



Stop Trafficking!

AwarenessAdvocacyAction

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FOCUS: This month's newsletter focuses on the intersection of sports and human trafficking.

Sport has become yet another cover under which the trafficking of human beings operates. From aspiring athletes trafficked to pseudo-sports camps in faraway countries, to exploited labor in the construction of the sports stadiums, to underage girls being forced into prostitution at nearby hotels during major sporting events, the link between human trafficking and sports can take many different forms. The relationship of sports with human trafficking is poorly understood, with uncertainty around its scale. This phenomenon was included for the first time as a topical issue in the US Department of State's Annual Trafficking in Persons Report (2020).



What is Athletic Trafficking?

Kamara left Africa and his home country of Liberia when he was 14, lured by the promise of a soccer career. Because Liberia has no soccer academy, Kamara went to Laos; having been promised a six-year contract with the "IDSEA Champasak Asian African Football Academy" that included salary and accommodation. But Kamara claimed he was never paid. Instead, he slept on the stadium floor with 30 other young players. They ate bread and rice, had no coach or medical staff or class schedule, and played no games. And, in the end, it appears the academy Kamara signed with never existed. When Kamara and his teammates tried to leave, they were told they couldn't unless they paid for their accommodations and food. In essence, they were trapped in a strange country with no promise of a future. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Athletes worldwide dream of making it big, and perpetrators prey on this desire. Athletic trafficking or human trafficking through physical ability or sports typically occurs in two ways.

The first is trafficking in sports which involves young players who pay agents or intermediaries claiming to have contacts with professional clubs abroad. Children and teenagers are recruited from foreign countries with the promise of an education and money to play sports. They could even obtain a contract or the opportunity to trial with a club. The prospect of finding the next big thing, combined with thousands of children desperate to improve their lives, has created the perfect opportunity for criminals, unscrupulous agents, and clubs alike.

The second, which occurs in most cases, is also known as human trafficking through sports. The agent demands a loan from the athlete, which in some cases, their family goes to extreme methods to finance. The agent would then

Moninda Marube, an anti-human-trafficking advocate and the University of Maine at Farmington running coach, fell victim to human trafficking trying to escape poverty and a dire political climate in Kenya. Marube flew to the United States in hopes of winning major races and earning lofty sponsorships. Marube took another chance when he moved to Coon Rapids, Minnesota, to train and live with an agent with no home and little to his name. While in Coon Rapids, Marube's agent took his passport and visa, forced him to live in a single room with several other runners, withheld the majority of his winnings, and limited his communication with others. Several people helped Marube escape from his agent and eventually move to Maine.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

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take the athlete to another country for a “trial.” In this case, the alleged interest from a foreign club is bogus, and the intermediary trafficker abandons the player on arrival in a destination country. The players are left abroad in cheap hotels without passports or money. Once the precarious nature of their situation is realized, the player is often said to be too ashamed to return home. He remains in the destination country illegally without subsistence, which makes him vulnerable to other forms of human trafficking. Many boys can be found in the sex trade, in involuntary domestic servitude, as forced laborers in the catering industry, and as participants in the drug trade.

Those complicit in the practice include former players, people in business, and even world-famous sports clubs. Concern regarding human trafficking and irregular migration within the football industry was first highlighted in a 1999 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report. The report highlighted the danger of creating a modern-day slave trade in young African footballers. A decade later, the European Commission’s Study on Sport (ECS) made a similar argument, which claimed that the increasing numbers of young West African males were taking covert journeys to Europe under the pretense of a contract or trial with a professional football club.

A popular sport on the Saudi Peninsula is the racing of camels. Because young children often make the best jockeys due to their size, they are either bought or kidnapped from Pakistan and Bangladesh. Recently, replacing child jockeys with robots has decreased the demand for children.

In track and field, top athletes from mainly the African countries are often persuaded to switch their nationalities to countries such as Azerbaijan, Qatar, and Bahrain. Every Olympic medal Bahrain has won was captured by an African athlete.

Meanwhile, Cuban baseball players seeking to play in America, including former Los Angeles Dodgers star Yasiel Puig, had to collaborate with a human-trafficking network to play baseball in America. In 2018, Major League Baseball and the players association reached an agreement with the Cuban Baseball Federation to give Cuban players an alternative — any player 25 and older is eligible to be released from his contract in Cuba to play in the United States. If the player is under 25, he would be subject to a waiting period to discourage smugglers.

