

The commercialization of professional men's cricket in the United States: A comparative analysis of entrepreneurial resource mobilization between first and biggest market movers



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Abstract

Major League Cricket has exceeded expectations since its launch in 2023. However, the intent to introduce a professional men's cricket league in the United States is long-standing. In fact, the first market mover was a privately backed venture called American Pro Cricket in 2004, which existed outside the purview of the national cricket federation at the time. Between American Pro Cricket and Major League Cricket several other ventures have come and gone over the past two decades – most were unsuccessful in bringing a product to market. The purpose of this research is to provide a detailed understanding of the relative success of American Pro Cricket and Major League Cricket, the first and biggest market movers respectively, in commercializing professional men's cricket in the United States. To do so, this research is guided by entrepreneurial resource mobilization (i.e., the process by which entrepreneurs assemble the resources used to execute on an opportunity). A three-stage historical case study method is used to conduct source and data collection and analysis followed by deductive data interpretation. Over 100 publicly available secondary sources were collected and analyzed, the majority taken from digital media sources, as well as website self-presentations from the leagues themselves. This research provides a detailed narrative of financial and non-financial resource accumulation across both ventures. In addition, this research establishes critical success factors in entrepreneurial resource mobilization relative to commercializing an emerging sport. First, resource research was influenced by existing networks ties and proactive networking. Second, the resource access process was determined by ethnic homophily and signaling. Finally, facility and player resource transfer were affected by bricolage and contacts, as well as power dynamics and resource dependence. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to launching new professional sport leagues, resource mobilization has the potential to elicit a deep understanding of the entrepreneurial processes that accompany the commercialization of sport products.

Keywords: cricket; commercialization; entrepreneurship; resource mobilization

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1. Introduction

In July 2023, the global spectacle of professional men's cricket touched down in the scorching hot Dallas metroplex. A total of 19 games involving some of the world's best men's cricketers were played over 18 days. Nearly 70,000 fans attended the games, which were also broadcast in 87 countries worldwide (Major League Cricket, 2023). Those in attendance at the final – which included Microsoft Chairman and CEO, Satya Nadella (Pragativadi, 2023) – witnessed a match-winning century from West Indian batter, Nicholas Pooran, as the Mumbai Indians New York defeated the Seattle Orcas by seven wickets (Major League Cricket, 2023). Major League Cricket (MLC) had arrived in emphatic fashion. Furthermore, American Cricket Enterprises (ACE) – the operators of MLC – seemingly delivered on their promise, which centered on a marketing campaign lauding the competition as the most ambitious and transformational venture ever undertaken in the American cricket landscape (Barot, 2019).

While MLC exceeded all expectations in its inaugural season (Lavalette, 2023), the venture represents a more recent iteration in what is a long line of largely unsuccessful attempts over the last two decades to establish professional men's cricket stateside. These attempts began with American Pro Cricket (APC) in 2004, where temporary matting was placed on baseball outfields amid the blending of a mix of American-born participants with current and former international players (see Altobelli, 2004; King, 2004; Engel, 2005). APC even trialed a designated hitter rule to resonate with an Americanized

market (Pro Cricket, 2004). The league failed to reemerge after the inaugural 2004 season despite how owners of the venture had boasted that APC was fully funded for three years (Pierik, 2004). In product development terms, APC and MLC represent the first and biggest market movers, respectively.

Bringing new products to market and exploiting commercial opportunities is primarily an outcome of entrepreneurship. Sport-based entrepreneurship occurs when a sports-related organization acts innovatively in a business context when responding to a market opportunity (Ratten, 2011). The mere presence of a market opportunity is insufficient to guarantee the successful launch of a product. To exploit a market opportunity in the context of sport, Ratten (2011) suggests that successful sport-based entrepreneurial ventures require sufficient financial and non-financial resources, a capacity-building network, and an innovative way of creating new value that ties into the skills and experience of people in the sports-based enterprise. Vamplew (2018), on the other hand, asserts that little attention is paid in the literature to sport ventures that have failed. Understanding the failures (and successes) of past ventures is a critical step for entrepreneurial ventures in developing absorptive capacity, which is an organization's ability to learn from others (Lazzarotti et al., 2015). In fact, both Ratten and Jones (2020) and Francis and Zheng (2010) implore practitioners within the sport entrepreneurship space to emphasize organizational absorptive capacity by learning from failures and related issues.

This research seeks to explore absorptive

capacity in the context of sport-based entrepreneurship through a detailed understanding of the success of MLC vis-à-vis APC in commercializing professional men's cricket in the United States. Specifically, an entrepreneurial resource mobilization (ERM) approach is adopted, which refers to how entrepreneurs assemble the resources used to execute on an opportunity (Clough et al., 2019). The importance of ERM is predicated on how newly-founded organizations face complex challenges – including the task of assembling required resources quickly (Stinchcombe, 1965). Accordingly, this research was guided by the following research question:

RQ: How might the entrepreneurial resource mobilization of the first market mover have affected the resulting commercialization of professional men's cricket in the United States by the biggest market mover?

The expected outcomes of this research are twofold. First, this research advances knowledge of sport-based entrepreneurship by providing a detailed comparative analysis of a particular case. Second, this research establishes the relevance of ERM within the unique context of professional sport league entrepreneurship, which could lead to more successful sport-based entrepreneurship ventures in the future.

2. Literature Review

Entrepreneurial Resource Mobilization

Resource mobilization (RM) theory examines the rational, purposive aspects of social movement behavior (Waterman, 1981). Conceptualized in

the 1970s as a lens through which to interpret the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Jenkins, 1983), RM theory aids in explaining how collections of people who are motivated to pursue social change “organize, pool resources, and wield them effectively” (Fireman & Gamson, 1979, p. 9). In a similar vein, entrepreneurship is the process of identifying, acquiring, and accumulating resources to take advantage of perceived commercial opportunities (Bergmann-Lichtenstein & Brush, 2001). The success or failure of a new entrepreneurial venture is often determined by the organization's resource profile (Hoang & Antoncic, 2003). Importantly, Clough and colleagues (2019) argue that because the phenomenon of entrepreneurship involves the dynamic interplay of opportunities and resources, it cannot be understood without due attention to resource mobilization. As a result, a growing body of management literature has been dedicated to the establishment of ERM.

The mobilization of resources is a process that requires entrepreneurial action. Specifically, ERM involves three sequential steps that require entrepreneurs to: 1) search for potentially relevant resource holders, 2) access resources from resource holders through a formal agreement, and 3) transfer resources (Clough et al., 2019). While steps one and two are easily understood, the third step, transfer of resources, focuses on control processes between the entrepreneur and resource holder such as any agreements on the governance of the resource, allocation of property rights over the resource deployment, and sharing of the resultant created value (Clough et al., 2019).

