to have a job so I would stay out of trouble during the summer” (Brian).*

Another one of their teammates, “Frank”, when asked the same question, responded, *“We struggled. It was just me and my Mom. I worked a couple of different jobs just to help out with paying bills and stuff, but we always found a way to make it work” (Frank).*

As these three interviews illustrate, the social background of the players on Kansas State’s football team is quite vast. These are just three guys out of over 100 on the team that each grew up with very different social backgrounds, that are all now on the same team with each other. As I continued on through the interviews, I constantly saw that many of the young men grew up in very different environments, but I also was able to see that many of them also had a number of things in common as well, which Bacon explained was quite common among college football teams (Bacon, 2013).

## ***Feeling Supported***

One of the main commonalities throughout the interviews was that the majority of the players conveyed that they had received a great deal of support from their family throughout their lives. In the end, 12 of the 20 players expressed that they felt that they had a great support system growing up, 2 said that they had some support but were on their own for a lot of things, and 6 expressed that they did not have a great support system. When asked if his family members were supportive of him growing up, Jim said, *“My family was always there for me no matter what. They have been such a huge part of my success and I don’t think I would have been able to do it without them” (Jim)*. This type of response seemed to be the standard for many of the student-athletes, which was great to see that many of them grew up with supportive families to help them through any times where they could potentially struggle.

Several of other respondents replied similarly, saying, *“The level of support my family has given me has been unbelievable” (Carl)*, or *“I wouldn’t be playing here today if it wasn’t for my family” (Mark)*, and *“Who knows where I would be if it weren’t for them” (Jared)*. Though a good number of the interviewees responded that they believed they had a great support system in place when they were younger, I think it is possible that they may have reconstructed their own views of their past because the family concept has been such a huge part of their lives since at Kansas State. Then again, maybe they all did have the great support that they said they did.

This research showed me how huge of an impact family can have on a young person’s life. Drawing back to some of the research about the importance of family it makes sense.

Family was considered to be one of the most influential parts of a young man or woman's life, in that their support can help the young person's self-esteem and help keep their state of mind in the right direction in many cases (Brustad, 1996; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). It was clear that when I interviewed a player who grew up with a lot of solid support from everyone in their lives, that they were very grateful for it and they expressed how much of a positive impact it had on them.

After seeing cases like Jim's, I could definitely see how a group of guys with backgrounds similar to his could learn to come together with teammates and have a special bond. Jim grew up in a loving environment where he was supported his whole life by the people who love him the most and want him to succeed, his family. He didn't have any reason to not trust anyone because most of the influential people in his life had always been there for him, guiding him. He was taught to be supportive of others and to take care of your family. There were other cases where the players perhaps had a little different situation than Jim, but still had a great deal of support.

One of the other student-athletes that was mentioned above, Frank, was raised with just his mother in the house and they weren't as financially "well off" as Jim's family. Frank explained that he had to constantly work jobs while growing up just to help his mother pay the bills and keep food on the table. Though he had to do all of these things, throughout his interview he expressed the love that he had for his mother, as well as the high level of support that he felt as a child. *"She is an unbelievably strong woman. She raised me by herself, with no help from no one. She was always there for me, making sure I was doing right and staying out of*

*trouble, and she was always supportive of everything that I did. She was always pushing me to play sports and made sure that she never missed one of my games while I was growing up, no matter what she had to do, I always knew that she would be there cheering me on. I know for a fact that I would not be here today without her. Growing up in the neighborhood I did, I would honestly probably be in some gang or dead” (Frank).*

Though Frank had a different situation in regards to growing up in a single-parent home and having financial struggles, he was still taken care of and guided by his mother which ultimately led to him working hard and earning a scholarship. This type of success story illustrates what Hirschi explained as the social bond theory (1969). As Frank explained, he was lined up to be in a gang and get into trouble. However his mom wouldn't allow that to happen. Hirschi (1969) explained that adolescents controlled their delinquent desires by developing social bonds with conventional institutionalized structures like sports, which are time consuming and traditionally help children steer away from delinquency (Hirschi, 1969). Luckily, Frank's mother did what Eitzen and Sage (2012) referred to as “Socializing Frank into sport” by always leading him in the direction of sports in order to allow him the opportunity to learn all of the values that sports have to offer (Eitzen & Sage, 2012: 66). Though many of the players had this kind of support system in place growing up, there were a good number on the team that weren't so lucky.

As part of the recruiting process, coaches will run into some prospects that may be a little rough around the edges, many times due to the way they were raised. It is the recruiting coach's decision on whether or not they think that the prospect will be able to make it through



Coach Snyder's program. At Kansas State, recruiting is not purely about the players' ability, but also about what kind of person each of the recruits are. There are a number of players on the team that would tell you that they had never had anyone constantly checking in on them making sure that they were doing what they were supposed to be doing, until they came to Kansas State to play football. Just because a prospect grew up with little support and got into some trouble when they were younger does not mean that they are a bad person; and, it is the coach's job to feel out whether or not they believe that player will be able to stay out of trouble, do well in school, and be a good fit for the team (Bacon, 2013; Rees & Howell, 1990; Weber et al., 2001).

Though the majority of the student-athletes I interviewed said that they had great support from their family growing up, as I stated above, six of the twenty conveyed that they did not have a strong support system in place. One player, Bob, when asked about the level of support he received growing up said, *"Well, I grew up with just my mom. She worked two jobs, so she really didn't have much time to be around. I had an older brother, but we were never that close and he was always off doing something with his friends. I was kinda on my own when it came to taking care of myself, especially when I got older, like in middle school and high school"* (Bob).

Of the six student-athletes who said they did not have a strong support system in place growing up, five expressed that they had gotten into trouble regularly when they were younger. Many of them did not have the guidance they needed in order to keep themselves going in the right direction, and, in return, they ended up getting involved in some delinquent acts, which is

caused many times by the absence of parental influence (Eitzen and Sage, 2012; Sabo and Veliz, 2008). When I asked the respondents if they got into trouble when they were younger, a few responded:

*“I ran with a bad group of kids when I was in middle school. I got in a lot of trouble and wasn’t doing well in school. Things didn’t really get any better in high school. The only things I was good at was sports...In the end, my coaches and teammates helped me keep out of trouble for the most part” (John).*

*“I don’t know how I was able to get into school here to be honest with you. I went to Junior College and just barely made good enough grades to come play here. I was lucky to get out....I think sports were the only thing that helped me turn things around” (Bob).*

These types of responses were common among the other four student-athletes who expressed that they didn’t have great support in their interviews as well. Though each of them had their own stories, the theme was the same for the most part. They didn’t have much guidance, so in turn, they got involved in some things that they shouldn’t have and got into some trouble. They eventually ended up getting away from that bad behavior, and, for all six, sports and their coaches were what allowed them to do that. Looking back at the literature, coaches and peers are commonly seen as a huge reason for some delinquent youth’s success as the coaches teach young people the values and lessons through the sport that eventually carry over into their personal lives. The peers usually help keep the young person involved in the sport as well in order to make sure that they aren’t running around with a bad crowd doing things that they shouldn’t be doing (Eitzen and Sage, 2012; Hirschi, 1969).