The problem exists even within high school sports. Paterson Eastside High School in New Jersey faced significant repercussions after a series of exposés revealed six players were recruited from Nigeria and Puerto Rico and living in poor conditions with the school’s boys’ basketball coach. An international pipeline had funneled athletes to Eastside over several years. Another investigation in 2015 revealed four Nigerian athletes were homeless and in foster care after being lured into playing basketball for a Christian high school in Georgia.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Human Trafficking and Major Sports Events

When thinking of major sporting events like the Olympics, World Cup, or Super Bowl, we usually remember memories of joy and resilience. However, we cannot ignore a shadowy side of these events: human trafficking.

Human trafficking occurs year-round and everywhere, from major cities to small towns. It also can spike during a major event that draws a big audience and large numbers of people from out of town, which may increase demand for commercial sex. Unfortunately, because of the secretive nature of human trafficking, reliable data on human trafficking around major sporting events is limited.

During major sporting events, there are significant increases in the number of calls reporting suspected cases of human trafficking to human trafficking hotlines. For example, during the 2020 Super Bowl in Miami, the National Human Trafficking Hotline operated by Polaris received 163% more calls from the area in the Super Bowl period than it



IT'S A PENALTY
HARNESSING THE POWER OF SPORT TO PROTECT CHILDREN
FROM EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE. GLOBALLY.

did during the same time in 2019. Increases also occurred during the 2019 Super Bowl in Atlanta (26.3%) and in 2018 at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics & Paralympics (7%). In addition, during the 2018 Super Bowl in Minneapolis, calls to the hotline increased 300%.

In recent years, law enforcement, businesses, and citizens have come together in cities hosting the Super Bowl and other major sporting events and used the event as a platform to increase awareness about human trafficking. Systems are also put in place to mitigate human trafficking during the event. For example, Uber and many hotels train employees on the signs of human trafficking. In addition, law enforcement crackdowns on “talent” ads found on sites like Craigslist and Backpage and the National Center on Sexual Exploitation have initiated campaigns addressing child exploitation.

Law enforcement agencies launch sting operations during major sporting events due to the increased occurrence of human trafficking and exploitation. These stings have resulted in mass arrests of perpetrators and recoveries of survivors. During the 2019 Super Bowl in Atlanta, for example, the FBI arrested a total of 169 people, including those who were trafficking forced sex workers, those who attempted to exploit minors sexually, and others buying sex. Nine survivors aged 14-17 years old were also recovered during this sting in Atlanta.

During a similar operation at the 2020 Super Bowl in Miami, 47 traffickers were arrested, and 22 survivors were

identified. Throughout an investigation dubbed “Operation Game Over,” which started Monday, February 1, 2021, and ended Saturday, February 6, the week leading to the February 7 Super Bowl, the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office also arrested a total of 75 people who were seeking to either buy or sell sex. Undercover deputies targeted massage parlors, hotels, motels, and online chatrooms known for illicit activity. Arrestees ranged in age, from as young as 19 to 73 years old.

Before the Olympic games in Japan in 2021, there was a global campaign to address human trafficking and child prostitution, and exploitation linked to sport. Moreover, in 2016, police in Brazil rescued young teen girls from a sex-trafficking ring as part of a sweep in the run-up to the Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

It would be misleading and harmful to suggest that a major sporting event, like the Super Bowl or the Olympics, is the only reason human trafficking occurs in a host city. Once the sporting event is over, human trafficking will continue in the area, probably at the same activity levels as before the sporting event.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

While in Charlotte, North Carolina, Evelyn Mack set up a private school where she lured in foreign student-athletes on the promise that they would earn athletic scholarships to prominent schools. Mack earned \$75,000 by falsely representing that 75 student-athletes were attending her school and therefore compliant with F-1 student visas. Instead, all student-athletes were actually in the U.S. illegally and mysteriously disappeared with basketball coaches or recruiters. Mack ultimately pleaded guilty to federal charges. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Slave Labor in Building

Amnesty International reports that thousands of migrant workers from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and elsewhere constructing a new stadium for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar have been victims of slave labor and are stranded in the country. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) claims that Qatar’s construction in preparation for the 2022 World Cup is on course to cost the lives of at least 4,000 migrant workers before a ball is kicked.

Before the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia, in 2014, migrant workers also endured slave labor. Thousands of migrant workers from Armenia, Bosnia, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine were brought in to enlarge roads, electrical infrastructure, and sewage treatment facilities and build dozens of new buildings.