Entrepreneurial action also takes place within a

resource environment, which refers to the interdependence between society and the environment including factors such as resource use, population, and technological change (Lupton & Bruce, 2010). The consideration of the environment is RM's attempt to account for market forces and how these forces influence the resource mobilization process. After all, entrepreneurship "can only be fully understood with reference to context, conditions and historical processes" (Mason & Harvey, 2013, p. 6). When exploiting market opportunities, "firms need to seek a strategic fit between their internal characteristics (strengths and weaknesses) and their external environment (opportunities and threats)" (Das & Teng, 2000, p. 32). Market conditions change and the temporal nature of the resource environment implies that there may be certain advantages and disadvantages to entering the market at specific times. For example, being first to market can produce dominant and enduring market share; however, later entrants may achieve cost and differentiation advantages (Kerin et al., 1992).

The Mobilization of Resources in New Professional Sport Leagues

Establishing a professional sport league is a resource-intensive endeavor. Generally, a professional sport league requires popularity (i.e., market demand), television and media contracts, labor (i.e., access to a talented pool of players), and finances (Gaylord, 1995). When comparing the success of Major League Soccer (MLS) to the league's predecessor, the North American Soccer League (NASL), Francis and Zheng (2010)

identified key differences in how the league's accessed player labor. The authors identified how NASL engaged in an exuberant rush to import foreign players that sold short term curiosity and novelty, whereas MLS (at least initially) relied on more of a balance between home-grown talent and international star power (Francis & Zheng, 2010). Doing so formed both short- and long-term bonds between the teams and their fanbases.

Professional sport leagues also rely heavily on media coverage for success – most notably through a sizeable television audience that is reached through multi-billion-dollar media rights packages. In the last decade, media rights have surpassed gate receipts as the largest revenue generation tool for leagues and teams for the first time (Broughton, 2015). In the case of professional soccer in North America, a lack of media coverage has been cited as a major contributor to NASL's failure, as television networks soon dropped their coverage, thus limiting the league's profile while also removing substantial broadcast fees, which is a crucial revenue stream (Francis & Zheng, 2010).

Beyond the shopping list of non-financial resources needed, access to financial capital is an unsurprising prerequisite for professional sport leagues. Francis and Zheng (2010) suggest that "start-up leagues are not immediately profitable due to large upfront infrastructure costs incurred (stadiums, player salaries, training facilities, etc.) with very little revenues initially being accrued" (p. 551). As a result, sport-based entrepreneurs must raise enough financial capital in the pre-launch phase to offset these anticipated early, post-launch losses and growing pains. facilities as

a key non-financial resource. On infrastructure costs, the availability of and access to stadiums and other playing facilities was determined as a success factor of upstart professional sport leagues in India (Tripathi & Kapoor, 2017). The emphasis by the MLS from a facility perspective was on soccer-specific stadiums that provided authentic atmospheres and saved teams the expense of leasing mixed use facilities (Francis & Zheng, 2010).

Other scholars have focused less on the “what” of resource accumulation and more so on the “how”. Gaylord and Groves (1993) cited leadership, management, and entrepreneurship as the main variables that differentiate new professional sport leagues that failed from those still successfully in operation. The importance of leadership in professional sport league success draws attention to human capital considerations. For instance, entrepreneurship in sport is “typically related to the skills and experience of people in the sports-based enterprise” (Ratten, 2011, p. 563). Leadership and management are also determined by structure. Traditionally, the approach favored by new sport league entrepreneurs is a single entity enterprise that features one central organizational body who contracts players and allocates these players to respective teams (Jordan, 2001). This unified organizational structure potentially limits the outcomes of destructive behavior of individual owners operating in their own financial interests (Francis & Zheng, 2010). In other words, single entity structures provide control and consistency, which can breed solidarity and blend the egos of key focal actors in the league venture, aiding in

longevity (Gaylord, 1995).

Ratten (2011) suggests “it is the ability of a sports-based enterprise to exploit social capital that enables it to be more competitive” (p. 562). The use of social capital refers to the ability of sports-based entrepreneurs to accumulate both financial and non-financial resources through their networks. Therefore, social capital and inter-organizational collaboration in sport enables capacity building, which in turn is a critical enabler of entrepreneurship (Ratten, 2011).

Today, the resources accessed through social capital by sport organizations are not confined to domestic markets. Ratten (2021) shared how international partnerships between sport organizations are leading to knowledge spillovers and growth. For instance, both Manchester City and Real Madrid soccer clubs have partnered with Melbourne-based professional soccer clubs in Australia, which means that knowledge from the English Premier League and Spanish La Liga is spilling over to the Melbourne clubs (Ratten, 2021).

The presence of knowledge spillovers points towards how resource mobilization in sport is determined by the resource environment. Specifically, “the sport industry operates as an ecosystem with interactive network members disseminating information” (Ratten & Jones, 2020). While internationalization has created an extra dimension to the ability of sport organizations to share resources across international borders, such processes have also meant that sport organizations must look internationally, if not more so than domestically, for insight from competitors (Ratten, 2022). Key

agencies including government, national councils, and international and national sport governing bodies also play a central role in affecting innovations in the organization and commercialization of sport (Newell & Swan, 1995). For instance, Winand and Hoeber (2017) suggest the ability of sport organizations to innovate (albeit in a non-profit setting) is reduced to the range of freedom in their market, which is constrained by rules and regulations imposed by governing umbrella organizations. This regulatory influence led Tripathi and Kapoor (2017) to cite the league-federation relationship as key determinant of professional sport league success.

Still, sport governing bodies are active in innovating and endorsing new formats of gameplay within the global sport ecosystem. In the context of cricket, the Twenty20 (T20) format is a mediatized version of the longer formats of the sport where speed and compression are seen as key attractors to the core product (Axford & Huggins, 2011). This format reduces the length of cricket matches from all-day affairs to a more media- and fan-friendly timeframe of three to four hours. The T20 format was formally endorsed by the International Cricket Council (ICC) in 2005 when Australia and New Zealand competed in the first sanctioned international game (Nalwala, 2023). However, it was the England and Wales

Cricket Board (ECB) in 2003 who introduced the first professional men's T20 league, the Twenty20 Cup (Nalwala, 2023). The T20 format was later commercialized even further through the Indian Premier League (IPL), which launched in 2008.

In summary, the literature on professional sport league success factors identifies several critical resource requirements. However, the interplay between professional sport leagues and their resource environments implies there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the mobilization of resources when attempting to launch and sustain a new professional sport league venture. As both Vamplew (2018) and Ratten and Jones (2020) have argued, there is no single formula to explain the success or failure of a sport entrepreneur.