It was at this point in the research that I truly saw how different many of the student-athletes upbringings were. There were some guys who had so much support from their families growing up, and others had basically no guidance whatsoever. It was actually quite amazing to see how different each of these young men's upbringings were and to think about the fact that they all have been able to come together, and put into play the "family" concept the way that they have in their time at Kansas State University.

### ***For the Love of the Game***

Though each of the young men had different stories when it came to their upbringing, they all had one thing in common, love for the game of football. When asked why they played football when they were younger, some of the players responded:

*"Football was my favorite sport since I was little. It was the one place where hitting people and taking out my frustrations was a good thing" (Bob).*

*"I slept football, I ate football, I drank football. This game was everything to me from the time I was young. I got good grades and took care of business, but football was what I was truly passionate about, there was no hiding it" (Jim).*

All of the young men that I interviewed in this research project had similar responses to these when asked about their football teams before Kansas State. Each of them expressed how much football meant to them not only now, but when they were younger as well. Looking back at the literature, youth involvement in sports was usually brought on by parental influence, the want to play a competitive physical sport, or by the want of the child to play a game with their

friends (Brustad, 1996; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). One thing that most of the players expressed throughout this section of the interviews as well was how close they thought their teams were in high school.

*“I remember how much my high school coach stressed the ‘brotherhood’ thing, and how we all bought into it. We were a close group because all of us grew up playing ball together since we were in second grade and that allowed us to be a really good team my senior year. At the time, I never thought that I would have the chance to be a part of anything like that again” (Frank).*

The majority of the other players expressed the same feelings that Frank did. They too truly believed that there would never be anything quite like the experience they had in high school, and especially didn’t think that college football would be able to replicate the same type of “brotherhood” in any way. It is constantly preached throughout movies and media that there will never be relationships like the ones that are made through high school football. Every couple of years a new football movie comes out about an underdog high school football team, stressing how close they became and how they formed a brotherhood enabling them to face adversity and beat the team that was favored to win. Though this is a great concept, and one that holds true for many former players, chances are that they didn’t have a chance to play at Kansas State University.

When players are playing football in high school, these types of bonds typically seem much more important than they do at the college level. Once a player gets to college, football becomes much more time consuming and more like a job. Because of this, it is commonly

thought that there is no way that a college team could replicate the same types of emotions and bonds that are formed through ritual on a high school football team, which is typically much less stressful than at the college level (Bacon, 2013; Eitzen and Sage, 2012). Though this could be the case for many college football teams, it certainly is not at Kansas State as in most cases, the elements of that “brotherhood” are elevated due to the increase in time spent together, working harder than they ever have before in order to attain a common goal. The secret at Kansas State is in the constant stress for the players to come together and be closer than ever before.

## **Coming Together as One**

### ***Recruiting***

While players are competing at their high schools or junior colleges, if they are deemed to be good enough to play at the next level, they begin the recruiting process. In many cases, schools from all over the country are coming through their schools evaluating them in every aspect and determining whether or not they would be interested in offering the student-athlete a scholarship. The players can take a total of up to five recruiting trips to different universities during the recruiting process in order to get a feel for what kind of program they want to be a part of. On these recruiting trips, the coaches get an opportunity to sell their program to the prospective student-athlete. This is where, according to many of the players, Kansas State stands out as they get a chance to practice their family rituals starting from the recruiting trip. When asked how the coaches were during his recruiting trip to Kansas State, Jim responded, *“I remember my recruiting trip to K-State very well. I had just gone on two other*

*trips before I came here, and I just remember how different it felt. The coaches brought their families to dinner to meet me and my family and by the end of dinner they were hugging each other when saying goodbye. That didn't happen on any of my other trips" (Jim).*

Virtually every single person I interviewed had a story similar to this to tell about their recruiting coaches during their recruiting trip to Kansas State; only two didn't have stories like this because they were Junior College players who had come on the trip by themselves so they didn't have any family with them to interact with the coaches families, though they did express that they felt very comfortable with the coaches and their families. Of the eighteen that were accompanied by family, they all revealed that their families felt very comfortable while on the trip, and expressed that they had a great time with the coaches and their wives. This is yet another way in which Kansas State tries to be different than other schools. The Kansas State coaches take part in recruiting rituals in order to bring the prospects and their families in and allow them to truly feel like they are a part of the K-State family.

The main rituals the recruits take part in on the recruiting trip are the meals with the coaches, recruit, and typically the families of each. Everyone comes together and breaks bread with one another in order to hopefully try to create a close bond with each other. The coaches usually bring their wives along with them in order to show the recruit and their family that they too stress the importance of having a family environment. The coaches get a chance to spend time with the recruit and the family of the recruit, and have the ability to sit down and feel each other out in a casual, personal setting for the first time. Usually after the recruiting trip, the coaches and families of the coaches have great relationships with their recruit and the recruit's

families. Many parents express that they feel extremely comfortable after the recruiting trips to Kansas State, and a lot of that is based around the fact that they felt like people truly cared about them and their son. Kansas State's coaches make sure to express that they care a lot about their recruits and current players, and they can say that they do confidently because they genuinely do care, as a coach stated, *"My players are a lot like my kids. I usually get them when they are still young, and by the time they leave, they are grown men who are ready to take on the world. In those couple of years, however long they are here, a very special bond is made because of all of the obstacles we encounter and go through together. In the end, I love those young men like they are my own children"* (Coach X). I believe that this is the case because Kansas State coaches engage in those ritualistic behaviors, and as Durkheim explained, ritual is the key element in bringing a community together (Durkheim, 1965).

Though nearly all of the players had great things to say about how their coaches were during their trips, the biggest influence made on all of the interviewees during their recruiting trips seemed to be how they saw the Kansas State players interact with them and amongst each other.

