Portuguese Soccer Fans and Their Love for ‘The Big Three’

Boris Osorio, Brock University
Craig Hyatt, Brock University

Marketing Abstract 2016-267
Saturday, June 4, 2016 10:35 AM
20-minute oral presentation (including questions) (Forum West 3)

In the Portuguese community in Toronto and in Portugal, soccer is the most supported sport. Many first generation migrants to Toronto from Portugal have retained their affiliation with a Portuguese League soccer team and have used their affiliation to create a sense of community and a feeling of ‘home’ by expressing sport behaviors such as rituals, symbols, and values. Since the inception of the Portuguese soccer league, three teams referred to collectively as the ‘Big Three’ have dominated the league and garnered the most support from Portuguese fans. The ‘Big Three’ is comprised of two teams from Lisbon (Sporting Clube de Portugal, and Sport Lisboa e Benfica) and one team from Porto (Futebol Clube do Porto). The popularity of the ‘Big Three’ in the Portuguese soccer league has led many Portuguese soccer fans to revert to having dual fandom, where they often affiliate with one of the ‘Big Three’ teams as the primary team they support, while simultaneously supporting their local Portuguese team as a second choice.

Research on Portuguese fandom has focused on transnational soccer fans in regards to their allegiances to their soccer team within a new host nation (Tiesler, 2012), their contribution to the soccer landscape (Moniz, 2007; Pereira, 2012), the creation of ethnic spaces and markets where the commodification of the ‘Big Three’ merchandise is represented (Leal, 2009), and second generation Portuguese-Canadians grappling with assimilation through the national sport in Canada (hockey) and retention of cultural sport (soccer) (Sardinha, 2012). The research on fan behavior for non-local and distant fans has been studied from the perspectives of franchise relocation in which fans cheer for their team in the team’s new host city (Hyatt, 2007; Foster & Hyatt, 2007), fans living in another country and community (Farred, 2002; Kerr & Gladden, 2008; Svinson, & Hoeber (in press)), and becoming a fan to a distant team when a local alternative exists (Hyatt & Andrijew, 2008). Much of the literature on how these distant and nonlocal fans support their team focuses on the creation of imagined communities (Tiesler, 2012; Stone, 2007; Anderson, 2006). One manner in which researchers have been able to understand the effects of acculturation on Portuguese migrants is through sport (Pereira, 2012; Sardinha, 2012; Tiesler, 2012; Moniz, 2007). Contributions to the study of Portuguese fandom have added to existing literature on the ways in which the commodification of ‘home’ within ethnic markets in Portuguese communities has influenced fandom retention. Missing in the literature on Portuguese soccer fandom are the narratives of nonlocal Portuguese soccer fans living in continental Portugal and the narratives of nonlocal Portuguese soccer fans that have migrated to Canada as well as the effects migration has on team allegiances.

The purpose of this research was to explore the ways in which Portuguese migrants living in Toronto who have identified as nonlocal Portuguese soccer fans (i.e. fans from Portuguese towns outside of Lisbon and Porto) have retained their fandom to one of the ‘Big Three’ Portuguese League soccer teams after leaving continental Portugal. To explore this, participants were recruited and face-to-face interviews were conducted with Portuguese non-local fans living in Toronto. Further, non-local fans were recruited in Portugal by utilizing the same participant criteria. The research utilized qualitative methods (consisting of seven semi-structured interviews with four nonlocal Portuguese soccer fans living in Toronto, Canada and three nonlocal Portuguese soccer fans living in Continental Portugal that were recorded, transcribed and coded) in order to better understand how fandom behavior is affected by location, and immigration. The research compares how the fandom of non-local Portuguese soccer fans living in Toronto is similar and different from non-local Portuguese soccer fans living in continental Portugal. The research is qualitative in nature and involves an interpretive methodology that captures the lived experience of non-local Portuguese soccer fans. From an analysis of the participants’ interviews there emerged specific themes such as fans supporting two teams, fan allegiance as a tool to navigate their current location, and fan identity as memento of home. Through the narratives of these seven Portuguese soccer league fans conclusions were drawn that can provide a better understanding of sport consumer behaviors. These include the formation and maintenance of fan nations for teams that look to extend their brand beyond their geographical proximity, and how sport organizations can influence first generation migrants’ sport consumption through the behaviors of second generation populations. This research
project adds to the existing literature on Portuguese communities and sport fandom in relation to sport consumer behavior and fan relocation. This research project contributes to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the ways in which sport organizations are faced with opportunities to attract a larger fan base as well as how sport can be used as a migration tool to retain fandom and identity of both the host nation and country of origin.