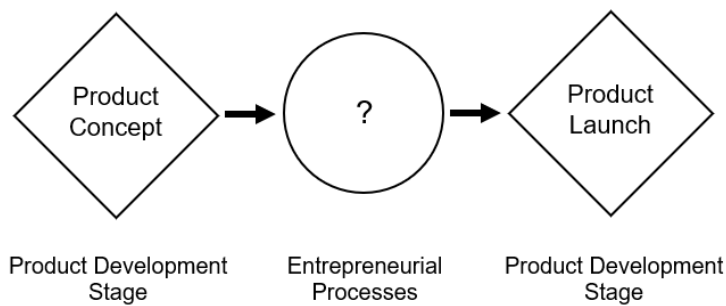
3. Methodology

Research Design

Figure 1 illustrates in simple terms the central crux of this research, which is understanding the processes taking place between the public disclosure of a product concept and the actual product launch (i.e., the commercialization process), and how these processes positively and/or negatively impact the ability of entrepreneurs to successfully bring products to market in a sustainable and scalable manner.

Figure 1

The entrepreneurial bridge between product concept and launch



To fulfil the above-mentioned purpose, this research used a historical analysis research design to provide a chronology of the facts of the past, as well as the establishment of a cause and effect between those facts to ascertain why things happened (Thorpe & Holt, 2007). The use of historical analyses in organization and management research is widely accepted. This research adopted a micro/organizational approach to explore the processes of and features within individual organizations, as well as their interaction with the external environment (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014). More specifically, this research was guided by Widdersheim's (2018) three-stage historical case study method. The historical case study was developed to account for all possible types of diachronic research projects by combining the features of history and case study to examine cases that span from the distant past to the present (Widdersheim, 2018). The result is a three-stage method including 1) source collection and analysis, 2) data collection and analysis, and 3) data interpretation (Widdersheim, 2018). The operationalization of the three stages of the historical case study is described below.

Source Collection and Analysis

The first stage of the historical case study is source collection and analysis. In this stage, the

depth and scope of the case is defined, temporal units of analysis identified, and relevant source materials gathered (Widdersheim, 2018). The outcome of this first stage is the production of idiographic knowledge through a general narrative and chronology of the case and a list of actors and themes (Widdersheim, 2018). In this research, source collection was limited to secondary data including publicly available internet sources such as scholarly (e.g., peer-reviewed journal articles and textbook chapters) and non-scholarly articles (e.g., mass media articles), and self-presentations (e.g., news releases and website content) from the entrepreneurs themselves. Source collection was initiated using theoretical sampling, meaning that “cases are selected because they are particularly suitable for illuminating and extending relationships between and logic among constructs” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 27). Furthermore, theoretical sampling is used in the context of multiple cases to examine replicated cases (Yin, 1994). From a practical standpoint, theoretical sampling began in this study with searches conducted on Google, Google Scholar, newspapers.com, and SearchCat (via the library of the first author's institution) using the following terms: “American Pro Cricket” and “Major League Cricket”.

Source collection and analysis took place

across the months of December 2024 and January 2025. A total of 102 sources were collected and analyzed in this first stage, which included one scholarly article, 82 non-scholarly articles, and 19 self-presentations. To organize the sources into a narrative summary, the details extracted focused on the who, what, and when (i.e., leaving the “how” for the second and third stages of the historical case study method). In addition, key dates in the commercialization process were captured to provide a chronology to the narrative summary beginning with the first public disclosure of the venture and ending with details of the initial season of competition in each venture. The resulting idiographic knowledge is presented in the findings section.

Data Collection and Analysis

The second stage of the historical case study method is used to describe the case over time whereby the temporary units are analyzed with the same criteria and using the source materials as the evidentiary basis (Widdersheim, 2018). ERM is the guiding theoretical framework for this research, which is applied within the context of startup organizations bringing new services to market. Accordingly, ERM was applied purposively to analyze the sources collected to provide a standardized account of each temporal unit. To allow for ease of unit comparison in the final data interpretation stage and in keeping with the ERM-focus of this research, the following question guided the data analysis: How were resources mobilized in relation to the key dates and events in the narrative summary and chronology? The resulting idiographic knowledge

is presented in the discussion section.

Data Interpretation

Data interpretation is the third and final stage of the historical case study method, which is where the descriptions of the case produced during data collection and analysis (stage two) are compared so to decipher patterned similarities and differences (Widdersheim, 2018). In this research, data interpretation had a three-pronged approach consistent with the steps in Clough and colleagues’ (2019) ERM process. By accepting these steps from Clough and colleagues, the authors attempted to identify patterns in how entrepreneurial resources were sought by the focal actors of MLC vis-à-vis APC, as well as how the search process was influenced by the resource environment relative to MLC when compared with APC. This same process was then repeated for the other two steps: access and transfer. The resulting nomothetic knowledge is presented in the discussion section.

4. Results

The findings are divided into two main sections. The first section presents the narrative summary and chronology of the commercialization process relative to APC (i.e., the first market mover). The second section provides the same as the first but for MLC (i.e., the biggest market mover).

American Pro Cricket

Details of APC first emerged in the media in February 2004 (King, 2004). The venture was founded by Kalpesh Patel, an Indian computer

consultant based at the time in Warren, New Jersey, as the first professional cricket league in North America with the intent of blending a mix of American-born participants with current and former international players (Engel, 2005; Grunill, 2004; Pro Cricket, n.d.b.). APC was established as a privately backed venture with Patel serving as chairman and commissioner for the nascent venture (Pierik, 2004; Kirsch, 2016). In addition, Patel shared that APC was fully funded for three years (Grunill, 2004). The venture was launched after two to three years of research, which in part evidenced a significant market demand for cricket in the United States including over 30,000 active top club level players, 70,000 recreational players, and over seven million followers of both domestic and international cricket action (Pro Cricket, 2004).

When details first emerged about the APC product, a May to September season was proposed (King, 2004). However, as more frequent media coverage of APC started in early June, reports mentioned a more modest two-month season spanning July and August, with a final set for September 4 (Lammer, 2004a). The details of APC's official launch were formally released to the public on June 24, 2004 (Pro Cricket, 2004). Specifically, APC was to be established with eight teams across two divisions including New York Storm, Jersey Fire, DC Forward, and Florida Thunder in the East Division, and Chicago Tornadoes, San Francisco Freedom, LA Unity, and Texas Arrowheads in the West Division (Pro Cricket, 2004). APC also included some subtle and not so subtle variances on the emerging T20 cricket format at the time. First, games would

consist of 20 five-ball overs with players able to bowl a maximum of five overs (Pro Cricket, 2004). This modification effectively reduced each inning to 16.4 overs (Engel, 2005). Second, teams were made up of 12 players of which one was classed as a designated hitter (Pro Cricket, 2004). In fact, Patel, admitted that APC was highly Americanized to include "games" not "matches" to cater for an American audience in an atmosphere billed as "Fast 'N Furious Global Action" (Hiestand, 2004). Games were to be played at multiple minor league, semi-pro, and collegiate baseball stadia including Richmond Bank Ballpark in New York, Kezar Field in San Francisco, Commerce Bank Ballpark in New Jersey, Prince Georges Stadium in Bowie, Maryland, the University Houston's Cougar Field, Alexian Field in Illinois, and Blair Field in Long Beach, California (Pro Cricket, n.d.c.).