*"I remember leaving dinner with all of the coaches with my host. He said we were going to go hang out with some of the guys, which I was a little nervous about at first. We went to a house and there were a bunch of K-State players there. They were all really cool. All of them were willing to answer any questions I had and they were straight up with me. I thought it was cool how close all of them were, no matter where they were from, they all seemed to be best friends which stood out to me. We all hung out and got*

*to know each other. Everyone was joking around and made me feel like I was just one of the guys. On other trips I didn't see the same type of atmosphere as I did here at Kansas State" (Dave).*

The scenario that Dave is explaining above is one of the biggest attractions for recruits, and why the majority of the recruits commit to Kansas State. When each of the interviewees were asked why they chose Kansas State, all of them mentioned the fact that they could feel how close everyone was and that there was a different dynamic than at other schools. They witnessed the Kansas State players participating in family rituals such as getting together and socializing with each other and joking around, much like siblings do with each other which brought all of them together and it certainly stood out to the recruits. In addition, 14 of the 20 specifically mentioned the word "Family" as being one of the main draws to Kansas State.

*"Growing up a Kansas State fan, I knew that Coach Snyder was all about building a family atmosphere. I had watched commercials about it on TV since I was a little kid. When I came on my recruiting trip, I found out what he was talking about building when I saw all of the guys (Kansas State players) around each other. They weren't just putting on a show, they really cared about each other and were true friends and that was something that I wanted to be a part of" (Jared).*

All of the respondents expressed similar feelings to what Jared said. Though they may have not necessarily all grown up as Kansas State fans, once they got on their recruiting trips, they all explained that they too could feel the closeness of the K-State players and it made an impact on them and their decision to choose Kansas State as the school they wanted to play at.



In addition to being around the coaches and some of the Kansas State players, I also asked each of the respondents if they had a chance to get around any other Kansas State students or any Manhattan residents who weren't involved with Kansas State. All 20 of the respondents said that they had the opportunity to be around both Kansas State students and Manhattan residents not affiliated with the university, and again, all 20 reported that they had positive encounters. One respondent said, *"We had lunch at 'So Long Saloon' on my recruiting trip, and I just remember random people coming up to me and welcoming me to Manhattan, telling me that they hope I have a great time and telling me how special this place truly is. They came up to our table and would hug me and tell me that they hoped I became a wildcat. It was unlike anything I had ever experienced anywhere else. I knew that Manhattan and Kansas State was where I wanted to go, because it is a special place"* (Mike). I felt that this was an important question to ask because I knew this kind of response would be what I would hear back. This response shows that though Kansas State Football is its own "Family", the community surrounding the team could be considered "relatives" as they too have an investment in the team. They are involved in and care about the success of the football program as they are the ones that show up to support K-State football on game days. They too are involved in rituals that bind them to the Kansas State football community, taking part in rituals like: tailgating, singing of fight songs and chants during the game, cheering, shaking of the keys at kick-off, etc. All of these are rituals which help bring the community closer together outside of the football team. All of these things become apparent to recruits when they are on their trips to Kansas State as they can feel the support anywhere they go.

### ***Time to Go to Work***

Once the recruiting process is over and all of the prospects that have chosen Kansas State University have signed their National Letters of Intent, they officially become a part of the K-State “Family” and are ready to experience all that comes with it. Football is a sport that is very heavily based on the idea of having great traditions and rituals and virtually every team possesses and utilizes them to help them connect and build off of the traditions from teams from the past, and Kansas State football is no exception. Kansas State football is a team of great tradition and ritual which is how it has been able to come together and become such a close knit group through all of these years. When new players come in, they are immediately involved with all of these traditions and rituals in order make sure that they bond with the group and know what kind of culture they need to adhere to.

As Emile Durkheim explained in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1965), rituals are very important functions for a community because they bring the tribe together. According to Durkheim, every community has a totem that is at the core of the ritual around it, and that ritual behavior helps define the boundaries and limits of the community. When the people in that community perform the ritual and participate in sacred rites, they experience the sense of belonging together and are drawn in closer. (Durkheim, 1965). In regards to the K-State football team, the Wildcat is the totem at the core of ritual, and the instant student-athletes step foot on campus, they immediately have a sense of pride and become loyal to that totem. The Kansas State Football team/tribe takes part in a number of rituals collectively, and each of them has

helped bring the team closer together. When asked what activities help bring the team together, one of the respondents said:

*"I think that the biggest reason that our team has been able to come together and be so close is honestly from spilling blood, sweat, and tears with each other. We have built a culture of pride when it comes to workouts here, and when we are all working our butts off together when it is 105 degrees out, everyone is pushed to their limit. Everyone is fighting the urge to quit on the workout at that point. Finishing up those last five sprints seems like the hardest thing in the world, but then you see that all of your teammates are at the other end of the field clapping and cheering you on to finish, then it doesn't seem so hard. When you get pushed to the point of collapsing and you have your teammates around you bringing you back up and supporting you, telling you that you can finish the workout together, there is nothing that brings a team together more than that in my opinion. Just knowing that your teammate is there for you and that they won't let you quit, that makes you want to hold yourself accountable for those other guys because you know they are working hard for you. We do everything as a team, there is no individuals on this team. If one of us fails, we all fail" (Jeff).*

When asked the same question, another player said:

*"One thing that comes to mind is unity sharing. We all get together after a practice and Coach gives us a topic of discussion and we get together with a player that we don't know that well and discuss with them what our answer is. The question is usually something personal so that teammate gets to know us a little better. Other than that I*

*think that spending time together off the field plays a big part in bringing our team together. Most of the guys on the team only hang out with teammates, no one else. I think that says a lot that you can spend basically all day with someone, and when you get some free time, you still choose to hang out with them” (Jim).*

These responses were interesting to me because even though they were different tactics on how to build team unity, they were both very heavily based on rituals and both accomplished the same task of helping the team come together. Looking back at some of the literature, cohesion was commonly seen as a crucial element in the development of a team working together, and something that is necessary in order for any team to truly have something special (Carron et al., 2003). It goes back to the old saying, “We can’t move this boat upstream unless everyone paddles together” (Bloom et al., 2003; Carron et al., 2002; Scarnati, 2001).

In the case of the first response, Jeff explained that he believed that the most effective way his team builds team cohesion is in the act of working out together. Fifteen of the twenty respondents agreed with Jeff, also describing this as the most effective way for a team to build cohesion, and all twenty mentioned it as being a way even if they didn’t feel it was the best way. This example can revert back to the model that Scarnati (2001) provided where he said *“First, the members of a team have to be selected carefully for their complimentary skills and expertise. Second, the team members need to focus on and be committed to a team goal”* (Scarnati, 2001:6). Clearly, this example perfectly illustrates this model as each of the players at Kansas State were selected based on their skills, and together they are working towards a

common goal which ultimately is to win a championship. This goal can only be achieved by putting in hard work like Jeff was describing in his response.