Most workers came willingly, recruited locally by an outside agency, but once they arrived in Russia, their passports were taken away, and they were forced to work 12 hours a day. Then, during months and sometimes years, the workers were paid a mere fraction of what they owed or sometimes received no payment.

When Human Rights Watch wrote a report detailing the working conditions of 66 migrant workers in Sochi, the Russian government began systematically arresting migrant workers in Sochi and placing them in detention facilities without food, water, or any legal representation.

Click [here](#) to learn more.





Awareness

It is important to note that human trafficking in sports does not only happen on the world's biggest stages, but it can happen in our own backyards. In late 2017, a 17-year-old girl who was a victim of sexual assault and human trafficking called the police to report the man responsible. Sadly, the perpetrator was heavily involved in the community and sports. He was the boys' soccer coach at the local high school, a youth team coach, and a Lyft and Uber driver.

Gymnastics

Human trafficking charges were brought against a former United States women's gymnastics coach in February 2021. Young girls were coerced to train at a Michigan gym where they were abused. The maximum penalty of 15 years in prison for each of the 20 trafficking counts brought against the coach was more than the penalty for the sex crime he was also charged with. Much of the alleged abuse continued because the private gyms and gymnastics clubs operated outside of the view of the public or even the athletes' parents. Click [here](#) to learn more.



Advocacy

What Can Sports Organizations Do?

Sports organizations can play a crucial role in affecting meaningful change and ending the trafficking of young athletes. The 2020 TIP Report asserts that though some national sports associations and individual government officials have taken an interest in addressing the exploitation of athletes, the global nature of the sports industry and decentralized structure of many associations and leagues calls for a more systematic and standardized approach.

A statement of no tolerance for human trafficking in and through sport is the first step in creating a culture of safety. Regulations have been implemented in the last two decades to prevent this kind of abuse and exploitation. The International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic and Sports Movement prohibits exploitation of young athletes and explicitly states that for protecting athletes:

- ◆ Measures should be taken to prohibit the exploitation of young athletes
- ◆ Athletes should be protected from unscrupulous recruiters and agents
- ◆ Cooperation with the government of the countries concerned should be developed
- ◆ All sports organizations should sign codes of conduct

Sports organizations should also do a risk assessment of the current business practices and policies. For example, if agents are being used to recruit potential players, the organization needs to be aware of how they entice or control the athletes they recruit.

Organizations should also know about the supply chain that provides the equipment they use and the uniforms they wear. What steps are they taking to stop human trafficking from occurring while they participate or put on an event?

Once a risk assessment is complete, the organization needs to set up standards that help identify and prevent human trafficking, implement human trafficking awareness programs for all employees and vendors, conduct supply chain audits, and develop protocols for suspected violations of organization standards.

There are some signs of sports organizations taking ownership of the human trafficking associated with sports. For example, Major League Baseball made monetary donations to organizations combatting human trafficking following some player-led initiatives. In addition, Fédération Internationale de Football Association has recently convened a Human Rights Advisory Board after several victims of labor trafficking died while they were forced to build the stadiums for the 2022 World Cup, set to take place in Qatar. Click [here](#) to learn more.



Created by Theresa Flores, the S.O.A.P. Project stands for Save Our Adolescents from Prostitution. Flores and her volunteers distribute soap bars to hotels housing visitors for major sporting events, conventions, and entertainment

extravaganzas across the nation. Soap wrappers contain the hotline number, but also three questions:

- ♦ Are you being forced to do anything you do not want to do?
- ♦ Have you been threatened if you try to leave?
- ♦ Have you witnessed young girls being prostituted?

The SOAP's Project mission is to end human trafficking by mobilizing communities, provide prevention education and advocacy, and facilitate restorative experiences for survivors. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Forced Labor

"Millions of Uyghurs are currently detained, sold and assigned to work at forced labor camps, prisons and factories across the country. They are under constant surveillance, with long working hours and poor living conditions. Don't forget, every time you put those shoes on your feet, or you put that T-shirt on your back, there are so many tears and so much oppression and so much blood behind it all."

Enes Kanter, a center for the Boston Celtics, has been an outspoken advocate condemning the forced labor of Uyghurs, a minority group in China. He has focused on Nike, and its benefits from Uyghur forced labor in making its sports shoes and clothing. Kanter also highlighted that Nike had not signed the Coalition's Call to Action to End Forced Labor in the Uyghur Region. In addition, Kanter has worn customized shoes during games with "Modern Day Slavery" and "No More Excuses" written on them.