APC gained significant global publicity due to the high caliber players connected with the league, which was in part due to how contracts with a value of \$60,000 were reportedly available for players committing to the two-month season (Pierik, 2004). Patel admitted to having exactly 104 committed players who wanted to participate in the league from several major cricket-playing nations (Giri, 2004). As examples, former Pakistan captain, Salim Malik, was reportedly signed by the Tornadoes along with West Indian opening batter Devon Smith (Pierik, 2004). Each franchise in APC was to be allowed to carry only four or five international players in a squad of 12 with the rest of the players being made up of American talent (Lammer, 2004a). Among the participating players were West Indians Wavell

Hinds, Daren Ganga, Merv Dillon, and 51-year-old Larry Gomes (Engel, 2005). Other notable players included Zimbabwean exile, Craig Wishart, as well as Ajay Jadeja and Vinod Kambli from India (Engel, 2005).

On June 19 a promotional game was held at Richmond County Ballpark on Staten Island in front of around 900 fans (Pro Cricket, n.d.d., 2004; Wisden, 2004). The league officially launched two weeks later on July 2 at the same venue and again in front of a near 1,000-spectator crowd (Altobelli, 2004). The next day, however, only 209 spectators turned out for the game between the Arrowheads and Freedom at Kezar Field (Corkery, 2004). Then, the game on Sunday, July 4, at Commerce Bank Ballpark drew a crowd of 1,200 paying fans who saw the Fire defeat the Thunder (Sebastian, 2004a), but this was some way short of the expected 5,000 to 6,000 games the stadium managers of the Commerce Bank Ballpark in New Jersey, home of the Somerset Patriots minor league baseball team, were expected prior to the season's launch (Frezza Jr., 2004). Patel shared how the largest crowd was 2,300 in New Jersey on July 5 (Giri, 2004). By the end of the first month of competition, the crowds were described as sparse, quiet, and more subdued than what was experienced in the first round of games (Sebastian, 2004c). At season's end, attendances were

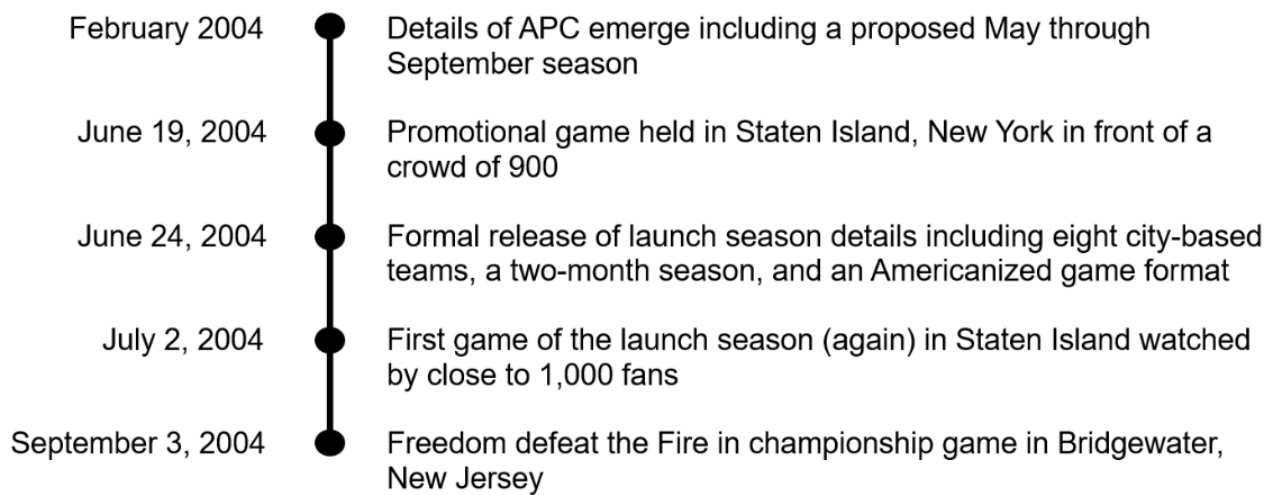
averaging around 500 (Engel, 2005), with low attendance in San Francisco a particular concern. Throughout the season single game tickets were sold for \$6.95 (Frezza Jr., 2004).

At the completion of the regular season, the Fire topped the East Division, and the Freedom placed first in the West Division (Pro Cricket, n.d.e.). On September 3 the Freedom would go on to take the championship with a nail-biting win over the Fire (Pro Cricket, n.d.a.). In total, 22 games were played across nine weeks in eight different venues with games mostly taking place on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings (Pro Cricket, n.d.c.). One major coup for APC was how successful the league's founders were in negotiating media rights to broadcast some of the games via Dish Network (Usborne, 2004; Engel, 2005). However, the venture failed to return beyond the inaugural 2004 season despite Patel's bullishness on the financial footing of the organization.

Figure 2 provides a chronology of APC as a temporal unit within this case. As the figure illustrates the publicly disclosed or covered aspects of the commercialization process and completion of the launch season (which turned out to be the last activities of the venture before its demise) took place over a seven-month period between February and September 2004.

Figure 2

Timeline of key dates in the commercialization and initial launch of APC



Major League Cricket

USA Cricket's commitment to scouting for commercial professional league opportunities was made public in October 2018 following the election of Paraag Marathe, the executive vice-president of football operations for the San Francisco 49ers, as chairman (Della Penna, 2018a). One month later, USA Cricket formalized this commitment by announcing a request for proposal (RFP) seeking commercial partners capable of helping the governing body establish cricket as a mainstream sport in the United States and delivering a T20 domestic competition by 2021 (Della Penna, 2018b). In addition, the RFP made clear that the partnership must also support the sustainable development of cricketing infrastructure nationally (Della Penna, 2018b). As part of the RFP announcement, Marathe also quoted newly released global research evidencing more than 20 million cricket fans in the United States (Della Penna, 2018b).

In May 2019 following the conclusion of a multi-stage evaluation process, ACE was announced by USA Cricket as its partner for the

development of a world-class T20 league in the United States (ESPN Cricinfo, 2019). The 10-year agreement with ACE, who are backed by Satyan Gajwani and Vinnet Jain of the Times Group (owners of the Times of India) along with Sameer Mehta and Vijay Srinivasan of Willow TV (the largest cricket broadcaster in North America), would reportedly see \$1 billion invested in to cricket in the United States (ESPN Cricinfo, 2019).