In addition, this example heavily revolves around Durkheim's work on ritual as they are all taking part in rituals and sacred rites, such as running sprints and working out in order to be the best team they can be, which can be connected back to Durkheim's work on ritual (Durkheim, 1965). They are also taking part in rituals such as clapping for each other and cheering each other on to finish the workouts. Because of this, Jeff explains that they are able to come together like never before because when they see that their teammates are cheering them on and supporting them, they want to work harder for the group, and they automatically are drawn closer together just as Durkheim explained they would by taking part in ritual (Durkheim, 1965).

In Jim's response, he explained that they took part in some "unity sharing" periods where they would have a topic to discuss with a teammate that they were not very close with. This usually took place early in the season when there were a good number of new faces on the team, and it was used as a way to get everyone to feel comfortable around each other. This could be seen as a ritualistic activity as well as the whole team was involved and it was something that they did in order to come together and become a closer, more united team. All twenty of the interviewees described this as an effective team building method as well, though only one felt that it was the most effective way that the team builds cohesion. Jim also expressed that the players all getting around each other and hanging out outside of football was one of the best ways they could bond as well. When you spend so many hours together, it

really says a lot that the players on the team only want to hang out with their teammates outside of the football complex. This shows how close these guys truly are to one another and that they value each other's friendship/brotherhood.

These examples are exactly what Coach Snyder has stressed for the Kansas State football team since he first came here, being close with one another, like family. The players at Kansas State have a unique dynamic for a college football team. There aren't any outcasts in the group; there aren't guys who don't hang around with each other because they don't like each other; and, there aren't race problems like there are at some schools. Racial issues are still present in athletics at all levels today. The success of minority players in the professional ranks has been said to have masked the racism that still exists in today's sports world (Eitzen & Sage, 2012:307-308). Luckily, this is yet another area where Kansas State sets itself apart from the rest, as this is not how it is in any way.

When asked about the team dynamic, one respondent said:

*"We are like brothers. We spend so much time together that it's hard to not feel that way. We all work hard together, live together, go back to each other's houses and spend time with each other's families. A lot of my high school teammates that play at other schools tell me that they have a couple of guys on their team that they do that with but that they also have other guys that they don't know at all. He said there are some dudes on the team that are racist and they don't care who knows it. I thought that was crazy because there aren't any guys on our team that I know of that are like that" (John).*

Virtually all of the players on the team know everyone and usually have a friendly relationship with everyone, because they know that is what this program is all about. Caucasians live with African-Americans. African-Americans live with Latinos or Polynesians. The race doesn't matter when everyone on the team is viewed as a family member.

### ***A Real Family***

When asked if they felt like the "Family" concept at Kansas State is different than at other schools, one of the respondents, Jeff, said, *"I would say yes, definitely. Everyone is friends with everyone. There aren't any cliques that don't hang out with anyone else. We all get together and hang out with each other any free time we have. I have friends at other schools that tell me that isn't how it is there at all, and that makes me happy to think that we have something special like that here. That is why we win games that people don't think we are talented enough to win. We know how to come together and fight together to get wins. A fist is stronger than five fingers"* (Jeff).

Another respondent said, *"Yeah for sure. I knew that K-State was different than the rest of the schools from the time I came on my recruiting trip. My brother played at a division-1 school and I have a few friends from high school that play at other schools in the Big XII. And, when I tell them stories about something that we did here, they give me a look like they have no idea what I'm talking about....and honestly they probably don't have an idea, which shows that Kansas State actually is different from the rest"* (Garrett).

These are just two examples out of twenty, but all twenty expressed that they believed that the "Family" dynamic was different here than at other schools. One of the comments that

stood out the most was when one respondent said, *“Yeah it’s different. It’s not just a thing that people say, the family is REAL here” (Mike)*. This comment showed me that the players surely buy into the idea that they truly are all family. For all twenty of the respondents to respond that they believed that it was a different atmosphere here than at other schools, shows that they really believe that to be true. It wasn’t just the fact that they said it, but how they said it was what was so convincing. The players were very adamant about conveying that they believed it was different here, and by the look of conviction in their eyes I could tell that they meant every word of it.

Perhaps one of the most important questions in the interview was asking the players whether or not the “Family” concept of the Kansas State football team had affected them in some way. I was extremely pleased to find out that all twenty of the respondents had replied that it not only had affected them, but in a positive way. There was quite a great deal of variance in the answers of how the “Family” concept affected them ranging anywhere from making them feel more comfortable away from home, to making life-changing differences. On the less-drastring side of things, one respondent said:

*“The concept of the team being a family has absolutely impacted me. I came here having never really left home for an extended amount of time before. When I first got to K-State I was homesick and felt like I wanted to quit and transfer to somewhere closer to home. My parents told me to wait it out and things would get better, so I took their advice. My teammates were the reason why I stayed when it was all said and done. The longer I was*



*around them the more comfortable I started feeling and eventually, I didn't want to leave Manhattan" (Carl).*

Of the twenty young men interviewed, I found that it had the biggest impact on four in particular. Those four student-athletes were individuals that had expressed earlier that they did not have a great support system in place growing up. This particular group was the one I felt would be the most impacted from the beginning, because as the literature explained, the kids who have the least amount of support are the ones that are desperately seeking it from somewhere, and many times it comes from sports (Bacon, 2013; Brustad, 1993; Eitzen and Sage, 2012; Hirschi, 1969). One of the respondents, who previously had explained that he didn't have much support growing up replied:

*"This has been the closest thing to a family that I've ever had. I grew up with my grandma, never knew my real parents, didn't have any brothers or sisters. My grandma didn't care what I did...she let me run around with my friends and I could do anything. When I got here, it was a big change for me. I almost didn't make it here and almost got kicked off the team. I was lucky that coach had faith in me and kept on top of me, otherwise I wouldn't have made it and who knows where I would be if I got kicked off the team. The guys on the team helped me figure it out too, making sure I went to class if we had classes together because they are my brothers and didn't want me to get in trouble. They are the brothers I never had" (Jerry).*

Another of the four respondents that were most heavily influenced said:

