

an identity.”¹² and “participating in sport is where I feel I am most comfortable, out of all the different aspects of my life. Since I enjoy sport so much, others see me as a sport freak sometimes, which I don’t think is a bad thing. Involvement in sport is my identity”¹³. I have concluded through my research that a person’s identity being solely defined by their involvement in sport is definitely not desirable. This can have an extremely negative effect on their life instead of the positive effect that would have come with a more balanced sense of identity.

Opportunity is defined as a favourable juncture of circumstances or a good chance for advancement or progress¹⁴. Equality of opportunity is not shared between country and city athletes as country athletes on a whole experience a great lack of opportunities. Distance from facilities, competitions and development opportunities can pose a major challenge for athletes in rural areas, particularly those who live outside of larger rural centres. In an effort to break down that barrier, scholarships are being offered more frequently to young country athletes to remove some of the financial pressure that comes with distance. An example is the “Smarter than Smoking Country Sport Scholarship” which offers up to \$1500 to young regional athletes aged 13 to 21, who have shown potential to reach state or national selection in their sport. The aim of this scholarship is to help country athletes achieve their potential. Scholarships can be a great help in providing opportunities for country athletes and can be used for training sessions, state and national competitions or specialist coaching. Peter Monaghan agrees that there is definitely a lack of opportunities in the country, however he thinks there is still some advantage in the way opportunities are nurtured. He states; *“Opportunities would certainly be far more abundant in the city, the competitors are also much more in volume. If a young player has the drive and talent I feel the opportunities are better nurtured in the country”¹⁵.* Nevertheless, country athletes are certainly at a disadvantage in regard to the opportunities they are exposed to when compared with their city counterparts. My findings on equality of opportunity in the country and city have contradicted my hypothesis.

¹² Response to Questionnaire, distributed 22/1/10

¹³ Response to Questionnaire, distributed 22/1/10

¹⁴ <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/opportunity>

¹⁵ Interview with Peter Monaghan, 28/11/09

Chapter 2: The City Experience

The aim of my PIP was to explore what aspects of the country environment make its athletes so successful. However, during this process I was enlightened to the positive attributes of sport in the city as well. The opinion of Peter Monaghan, which I obtained during my expert interview, broadened my understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of both the country and city experiences.

I found that the city heavily outweighs the country in terms of its facilities and competition levels. Regional areas often have poorer access to services and facilities because of the effect of locational disadvantage¹⁶. City areas are typically home to more modern and high tech facilities such as Institutes of Sports. Although Peter Monaghan pointed out during our interview that *“the country can and still will strive to provide facilities with a good environment for development”*¹⁷. In regard to the city’s competition levels, Peter Monaghan reveals *“Competition is always a higher standard in the city”*¹⁸ although he also notes that *“Country associations do try and retain or recall their elite athletes to develop or raise the level of competition”*¹⁹. However, the effort by various country sporting associations to raise the competition level high enough to compare to the level of competition in the city is not entirely successful. Country athletes pursuing professional careers will often move to the city to make use of the facilities and high competition levels that are lacking in rural areas.

Support is often measured by success. Support is shown through sponsorship, parental assistance, and community spirit. When asked about the difference in support between city and country areas, Peter Monaghan gave the following response; *“I have seen this support both strong in the city and the country. Whilst most of the support for the city comes from large business or state government, the country is usually supported by local council or strong community groups with business backing”*²⁰. The conclusion I drew from this

16 Casey, M.M., Eime, R.M., Payne, W.R. And Harvey, J.T. 2009, “Using a Sociological Approach to Examine Participation in Sport and Physical Activity Among Rural Adolescent Girls”, *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol.19, No.7, pp.881-893

17 Interview with Peter Monaghan, 28/11/09

18 Interview with Peter Monaghan, 28/11/09

19 Interview with Peter Monaghan, 28/11/09

20 Interview with Peter Monaghan, 28/11/09

statement was that although it is often shown in different ways, the city environment and country environment tend to provide a relatively even amount of support for their athletes. Despite the positive attributes of sport in the city environment, statistics still show that country athletes almost always represent the majority in representative sporting teams in Australia. I used statistical analysis as a primary methodology to investigate this further and help prove my hypothesis. I used field hockey as a case study and gathered information on the home associations of male and female athletes in various age groups that had been selected in New South Wales hockey teams.

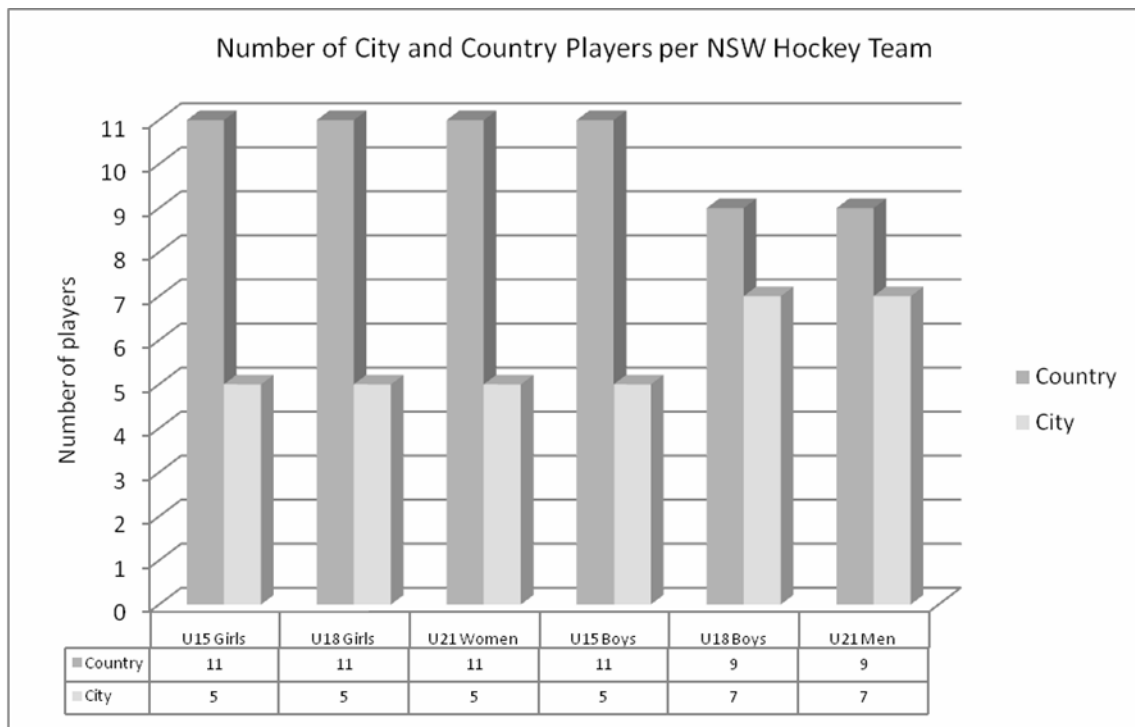


Figure 1: Number of City and Country Players per NSW Hockey Team

The age groups that I analysed were under 15's, under 18's and under 21's. My findings in every age group of both genders supported my hypothesis. Overall, 69% of athletes in the New South Wales Women's teams and 60% of athletes in the New South Wales men's teams were from the country. There was an increase in city players in both under 18's boys and under 21's men. Although it was a slight increase and did not mean that country players had become the minority, it is still relevant. Due to the better facilities, competition levels and opportunities, some country athletes pursuing a professional career move to the city when