Details emerged in February 2020 at a USA Cricket board meeting of the ground-breaking Minor League Cricket (MiLC) tournament being developed by ACE (Barot, 2020a). MiLC was announced as the first significant step on the path towards establishing MLC (Barot, 2020a). Specifically, MiLC was to include a 22-team city-based tournament taking place during a nine-week season comprising 170 matches (Barot, 2020a). In addition, the player pool was to include the best domestic cricketers in the country alongside semi-professional and professional cricketers from elsewhere (Barot, 2020a). In August 2020, USA Cricket and ACE announced owners of 24 MiLC

franchise teams divided across four geographic conferences (Barot, 2020b). And while the league was an ACE property, a Minor League Governing Council was established with USA Cricket membership that was initiated to root the competition within the national selection pathway (Patel, 2020a). Accordingly, interest in MiLC from players was significant with over 2,400 players registering for the draft and over 300 players being selected to take part in the inaugural competition that had now been pushed back to Spring 2021 following the COVID-19 pandemic (Barot, 2020c). Despite the delay to the official launch of MiLC, a series of exhibition games (i.e., a soft launch) did take place in late summer 2020.

As the MiLC pilot was ending, the next major development from ACE was being announced. In a historic move, ACE received approval from the City of Grand Prairie – a municipality located in the heart of the Dallas-Fort Worth area – on a long-term lease agreement to begin an extensive redevelopment of the former home of the Texas AirHogs baseball team into a major cricket-specific stadium (Barot, 2020d). The new stadium development was heralded as a seminal moment as the first MLC stadium and the centerpiece of USA Cricket's efforts to bring major international cricket events to the United States (Barot, 2020d). Not only was the plan to convert the stadium from baseball to cricket use permanently, but the plans included an increase in the seating capacity to accommodate more than 8,000 spectators along with additional and upgraded hospitality features (Barot, 2020d). Details would later emerge that the renovation cost in the region of \$20 million (Moreno, 2022).

In addition to the facility acquisition, ACE was gathering momentum financially. By early December 2020, a group of more than a dozen high-profile investors had personally invested in ACE including Microsoft chief Nadella, Adobe chief executive Shantanu Narayen, Texas property tycoon Ross Perot, Jr., and Vijay Shekhar Sharma of Indian payments start-up Paytm; the latter had invested \$1 million (Parkin et al., 2020). The 26-strong investor group was then made official by ACE towards the end December with Srinivasan highlighting how the individuals had come from different backgrounds, but also how each investor was unified through their passion for cricket (Coffey, 2020). In May 2022, around 18 months after the initial investor group was announced, MLC disclosed details of investment totaling \$120 million secured through Series A and A1 fundraising rounds (Liblit, 2022). Much of this investment would primarily flow to the construction and redevelopment of cricket-specific facilities including the flagship venue in Grand Prairie (Liblit, 2022). Overall, Srinivasan shared with Sportico that ACE was on track to achieve the initial billion-dollar goal that was agreed when the commercial partnership was announced in May 2019 (Liblit, 2022).

From a player labor perspective, news also began to break about players foregoing international careers with their countries of birth to take up offers to play in and for the United States. These moves were only made possible by the (as yet to be announced) lure of professional cricket to be provided by MLC. For instance, Pakistan opening batter, Sami Aslam, was one of the first players to reportedly accept an offer from

MLC (Patel, 2020b). At a similar time, former New Zealand all-rounder Corey Anderson was reported to have signed a three-year contract with MLC to include services in both MLC and MiLC, as well as coaching ventures at cricket academies (India Today, 2020). The 2021 calendar year was littered with similar storylines. Among the most notable signees were former England international fast bowler Liam Plunkett who was to link up with the Philadelphians of MiLC and former Indian Under 19 World Cup-winning captain Unmukt Chand who signed to play with MiLC's Silicon Valley Strikers (Hays, 2021; Times Now, 2021). Ultimately, an impressive pool of players was assembled for the inaugural MiLC tournament, which included 13 South African players with either provincial, franchise, or international experience (Club Cricket SA, 2021).

In May 2021, details emerged of MLC's pandemic enforced delay until 2023 – two years later than the anticipated start date agreed when USA Cricket first announced ACE as commercial partners (Houston, 2021). However, less than a month later the details of MiLC's inaugural season were being announced with Toyota named as headline event sponsor and \$250,000 in total prize money available – the largest purse ever on offer in American cricket (Barot, 2021c). In fact, according to USA Cricket more than \$4 million had been invested by ACE and the MiLC team owners to stage the tournament, the most extensive competition to ever take place in American cricket (Barot, 2021b). Between July 31 and October 3 more than 200 games would take place at 26 venues featuring more than 400 homegrown as well as international players

(Maqsood, 2021). Furthermore, more than 100 matches were streamed live across Willow and YouTube (Barot, 2021c). Prior to the tournament, each of the 27 teams named a provisional 16-man roster to include one wildcard professional, two USA-based professionals, three priority domestic players, three youth players, and a further seven domestic players, with a further two free agent positions to be named in the weeks building up to the tournament (Barot, 2021a). The MiLC championship game was won by the Silicon Valley Strikers who defeated the New Jersey Stallions at Church Street Park in Morrisville, North Carolina (Kapse, 2021).

Another key piece in the MLC puzzle emerging was the location of the initial teams, which had been a point of speculation since plans for MLC were first made public. For instance, in late December, USA Cricket's then-CEO Iain Higgins identified Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, and San Francisco as popular cricket markets (Carp, 2020). Then, speaking to NBC News in February 2021, Srinivasan confirmed Dallas and speculated on other "obvious" locales including the New York/New Jersey area and the San Francisco Bay area (Gandhi, 2021). Beyond this, six cities were listed in a more localized article about the potential of cricket in Seattle; the cities were Dallas, DC, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle (Cassidy, 2022). These six franchise locations were later confirmed when the long-awaited official details of the first season of MLC were announced in November 2022 (Della Penna, 2022). As per the announcement, the competition was slated for July 13 to 30, 2023, with Grand

Prairie Stadium set to be the primary venue with some games scheduled to be played at Church Street Park in Morrisville, North Carolina (Della Penna, 2022; Wisden, 2023b). The team names – including the Texas Super Kings, Washington Freedom, Mumbai Indians New York, San Francisco Unicorns, and Seattle Orcas – were confirmed in March of the following year (Gollapudi, 2023).

With the dates, teams, and venues confirmed, the next step in the launch process was the inaugural player draft that was scheduled for March 2023, at the historic NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston (Della Penna, 2023a). The draft consisted of nine rounds following a snake order where teams selected from among the best US-based players including a mandatory Under 23 player in the final round (Wisden, 2023). Each of the six teams had a \$1.5 million salary cap to secure 18 players with a maximum of seven overseas professionals (Savage, 2023). Former India Under 19 World Cup winner and now US-resident Harmeet Singh was selected first overall by the Seattle Orcas (Della Penna, 2023b). All six of the players taken in the first round were priced at a fixed \$75,000 (Della Penna, 2023b). Arguably, however, the major news was the signing of overseas players supplemental to the nine rounds of the draft. Among the international players signed on draft day were South African's Quinton de Kock and Anrich Nortje, and Australian trio Aaron Finch, Marcus Stoinis, and Mitchell Marsh (Savage, 2023). In the months between the draft and the start of the new season, teams completed their rosters. For instance, Mumbai Indians New York announced the several

landmark signatures including Kieron Pollard, Rashid Khan, Trent Boult, Tim David, and Kagiso Rabada (Mumbai Indians, 2023). The top-paid players at MLC in 2023 earned \$175,000 to play a minimum of five games (Roller, 2023).