*“I’ll be honest, I had trust issues when I first got to K-State. I grew up on my own, had to take care of myself. No one was helping me out and I knew that. I didn’t buy into it all at first. I thought that it was just a trick to get me to come play here. I kept my distance from the other players for the most part, the coaches were constantly having to yell at me and I was getting extra running every day because I wasn’t going to class and was showing up late to things. I wasn’t getting the reps in practice that I wanted and I complained a lot when I was in the locker room. One of the other guys that played the same position as me told me that I wouldn’t play until I learned to ‘buy in and quit being selfish’. I ignored him for a while, and the same thing kept happening. One day I tried being a better teammate because I was tired of not playing, and something clicked. I started having fun with the guys and things started to fall into place for me. Looking back, some of these dudes I used to not trust are the best friends I ever had....Even the secretaries in the complex care about you. Everyone calls them ‘Mama’ and ‘Grandma’, they are the sweetest ladies and will do anything to help” (Paul).*

These were both perfect examples of the types of players that the Kansas State football program is tailored for. These young men had as tough of upbringings as anyone on this team, yet they still managed to make it to college and play division 1 football. Though they had some problems early on, each of them really embraced the idea of the “family” and figured out how to make the changes they needed to in order to make it on the team. Both Jerry and Paul are classic examples of young men that had a tough past without support from their families. Both of these student-athletes used the team as a place where they could learn all of the values that the sport has to offer, allowed their coaches to guide them, took part in the rituals of the team,

and used all of these things in order to help them make a change (Bacon, 2013; Brustad, 1996; Eitzen and Sage, 2012).

Paul's confession was very interesting because it showed how much of a change the Kansas State program can make on someone. Paul came in not believing in the values that the program was built on and he struggled. Once he realized that there were people here to help him, and he tried to become a better teammate and took advantage of the values, he was able to thrive and create special bonds with his teammates (Eitzen and Sage, 2012; Scarnati, 2001). Paul also mentioned some of the "unsung heroes" in the complex, the secretaries, stating that they were mother-figures in the complex. When one of the secretaries was asked whether or not they felt like they played a mother/grandmother role to the guys, she said, *"There is no question that I feel like I play that role. I have 130 kids every year. They come and go every four or five years, but they will always be my babies. I try to be a mama for some of the boys that come through here because some of them need that motherly affection, being away from home for the first time. Each of the players that have come through here hold a very special place in my heart"* (Secretary J). This shows yet again, how special of a place Kansas State is due to the fact that even the secretaries are viewed in such a high regard as to be called "Mama" and "Grandma" and that they gladly accept that role with open arms.

The other two young men's stories were similar to Jerry and Paul's stories as they too grew up with little to no support from their families and each of them also expressed that when they initially got to Kansas State, they too struggled early on. However, like Paul and Jerry, they too ended up buying into the program and changed the way they behaved and changed their

lives. It was easy to see that these four young men were the ones that were the most heavily impacted by the family concept at Kansas State, because they really hadn't had any sense of family before they got here. They grew up fending for themselves and if they didn't come home at night, "...no one would probably notice" (Jerry). They came to K-State to play football, and in return, they got the family that they were always looking for.

### **Finishing What We Started**

The overall goal for any student-athlete to accomplish by the time their eligibility is completed at their college should be to work hard and earn a degree. However, many student-athletes across the country struggle with this as Eitzen and Sage explained, "Research indicates that college athletes in big-time football and basketball programs do not perform at the same level academically as other athletes and the general student body" (Eitzen and Sage, 2012:123). Though many times it is portrayed that athletes are just "dumb jocks", what people don't realize is that athletes typically have a more stressful schedule than any regular college student. They have weights, practice, meetings, film, study hall, meals, games/tournaments and a countless number of other things that they are required to be in attendance for that most other students don't have to worry about. Eitzen and Sage explained, "During the season, the athletes spend fifty to sixty hours preparing for, participating in, recovering from, and traveling to games...big-time college revenue sports have become a year-round occupation for the scholarship players" (Eitzen and Sage, 2012:126).

## ***Leading the Pack***

Sometimes, balancing all of these things can be too much for student-athletes and they will fail out. There are a number of schools across the country that struggle to keep their student-athletes eligible and more importantly, send them out with four-year degrees. Though this is the case other places, Kansas State has managed to be one of the top schools in the Big XII conference for several years, and particularly have led the Big XII in graduation rates among student-athletes for the past four years with a four-year GSR (Graduation Success Rate) of 81% (Kansas State Alumni Association, 2013). Kansas State football also individually leads the conference in the most recent GSR with a 4-class average GSR of 71% (Kansas State Alumni Association, 2013).

When looking at graduation rates, it is easy to see that there is a connection with the family atmosphere and rituals that have been utilized in so many ways here at Kansas State. Rituals certainly do not only affect sports, but they also have an effect on academics as well. The Kansas State football team has built a culture based on doing things the right way, on and off the football field, and they apply this same type of culture to academics. When asked what their educational goals were coming into college, all twenty of the respondents expressed that they had goals of achieving a Bachelor's degree, and nine of them said that they had goals to get a Master's degree as well. In order to obtain those degrees, each of these young men would have to be very dedicated to their education and would probably need help in order to stay on pace with everyone else in the class who would likely have more time to work on homework, study for tests, etc.

Though all of these young men had goals of acquiring their degrees, many of them expressed that they did not have the most impressive backgrounds in regards to: grades, test scores, etc. One respondent explained, *“I have never been very good at school. I always struggled in the class room, even though I tried really hard, I just have never gotten good grades. I was worried when I came to K-State because I was always told that college was a lot harder than high school. Since being here, it has definitely been a challenge for me to get good grades, especially with all of the stuff we have to do for football, but I get a lot of help from the guys at the ALC and tutors and stuff”* (John). Six of the players had similar experiences to John’s, all explaining that they had struggled with school in the past, even if they worked hard at it. They all explained that they were worried about classes when they first got to Kansas State University, but expressed that they received enormous amounts of help from the academic people at Kansas State to make sure that they were able to pass classes and get good grades.

### ***A Strong Support System in Place***

One of the more important questions asked in regards to education was whether or not the players felt like they had a good support system at Kansas State in regards to academics. I was pleased to find out that nineteen of the twenty felt like they had a great deal of support when it came to academics. One respondent said, *“Bill (Head of academics for football) and his staff are awesome. They have helped me so many times by helping me get tutors for classes I was struggling with. They check classes to make sure that all of the guys are going and just make sure that everyone is taking care of business and staying on track to graduate when they are supposed to. Everyone is required to do a certain number of hours of study hall, depending*

*on your grades, so they make sure that everyone is getting their hours in as well” (Jim).* This is another seamless example of how the use of ritual can help bring the team together. In this case they are practicing “Educational rituals”. All of the players take part in study hall, many times engaging in tutoring sessions together, or studying for a class together. Forming more bonds in a different venue than the football field, bringing the “Family” in closer together. In addition, they are all trying to get good grades in order to stay eligible so they can honor their totem (the Wildcat) by participating in games (Durkheim, 1965).