Freedom United sits on the steering committee of the Coalition to End Forced Labor in the Uyghur Region, which around 400 organizations and Uyghur groups endorse. They are calling on Nike to exit the Uyghur Region. Nike

has reportedly lobbied against the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act.

In January 2021, US Customs and Border Protection imposed a Withhold Release Order prohibiting the importation of all cotton goods from the Uyghur Region unless importers can affirmatively prove that no forced labor was used in the production of the goods.

In December 2021, the House of Representatives voted 428-1, passing the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act. The vote follows the Senate's unanimous approval of a companion bill on July 15.

Please click [here](#) to keep the pressure on Nike and take action today.

International Justice Mission

International Justice Mission (IJM) is a global organization that protects people in poverty from violence. IJM partners with local authorities in 21 program offices in 13 countries to combat human trafficking, violence against women and children, and other forms of abuse against poor people. IJM works to rescue and restore victims, hold perpetrators accountable, and help strengthen public justice systems.

Team Freedom, IJM's team of pro athletes, has partners in the NFL, MLB, NHL, US Soccer, and Olympics. They are committed to using the global power and influence of sport in IJM's work to protect people in poverty from human trafficking, slavery, and other forms of violence.

Since Team Freedom's launch in 2014, Team Freedom players and their families have advocated for survivors, traveled internationally to meet with IJM front line teams, and brought the work of IJM in front of tens of millions of people. They have also raised significant funds to support the work. In 2020 alone, Team Freedom raised over \$3 million. Click [here](#) to learn more.





Advocacy

What Can You Do?

Rahab's Daughters, a movement of volunteers working together to fight human trafficking, suggest the following steps that individuals may take to hold major sports organizations accountable for the human trafficking that occurs around their sport:

Ask what actions the sports organization is taking.

With social media, we can speak directly to people in power, including the leaders of major sports organizations. For example, when trafficking arrests are made in conjunction with the Super Bowl, ask the NFL what they are doing to prevent human trafficking around football games. Remind the @Olympics that trafficking occurs around the Olympic Games every time they are held. Ask how they are planning to prevent it. Do the same with local school and town sports organizations.

When athletes or team owners engage in behavior that enables trafficking, hold the teams and the leagues accountable.

Most teams and sports organizations have codes of conduct for their players and team owners, but they may not be enforced or are enforced arbitrarily depending on the person involved. When incidents like the arrest of New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft for soliciting prostitution happens, hold the team and the league accountable. Demand action to enforce existing rules of conduct.

When athletes or owners engage in behavior that combats trafficking, amplify it.

Changes are occurring for the better. When players, teams, and leagues take positive steps to fight trafficking, support their actions. Share the information with your networks and encourage the behavior or action.

If you attend a game, look for signs of trafficking and report it.

If you suspect human trafficking while at a game, report it to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-373-7888. Some warning signs may be people who seem afraid or withdrawn from others.

Educate your fellow fans.

Human trafficking takes place all around us. Unfortunately, most people enjoying a game aren't aware of the trade happening around them, don't know what to look for, and don't know how to report incidents. Make your friends and family aware of the problem and engage them in becoming part of the solution.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



Action

Athletes Working Against Human Trafficking

As awareness about human trafficking increases, so do the efforts by some athletes to abolish this crime.

Cleveland Brown's head coach Hue Jackson and his wife, Michelle, founded **The Hue Jackson Foundation** in 2017. They are "committed to empowering children, teen and adult survivors of Human Trafficking through the funding of organizations that champion for and serve as a voice for those who are exploited." Their reach is global through their website and broad-reaching platform, and their action is local. For example, they have partnered with The Salvation Army of Greater Cleveland to fund a safe house for survivors in that area.





Rick Fox is a former NBA player turned actor turned philanthropist. He works with several organizations to promote healthy relationships, including **togetherheart**, an organization active in rescuing and restoring human trafficking survivors. He even represented the charity in a celebrity competition on The Food Network's hit show Chopped.



Albert Pujols holds the record for the 6th most seasons (7) with 40+ home runs in Major League Baseball. He and his wife, Diedre, founded **Strike Out Slavery**, which seeks to raise funds and awareness to end human trafficking.