For the 2023 season, MLC games were streamed in the United States on Willow TV with a select few games being carried by CBS (Lavalette, 2023). In addition, over-the-top streaming platform Sling TV came on board just before the start of the tournament to add to existing coverage (Cunningham, 2023). The broadcasts included a 30-camera setup contributing to what was being considered a world-class production (Cunningham, 2023). Games were also broadcast live in India through Viacom18, the UK through BT Sport, the Caribbean through SportsMax, in Australia through FOX Cricket, in South Africa through Super Sports, in Pakistan through A Sports, and in New Zealand through Sky NZ (Wisden, 2023b). The line-up of commentators announced by MLC included legendary India batsman Sunil Gavaskar, former South Africa captain Graeme Smith, former New Zealand international Danny Morrison, and former Zimbabwe international Mpumelelo Mbanga (Kumar, 2023). The launch season also included an impressive range of sponsors including Betway, Abound, Royal Brand, Sling TV, CloudChef, Betbricks7, Mera Hoardings, and Kloth Studio (Mahadik, 2023).

Nearly 70,000 fans attended the games in total, which were also broadcast in 87 countries worldwide (Major League Cricket, 2023). Single-game tickets at Grand Prairie Stadium and Church Street Park begin at \$30 and \$15 respectively

(Deshpande, 2023). The final, which was played in front of a sellout crowd of around 7,000, saw Mumbai Indians New York defeat the Seattle Orcas (Major League Cricket, 2023). Celebrating the win in Texas was Nita Ambani, owner of the New York team and all other Mumbai Indians franchises (Kasi, 2023). MLC's inaugural season received substantial coverage from major US news outlets including the New York Times, Washington Post, and ESPN (The American Bazaar, 2023). Overall, MLC had revenues of around \$8 million for its inaugural season, which

far exceeded the initial target of \$5 million (Lavalette, 2023).

Figure 3 provides a chronology of the key dates and milestone events that define both the lead up to and completion of the inaugural MLC season. As shown, these activities took place over a four-year-and-three-month timespan between May 2019 and July 2023. Importantly, this period was inclusive of the COVID-19 pandemic that clearly disrupted the operations of sport entertainment products globally.

Figure 3

Timeline of key dates in the commercialization and initial launch of MLC



Table 1 captures several of the key comparative metrics and commercial activities that defined the chronology of both the commercialization processes and launch seasons of both ventures.

Table 1

Comparative analysis of key metrics and commercial activities for APC 2004 and MLC 2023

	APC	MLC
Founder(s)	Kalpesh Patel, computer consultant	Satyan Gajwani and Vinnet Jain of the Times Group, and Sameer Mehta and Vijay Srinivasan of Willow TV
Financial investment secured	Unknown; however, three-year funding depleted in one year of operation	\$120 million secured through Series A and A1 fundraising rounds
No. of games played	22 games played across nine weeks	19 games played across 18 days
No. and type of venues	Eight venues; all baseball stadiums that underwent temporary retrofit	Two venues; cricket-specific stadiums
Quality of play	“Triple-A” equivalent	Many of the world’s best T20 cricketers
Highest player contracts	\$60,000	\$175,000 to play a minimum of five games
Price of tickets	\$6.95	\$30 at Grand Prairie Stadium and \$15 at Church Street Park
Crowd size	Average attendance of around	70,000 fans in attendance across all games including

	500 fans with a high of 2,300	7,000+ sellout for the championship game
Television coverage	Select games broadcast on Dish Network	30-camera production broadcast in 87 countries worldwide
Key sponsors	Unknown	Range of sponsors including Betway, Abound, Royal Brand, Sling TV, CloudChef, and more
Revenue generated	Unknown	\$8 million

5. Discussion

The discussion is divided into three subsections, which is in keeping with the three steps of the ERM process: search, access, and transfer. Moreover, the ERM factors proposed by Clough and colleagues (2019) as salient within each of these steps are used deductively to interpret the extent to which the apparent success of MLC can be understood in relation to the obstacles and challenges faced by APC. Additional factors are also presented as patterns that have inductively stemmed from the case.

Search for Entrepreneurial Resources

Entrepreneurship is embedded in networks of relationships (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986). The assumption, therefore, is that entrepreneurs' search for resources is restricted to close social ties within pre-existing networks that predate their nascent entrepreneurial activities (Clough et al.,

2019). Entrepreneurs with resource-rich social networks appear to be more successful at attracting financial capital, recruiting skilled labor, and accessing tacit knowledge (Stuart & Sorenson, 2005). When interpreting the success of MLC, it is difficult to look past the significance of the pre-existing network of the focal actors – especially when compared to APC. Two of the founding focal actors of ACE, Mehta and Srinivasan, have a long history of involvement with cricket in both the United States and globally having co-founded Willow TV (Ainbinder, 2022). At the time where ACE was successfully bidding to become USA Cricket's commercial partner in early 2019, Willow TV had broadcast rights from all major cricket board across the world including the IPL, the ICC World Cup, and the Pakistan Super League (Times of India, 2019). As such, the focal actors behind MLC were already embedded in the cricket ecosystem and, thus, brought a high

level of social capital with them into the venture itself, which clearly aided the venture's efforts to mobilize (i.e., access and transfer) resources.

The role of proactive networking in the resource search process is based on the idea that agentic action and sheer force-of-will can elevate entrepreneurs beyond their existing social networks, thus challenging the deterministic status quo (Clough et al., 2019). In other words, entrepreneurs with a high propensity for proactive networking can overcome initially poor social structural positions (Clough et al., 2019). APC occupied a comparatively poorer structural position than MLC based on the existing social networks of the focal actors. In other words, Patel, a computer consultant, was not bestowed with the same network as Messrs. Gajwani, Jain, Mehta, and Srinivasan. The assumption therefore is that APC needed to proactively network to overcome this lack of existing ties. Patel's ability to network appeared to be largely influenced by the ownership and management structure of the league. Specifically, APC operated as a single entity with licensing agreements for each of the eight teams and was described as a consortium of undisclosed private investors (Sandomir, 2004; Simon, 2004). However, all team operating rights were licensed by APC to a single person, Kamal Verma, a Delhi-born information technology executive, despite interest from others (Sandomir, 2004; Simon, 2004). Ratten and Jones (2020) suggest that each sport entrepreneur has their own views about venture management, which can lead to conflicting views about how to progress a business. So, the decision to license to a single person likely enabled APC to maintain close

control over the direction of the venture. However, this licensing decision also restricted APC's ability to engage a diverse range of potential new resource providers and thus created a small business environment.