In addition to the academic staff, many of the players explained that their coaches also had a great deal to do with their education. As one former player explained, *“Coach always knew all of my grades and was constantly calling me and talking to me about classes to make sure that I was staying on top of my work. It could be annoying to have all of these people constantly getting after you about grades, but looking back, I understand why they did it. They wanted to make sure that everyone stayed eligible and got their degree. It just felt like he was one of my parents checking up on me” (Mark).*

This quote is a great example of the team, again, acting as a family does. As Mark explained, it seemed as though his coach was one of his parents looking after him, making sure that his grades were staying up so he wouldn’t get kicked out of school. The coaches at Kansas State genuinely care about their players and their grades, as they want to see all of their players succeed, so they are truly like father figures. When a coach was asked whether or not they felt like they needed to be a “father figure” to their players, the coach responded, *“Yes I feel that way many times.....making sure that my players are getting good grades is very important*

*because if they only take one thing away from this experience, I want them to walk away with a college degree” (Coach X).*

With all of the academic support that these student-athletes receive, it is easy to see why they have managed to lead the Big XII for the past four years. When asked if they had graduated, or were on track to graduate, all eight of the former players interviewed said that they had graduated, four of the twelve current players responded that they had already graduated, and the other eight current players all said that they were well on their way to graduating. I was impressed by these numbers as all twenty of them had expressed that they had already graduated or were on track to graduate, showing that Kansas State truly is focused on preparing their athletes to complete their overall mission in playing sports at Kansas State University, obtaining their degree.



## Chapter V - Conclusion

In wrapping up my research, I was extremely pleased about my findings. Throughout the research, I was able to make some great connections. Looking back at the layout of the twenty student-athletes I chose to interview, I found that a great deal of them came from different backgrounds whether it was: financially, different levels of support, family dynamic, delinquency during youth, etc. Though there were so many different situations present on the team, I was excited to find out that all of the players I interviewed responded positively in regards to whether or not they had been effected in a positive way by the family concept at Kansas State. Many times, the interviewees explained that within the family concept, informal social control was used by other players in order to correct behaviors throughout the team. An example of this would be when a player wasn't doing well in workouts or in the classroom, the leaders on the team would usually get on that player in order to make sure they were doing the things they needed to do.

In the end, I found that rituals played a huge role in the family concept of the Kansas State football team. Every aspect of the team is intertwined with some form of ritual and collectively, they have been responsible for creating a culture on the team revolved around coming together as one, and working harder than ever before for each other. The players have created their own rituals in order to bring the team closer together, and they apply them on the football field, in the classroom, and in nearly every dimension of their team in order to build the "family" that they want to have. That "family" can consist of players from every background imaginable, as long as they truly buy into the culture that they team is based on.

In conducting the interviews, I was able to find the evidence necessary to support my previous prediction that ritual in the family concept of the Kansas State football team affected student-athletes from all different types of social backgrounds, but more so when the young men came from families with less of a support structure in place while growing up. There were four student-athletes in particular that stood out at the end of the study. These four young men all explained that they did not have a very solid family structure early on in life and because of that, they did not have much support from family members. Due to the lack of support and supervision, each of these young men had shown some signs of delinquency in their youth, which will typically hinder some young men's ability to get out of their town and do something great. These particular student athletes managed to defy the odds and came to Kansas State in order to play football and pursue a degree. Through the ritual of family, great coaches that showed that they cared, and a team full of brothers, they were able to push past all of the delinquent behaviors from their past that were weighing them down and turn their lives around.

The student-athletes that grew up in a home environment that was full of support definitely showed that they too were affected in a positive way by the family expressing mainly that it helped them adjust more easily to being away from home for the first time. They also explained that it assisted them in their educational attainment as well as their athletics, by having such great support from both the coaches and by the academic staff put in place in order to help them succeed. Though their cases were not as life-changing as some of the other stories, this shows that the "family" concept can help anyone, from any kind of background, as the study showed that all twenty of the respondents expressed positive emotions about it.

After interviewing some of the student-athletes, I found that the “family” can expand outside of the complex walls. There were a number of cases where some of the players explained that they had interaction with people outside of the program who they felt would be considered to be a part of the family. One example that sticks out was when one of the student-athletes explained that people were coming up to him and hugging him when he was on his recruiting trip, just to welcome him to Manhattan. This made me think about the other athletics teams on campus. Could they have the same type of family environment as the football team does? Do they utilize ritual and tradition like football? Judging by the way that the entire town of Manhattan comes together to support each other, my guess would be that they certainly do, as Kansas State has a very special athletics program. This concept of “family” has a broader meaning that just being something that the football team uses in order to form cohesion; it has spread throughout the entire community. From elementary schools in the area having a purple-pride day, to having parades to celebrate victories, it is easy to see that people have drawn closer together through the success of the athletics teams at Kansas State, and in turn it has had a positive impact on the entire community.

When looking at the “Family” concept of a football team from the outside, it may look strange to some. It may seem like a recruiting ploy, or something that is being done just to please the media. Many teams stress it as being a major part of their program, while they don’t do the necessary things in order to truly get a real family feel. The truth about it is, at Kansas State, it is real. Kansas State football has touched so many lives, regardless of where a person came from. From the depths of the worst ghettos in America to the nicest of suburbs, Kansas State football has been able to take young men from any environment and achieve something

that very few teams are able to, a true FAMILY feel. It doesn't matter what you have done in the past or what kind of person you were before you got to K-State. The only thing that matters is that you choose to buy into the idea that if we are close together, anything can be accomplished, and that we can become closer here than any other team has ever been. With all of the traditions that Kansas State has, and all of the rituals that take place daily in order to bring the Family closer than ever, the sky is the limit for what can be accomplished by the "Family".

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## Appendix A - Estimated Probability of Competing in Athletics Beyond the High School Interscholastic Level

Source: NCAA Research, Sept. 2013.