Finally, former Chicago White Sox player Adam LaRouche has done amazing things to raise funds and awareness. In 2016, shortly after retiring from baseball, he went undercover with The Exodus Road. This non-profit is on the front lines of human trafficking in Asia. LaRouche joined them for a 10-day trip during which he assisted in uncovering brothels and sex slavery. [Learn more about his experiences and story here.](#)

It's a Penalty

It's a Penalty (IAP) works to end abuse, exploitation, and human trafficking globally. Through four programs that include education, awareness-raising, and advocacy, they work to end exploitation and trafficking. They collaborate with high-profile sporting athletes and the travel and tourism industry, including hotels, airlines and transportation. In addition, they partner with sporting governing bodies/hosting committees, local and international NGOs, governments, corporations, and law enforcement.

Youth sports present an excellent platform to raise awareness and protect children. High-profile cases of young athletes being abused while competing have drawn attention to the issue of child protection in sports all over the world.

Each It's a Penalty Campaign harnesses the power of sport to prevent abuse, exploitation, and human trafficking on a global scale, positioning each major sporting event as a platform for worldwide action and change. Another program, Safe to Compete, is a national initiative based in the US to prevent young children's abuse, exploitation, and trafficking as they learn to compete in youth sports.

Jamaica's sprint superstar Usain Bolt is among many sporting figures to feature in a campaign video, "It's A Penalty," produced by the group. In it, people are encouraged to report crimes and to "say something if you see something."

IAP is an organization that launches campaigns during major sporting events, using them as platforms to educate the public about the risks faced by children while equipping people with mechanisms to identify crimes and report anything suspicious. In doing so, it aims to widen the safety net provided by local communities, which IAP considers the first line of defense.

IAP has so far facilitated the rescue of more than 16,800 victims by partnering with local police, airlines, sporting bodies, and non-government organizations during sporting events, including the 2014 soccer World Cup, 2016 Rio Olympics, and 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. IAP also works with the International Olympic Committee.

In the campaign around February's Super Bowl, American Football's biggest day each year, IAP, with the help of 200 or so volunteers, hands out leaflets and wristbands with a hotline number to area hotels and motels.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Shut Out Trafficking

The Institute For Sport & Social Justice (ISSJ), formerly the National Consortium for Academics and Sport (NCAS), is in partnership with the U.S. Fund for UNICEF (UNICEF USA), annually targeting between 4 and 10 college and university campuses across the United States. Prominent student-athletes, coaches, athletic administrators, and students will speak out and educate peers during a one-week program at each university. The goal is to raise awareness about human trafficking in the United States and to inspire students to act while learning the value love and forgiveness can have in implementing change.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



Action

Not in our Game

Please click [here](#) to view three short YouTube videos on human trafficking and sport.



**ATHLETES
FOR
IMPACT**

Athletes for Impact is a groundbreaking effort to connect athletes with communities to transform America positively. By leveraging the influence of prominent athletes and connecting them with leading grassroots efforts, Athletes for Impact works to educate and encourage people of all backgrounds to engage in collective social action.

Knock Out Human Trafficking is a social action campaign anchored by professional boxer Laila Ali. Our goal is to educate and mobilize the public to end this global human trafficking crisis by advancing the national conversation on what human trafficking looks like and providing information, resources, policy advocacy, and concrete action steps to help end human trafficking.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Efe Obada, born in Nigeria, was a victim of human trafficking at the age of 10. Obada and his older sister were living in the Netherlands when they were trafficked to the UK by someone who was meant to be looking after them. Instead, they were abandoned on the streets, and the rest of their childhood became a fight for survival.

Now he plays defensive end for the Buffalo Bills.

Obada is hesitant to divulge many details of his past, saying he still has “deep trust issues” with strangers and doesn’t want to jeopardize losing his focus on maintaining his roster spot.

According to www.worldschildren.org, 21 million people worldwide are victims of human trafficking — an issue Obada hopes to tackle when he has a more solid platform in the NFL.

Please click [here](#) to view a short YouTube video on his journey.

Action Needed

Migrant workers in Qatar continue to face severe exploitation, according to a new report by Amnesty International. With one year to go until the 2022 World Cup, the rights group calls for Doha to roll out further labor reforms and enforce existing worker protection policies more consistently.

Amnesty International is urging FIFA, the international governing body for football, to pressure Qatar to meet its labor reform commitments before the World Cup begins on November 21, 2022. The charity has also called on world-renowned footballer David Beckham to take a stand as a World Cup ambassador.

Please click [here](#) to call Qatar to live up to its promises on labor reforms and protect migrant workers from forced labor and exploitation. When the World Cup ends, migrants working in Qatar will likely receive less attention, so we must seize this present moment and call for immediate action.



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