Contrary to APC's structure, MLC would begin with six teams under a single-entity structure whereby all teams are owned by ACE but with investor-operators (i.e., those who have invested in the company) assigned to each team (Williams, 2020). In fact, originating investor-operators would also own part of MLC, which was identified as a key difference from other leagues like the IPL (Dasgupta & Della Penna, 2020). Ultimately, investors were proactively sought by offering the opportunity to buy an ownership interest before adopting a team as their own moving forward (Carp, 2020). This approach quickly yielded venture-critical partnerships. As an example, in December 2020 Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan was named as an investor in MLC through his Knight Riders Group – the same group that owns the Kolkata Knight Riders of the IPL and the Trinbago Knight Riders of the Caribbean Premier League (Carp, 2020). The partnership between ACE and the Knight Riders Group included an undisclosed financial investment, as well as significant expertise from the Knight Riders Group to ACE in the development and launch of MLC (Carp, 2020).

Importantly, research indicates larger organizations with more financial and non-financial resources have an advantage over smaller organizations when it comes to creating sports-based entrepreneurial ventures (Ratten, 2011). In short, APC operated with a very lean

ownership and management structure in addition to a limited pre-existing network of the focal actor. As established, resource search by entrepreneurs is restricted to close social ties. For APC, close social ties with relevant resource providers were scarce. On the other hand, ACE not only brought a significant existing social network to the venture, but they also implemented an ownership and investment structure that fostered and encouraged proactive networking, and this enlarged organizational core enhanced MLC's connections to prospective resource providers.

Accessing Entrepreneurial Resources

Ethnic Homophily and Investment Ties

Ratten (2022) discovered how ethnicity is an important influence in determining the experiences of sport entrepreneurs and how sport entrepreneurs actively use this diasporic personal knowledge when moving forward within entrepreneurial ventures. One aspect of this case influenced by ethnic homophily is financial investment. Clough et al. (2019) cited multiple studies evidencing how similarity of ethnicity between investors and a venture's executives raises the likelihood of an investment tie forming. The financial capital required to establish a professional sport league is considerable. While the investment needs for APC nor MLC were disclosed publicly, ballpark figures for ACE's short-term fundraising needs were estimated to be in the \$60 million to \$75 million range (Coffey, 2020). Importantly, the founding investors of MLC have been described as "Indian-origin techies who have been in the US, working for some of the world's biggest companies" (Khakhar,

2024). As a result, ACE were able to successfully leverage ethnic similarity to develop multiple investment ties from both founding investors and investors who joined in subsequent Series A and A1 fundraising rounds.

Ethnic homophily not only provided access to financial capital for MLC but also added to the venture's social capital pot. Importantly, angel investors do not just provide funds, but other non-financial resources to new firms including business ideas and network connections (Ardichvili et al., 2002). In this case, the ACE investor demographic was considered advantageous because "they're familiar with the popularity and strength of cricket in Asia, and it's in their best interest to translate these metrics to the American game" (Ainbinder, 2022). Also, MLC recruited owner-operators early in the commercialization process. Owner-operators bring value to entrepreneurial ventures through successful track records of bringing products to market, relationships in the industry, and experience navigating challenges that founders face (Pathway Ventures, 2020). Ethnic familiarity was a factor that was leveraged successfully by ACE in accessing multiple forms of capital necessary for the ensuing commercialization process.

Signaling Underlying Quality

Entrepreneurs gain access to various resources by signaling their underlying quality, which can take many forms including a credential, certificate, or award – often granted by a credible third-party (Clough et al., 2019). A critical success factor for MLC that aided the venture's ability to

access resources was ACE's official status as the commercial partner of USA Cricket. Ainbinder (2022) cited the importance of MLC's efforts beyond the flagship professional league product as a critical success factor in the league's success, which were terms included within the commercial agreement signed in late 2019. One part of this partnership that extended beyond the professional and semi-professional cricket product was the development of a Youth Major League, Youth Minor League, as well as regional and national championships for different age group categories (Patel, 2021). The introduction of elite talent development programs for youth cricketers was seen as a mechanism to promote long-term sustainability by creating a conveyor belt of quality American cricketers (Patel, 2021).

According to Ainbinder (2022), owning and operating MiLC along with youth tournaments and academies represented a "holistic, almost fully vertically integrated approach". These efforts – especially MiLC – served as a test bed for the launch of MLC in 2023. In turn, the holistic approach in the years leading up to MLC enabled ACE to demonstrate its organizational capability, which is "the ability of an organization to perform a coordinated set of tasks, utilizing organizational resources, for the purpose of achieving a particular end result" (Helfat & Petaraf, 2003, p. 999). Organizational capabilities are key intangible assets that signal quality to consumers (Smallwood & Ulrich, 2004). Delivering MiLC as the then most extensive competition to ever take place in American cricket provided an important signal of quality to prospective players and media partners as to the underlying quality of the

impending MLC launch. Alternatively, APC provided little space in the commercialization process – beyond a one-off promotional game two weeks before the season launch – to demonstrate their organizational capability.

In building on the importance of social networks in the preceding subsection, an actor's affiliations (or network) can also be interpreted by others as a signal of the actor's underlying attributes (Podolny, 2005). The focal actors within ACE undoubtedly played a role in signaling to other resource providers the underlying quality of the MLC product. Four out of the six teams were either partly or fully owned by existing IPL franchises (Wisden, 2023a). The Knight Riders Group owned the Los Angeles-based team, the Mumbai Indians became solely responsible for the New York-based franchise, the Delhi Capitals joined forces with Nadella to co-own the Seattle Orcas, and the Chennai Super Kings bought a stake in the Texas-based franchise (Wisden, 2023a). The remaining two teams, while not connected with IPL teams, boasted Australian cricket connections. The Washington Freedom had ties with New South Wales Cricket and the San Francisco Unicorns with Victoria Cricket (Wisden, 2023a). Such examples are also indicative of Ratten's (2021) depiction of knowledge spillovers within an increasingly international sport ecosystem, which has been critical in the capacity building capability of MLC through access to additional human capital. The heavy IPL involvement positioned the league legitimately by association as part of the dominant economic power in cricket (The Economist, 2023). Today, eight out of the 10 IPL team owners

have a stake in franchises in other countries (Sen, 2024). Beyond the legitimacy these partnerships provided MLC in the commercialization process, the IPL connections provided seamless access to world-class international players. For instance, a trend is emerging whereby IPL players are becoming increasingly likely to play for the same owners in other global T20 leagues (Banerjee, 2025).