[https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/Probability-of-going-pro-methodology\\_Update2013.pdf](https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/Probability-of-going-pro-methodology_Update2013.pdf)

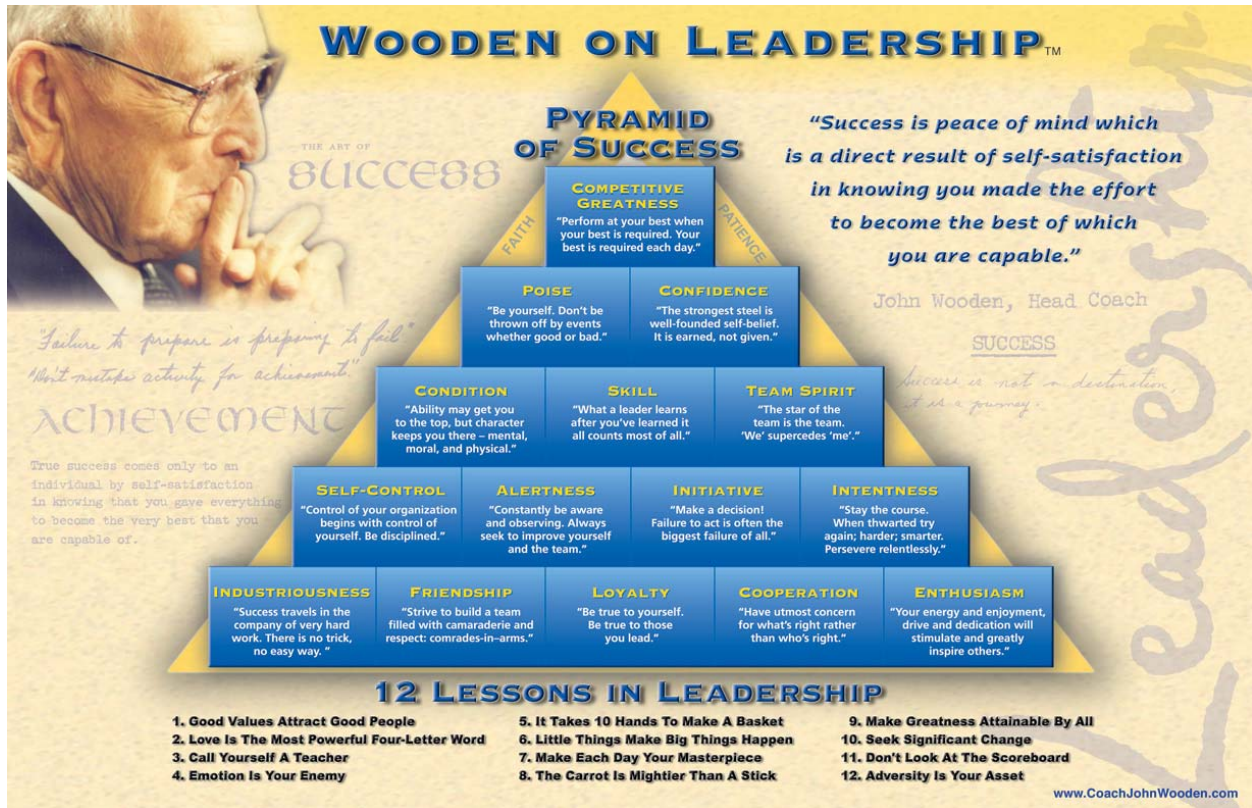
<b>Student Athletes</b>	<b>Men's Basketball</b>	<b>Women's Basketball</b>	<b>Football</b>	<b>Baseball</b>	<b>Men's Ice Hockey</b>	<b>Men's Soccer</b>
High School Student Athletes	538,676	433,120	1,086,627	474,791	35,198	410,982
High School Senior Student Athletes	153,907	123,749	310,465	135,655	10,057	117,423
NCAA Student Athletes	17,984	16,186	70,147	32,450	3,964	23,365
NCAA Freshman Roster Positions	5,138	4,625	20,042	9,271	1,133	6,676
NCAA Senior Student Athletes	3,996	3,597	15,588	7,211	881	5,192
NCAA Student Athletes Drafted	46	32	254	678	7	101
<b>Percent High School to NCAA</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>6.8%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>
<b>Percent NCAA to Professional</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>9.4%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>1.9%</b>
<b>Percent High School to Professional</b>	<b>0.03%</b>	<b>0.03%</b>	<b>0.08%</b>	<b>0.50%</b>	<b>0.07%</b>	<b>0.09%</b>



## Appendix B – Pyramid of Success

Source: John Wooden, Head Basketball Coach, UCLA 1948-1975.

<http://www.coachwooden.com/>



## Appendix C – 16 Goals for Wildcat Success

Source: Bill Snyder, Head Football Coach, Kansas State University, 1989.

<http://www.kstatesports.com/sports/m-footbl/ksu-m-footbl-body.html>

- 1 - COMMITMENT
- 2 - UNSELFISHNESS
- 3 - UNITY
- 4 - IMPROVE
- 5 - BE TOUGH
- 6 - SELF-DISCIPLINE
- 7 - GREAT EFFORT
- 8 - ENTHUSIASM
- 9 - ELIMINATE MISTAKES
- 10 - NEVER GIVE UP
- 11 - DON'T ACCEPT LOSING
- 12 - NO SELF LIMITATIONS
- 13 - EXPECT TO WIN
- 14 - CONSISTENCY
- 15 - LEADERSHIP
- 16 - RESPONSIBILITY

## **Appendix D – Flyer for Interviews**

### **Family: A Study of the Sociological Structure of a College Football Team**

**The Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work is conducting a research about the concept of “family” used by K-State’s football program. The study is supervised by Dr. Laszlo Kulcsar and the fieldwork will be done by Zach Hanson. The study procedures have been approved by Kansas State University’s Institutional Review Board.**

**In order to find subjects for this study we will need volunteers to come forward if interested. This is a completely voluntary study but your participation would be greatly appreciated.**

**If you have any questions about the study or the procedures, please contact Zach Hanson ([zhanson70@gmail.com](mailto:zhanson70@gmail.com) or at (209) 470-6270)**

## Appendix E – Coaches Interview Questions

### Coaches Interview Questions

- How long have you been a coach?
- Why did you get into coaching?
- As a coach do you feel like you have a responsibility to be a sort of “Father Figure” to your players? Explain.
  - If yes, do you feel that you have to treat players from different types of backgrounds differently in regards to guiding/helping them?
- Do you feel like football teams can act as a “Family” away from home? If yes, How so? If no, why not?
- Have you seen differences in teams where there was a strong sense of Family as opposed to one where there wasn’t? Explain.
- Do you think that the “Family Concept” on football teams affect kids from different backgrounds differently?
  - If yes, how does it affect them differently and in your opinion why?
- Do you think that the Kansas State football team truly does have a “close family feel”?
- What would you say the make-up of the team is in regards to sociological background? (Family situation -Who they were they raised by, financial situation growing up, area raised in, etc.)
  - Do you think this has anything to do with how the team comes together as a “family”?

## Appendix F – Secretary Interview Questions

### Secretaries Interview Questions

- How long have you been a secretary for football teams?
- As a secretary at the football complex, do you feel like you serve as a sort of mother/grandmother figure to the players? Explain.
  - If yes, do you feel that you have to treat players from different types of backgrounds differently in regards to guiding/helping them?
- Do you feel like football teams can act as a “Family” away from home? If yes, How so? If no, why not?
- Have you seen differences in teams where there was a strong sense of Family as opposed to one where there wasn’t? Explain.
- Do you think that the “Family Concept” on football teams affect kids from different backgrounds differently?
  - If yes, how does it affect them differently and in your opinion why?
- Do you think that the Kansas State football team truly does have a “close family feel”?
- What would you say the make-up of the team is in regards to sociological background? (Family situation -Who they were they raised by, financial situation growing up, area raised in, etc.)
  - Do you think this has anything to do with how the team comes together as a “family”?

# Appendix G – Player Interview Questions

## Player Interview Questions

### PRIOR LIFE EXPERIENCES

#### - FAMILY IN-DEPTH

- How would you classify the neighborhood you grew up in? (Rural, Urban, Suburb, etc.)
- How would you describe your family environment growing up? Were you close with your parents?
- Did you have any siblings? If so, what was your relationship like with them?
- Were your family members supportive of you when you were growing up or did you feel that you were “on your own” for most things?
- How would you describe your upbringing financially?
- Was your family supportive of you going to college? Explain.
- Has anyone else in your family gone to college and if so, who?
- Did you have support from family when you chose Kansas State? Explain. (Financial? Emotional/Ritual?)

#### - ATHLETICS GROWING UP (ANYTHING PRIOR TO K-STATE)

- What sports did you play growing up?
- At what age did you start playing football?
- Were your parents/guardians supportive of you playing sports when you were young?
- When you were younger, why did you play sports?
- Did you get into trouble a lot when you were younger? Explain.
- What were your relationships like with your teammates on these teams?
- Did you ever see any of your childhood athletic teams as a “family” environment, or a community? Explain.
- Growing up, did you ever look at your Coach as a Father/Mother figure? Explain.

### FEELING OF BELONGING:

#### - RECRUITING RITUALS (Prior to K-State):

- What was your recruiting visit to K-State like? Was it different than at other schools? Explain.
- How was your recruiting coach during the recruiting process? Were they different than coaches at other schools? Explain.

- Did the KSU coaches do anything that stood out to you on your recruiting trip?
  - How did you feel about your hosts on your recruiting trip?
  - What was the time spent with the players on the team like on your trip? How did you feel about them?
  - Did you get a chance to be around some other K-State students not on the team on your recruiting trip? If so, what did you think of those encounters?
  - Did you get the opportunity to be around any Manhattan residents who aren't involved with KSU at all? Explain how those encounters were.
  - What made you choose Kansas State?
- TEAM BUILDING/FAMILY RITUALS (At K-State):
- What are your relationships like with your teammates? Do you feel like you know everyone on the team?
  - What are your relationships like with your coaches?
  - How well do you know the secretaries in the office (Joan/Teresa)?
  - Were you assigned any kind of mentor by the coaches when you arrived on campus? If so, has that helped your transition? Explain.
  - What, in your opinion, is the biggest thing that brings a team together?
  - What kinds of activities have you done here that you feel have helped bring the team together?
  - Do you guys have any rituals that you do as a team?
  - Have you gone through any sort of Life-changing event since you have become a student-athlete here? Explain.
    - If yes, did you feel like you had a strong support system here at Kansas State to help you through whatever event took place? Explain.

## LOYALTY TO THE PROGRAM

- UNIVERSITY RITUALS:
- Are you originally from Kansas?
  - Did you grow up a K-State fan?
  - Did you have any affiliation with K-State growing up? (Maybe relative was a fan or attended school here, etc).
  - How would you describe Kansas State University as a whole to an outsider?
  - What was your first impression of the program and its connection to the university?
  - How has that changed since you have been a part of this team/university?
  - If yes, what do you think are some of the things that make people loyal to the Kansas State program/University? (Examples of possible rituals/rites: family feel, Wabash, KSU chant, fight song, rivalry games, tradition, blue collar, etc)
  - Do you think that the fan base here is different than it is elsewhere? Explain.

- How do you think the community has an impact on the Kansas State football team and vis-versa?
- Do you feel that the concept of Family at K-State is different than other places? Why or why not?
- Has the “Family” concept of this football team affected you? Why or why not?
- How would you describe the Kansas State Football team to an outsider?

## **STAYING ON TRACK & GRADUATING**

### **EDUCATION RITUALS**

- What kind of student were you in high school? GPA?
- Did you have any kind of help while in middle/high school? (Tutors, study hall, etc).
- Coming into college, what were your educational goals?
- How do you feel about your academics here at Kansas State?
- How does the Athletic Learning Center (ALC) help you with school? Do you utilize any tutors and if so, do you feel like they help you?
- How do you think the counselors in the ALC feel about the program?
- Does your coach have anything to do with your academics?
- Are you on track to graduate or have you already graduated? How do you feel you measure up with regular students who are not involved with athletics?
- How do you stay focused on your education with your crazy schedule for football?
- Do you feel like you have a good support system here at Kansas State in regards to academics? Explain.



## Appendix H – Player Information Chart

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Current/Former Player</b>
Alex	20	Caucasian	Current
Bob	20	African-American	Current
Brian	20	African-American	Current
Carl	19	Caucasian	Current
Carlos	22	African-American	Former
Chris	22	Caucasian	Former
Dave	19	Caucasian	Current
Eric	20	Caucasian	Current
Frank	20	African-American	Current
Garrett	23	African-American	Former
Jared	22	Caucasian	Former
Jeff	21	Caucasian	Current
Jermaine	19	African-American	Current
Jerry	22	African-American	Former
Jim	21	Caucasian	Current
John	21	African-American	Current
Mark	23	Polynesian	Former
Mike	21	African-American	Current
Oscar	21	African-American	Former
Paul	24	Caucasian	Former