The quality-signaling legitimacy provided through the IPL's internationalization strategy was simply not present within the resource environment within which APC emerged. As the first mover in the market, the focal actors behind APC were not just the first venture to launch professional men's T20 cricket in the United States but were the first to commercialize T20 cricket in an ICC associate country. In fact, APC moved in the market before other prominent professional T20 leagues in traditional cricket-playing nations – like the IPL, which launched in 2008 and just one year after the ECB's T20 Cup. Without being connected by association to a national governing body nor other legitimate professional franchises, APC had to explore other means by which to access player resources. Patel attempted to do this by making strategic appointments within the organization. For instance, former two-time Indian national cricket coach Anshuman Gaekwad accepted a role as executive director after Patel flew to India to present his plan and research (Rediff, 2004). In addition, Australian expatriate Robert Smith served as assistant commissioner and was active in recruiting cricketers in the Sydney area (King, 2004).

Transfer of Entrepreneurial Resources

Bricolage and the Repurposing of Baseball Fields

Bricolage is the practice of coping with resource scarcity by repurposing things in the environment that are overlooked by others (Baker & Nelson, 2005). Furthermore, bricolage requires entrepreneurs to recognize and realize the latent potential of some possible resource (Clough et al., 2019). APC dealt with the scarcity of available cricket-specific facilities by repurposing a series of baseball fields located at stadiums in each of the city locations of their teams. Each stadium underwent a temporary retrofit for cricket where the pitcher's mounds were flattened, and an artificial wicket laid out in the outfield (Altobelli, 2004). APC described how the alterations enabled the league to simulate international cricket fields (Pro Cricket, n.d.b.). Witell and colleagues (2017) suggest how “making do with is available is regarded as a type of stop-gap tactic that leads to imperfect (‘good-enough’) solutions” (p. 293). While repurposing baseball fields enabled APC to execute on its expedited commercialization timeline, the venues were poorly conceived and prepared (Engel, 2005). For instance, in a feature on players Fazez Abassi confessed to the disadvantages of playing on fields with non-regulation (smaller) boundaries (Pro Cricket, n.d.f.). Ultimately, the sources analyzed in this case imply this solution was not always accepted by more-demanding customers including players and fans.

Formal and Informal Facility Use Agreements

Had the bricolage attempts by APC been accepted by players and fans alike, subsequent market movers – including MLC – may have been convinced to apply a similar approach to facility scarcity. However, this case reveals how APC’s good-enough solution was rejected as a suitable way to fill facility resource gaps. Rather, MLC were only able to overcome facility scarcity through acquisition and accumulation of the recognized international standard playing facilities. As established, ACE secured the requisite financial capital to develop Grand Prairie Stadium into what is now a facility deemed worthy by the ICC of hosting international competitions. The playing conditions at the stadium were also praised by players. Specifically, Anand Rajaraman, San Francisco Unicorns co-owner, told Forbes that “the overseas players said the ground and pitch in Dallas was as good as anywhere they’ve played around the world” (Lavalette, 2023). The transfer of this resource was formalized between ACE and the city via the signing of two 10-year leases including payment of \$20,000 a month to use the stadium for the first 80 months and \$10,000 per month thereafter (Smith, 2020). The long-term lease with the city provided the green light for ACE to break ground and redevelop Grand Prairie Stadium.

APC, on the other hand, was unable to secure such a long-binding agreement with any facility resource provider. In fact, securing adequate facilities in Florida was a challenge for APC. Initially, the Thunder were scheduled to play their home games, including the season opener, at the Homestead Sports Complex south of Miami (Lammer, 2004a). However, the season opener

was pushed back and moved from Florida to the Richmond County Bank Ballpark in New York (Lammer, 2004b). One of the reported reasons for the delay and relocation of the season opener was how the Thunder were no longer scheduled to play out of Homestead Sports Complex (Lammer, 2004b). The Thunder would experience similar issues later in the season when a provisional agreement to host games at Fort Lauderdale Stadium fell through with the owners of the stadium stating the facility was not ready to host large events (Sebastian, 2004b). These facility-based resource transfer issues were perhaps indicative of the vulnerability of informal contracts involving startup firms. Without binding formal contracts, resource transfers between resource providers and entrepreneurial ventures are based on trust, which the scarce literature implies is based on the existence or duration of a past relationship (Clough et al., 2019). Some of the informal agreements APC had in place to use various facilities fell through in some cases just days before agreed use was scheduled to take place, which suggests resource transfer included a high level of vulnerability.

League-Federation Power Dynamics and Resource Dependence

Clough and colleagues (2019) suggest that “nascent entrepreneurs are often far more dependent on the resource holders they work with than vice versa” (p. 254). In sport, Tripathi and Kapoor (2017) state that leagues without the approval or support of sports federations were almost destined to fail due to resulting issues such as (lack of) availability of affiliated players and

infrastructure, and (lack of) support from sponsors. In cricket, it is critical for professional leagues to be sanctioned by their national governing bodies should those leagues want increased freedom in their player signing decisions. While playing contracts are shifting, a majority of the top 100 T20 men's cricketers are contacted either exclusively or in part by their respective national cricket federation, which are known as central contacts (FICA, 2022). So, without a host member governing body sanction, the ICC deem such competitions as "disapproved cricket" (Della Penna, 2023c). The outcome of disapproved status is that the ICC advise other member countries to not issue No-Objection Certificates (NOCs), which is a process that requires centrally contracted players wishing to participate in overseas tournaments to seek approval through both their domestic registered team and national governing body (Sky Sports, 2025). The granting of official status for MLC by USA Cricket – which incidentally only arrived three months before the season launch (ESPN Cricinfo, 2023) – allowed for the transfer of player resources. As just one example, Sri Lanka Cricket issued a NOC to then national team captain Dasun Shanaka to play in MLC for the Seattle Orcas (Sanjeewa, 2023).

On the other hand, APC emerged as a private start up independent of the commercial efforts of United State of America Cricket Association (USACA) and, despite efforts from Patel, APC also failed to secure the appropriate governing body sanctions. Specifically, Patel presented the venture to the ICC at Lord's Cricket Ground in May 2004, but the ICC at the time shared how they

only work with nationally recognized cricket boards for competition sanctioning purposes (Grunill, 2004). Patel then met with the USACA in June, where then-president, Gladstone Dainty, appeared to be supportive of the venture (Grunill, 2004). However, even with Dainty's support, USACA's approval never materialized. The directive from the ICC to international cricket federations was to not release contracted players to participate in APC. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) took this a step further by issuing a threat of severe consequences to any player considering involvement with APC, including those who were older or even fourth string on their domestic teams (Giri, 2004).

Patel admitted to how the handful of Indian players who did initially travel to the United States for APC had returned to India part way through the season (Giri, 2004). In fact, the international players that did participate in APC would fly in for around 10 days playing between six and eight matches where they would rotate between teams, after which they would depart, and a new set of international players would arrive (Giri, 2004). Overall, only 15 to 20 overseas players appeared in APC, which fell some way short of the 40 international stars reportedly signed prior to the start of the season (Collins, 2004; Engel, 2005). Despite this disappointment, Patel admitted that it was not a mandatory component of the business plan for APC to have current international players (Grunill, 2004). Rather, Patel was content with a "Triple-A" equivalent level of play in the league (Sandomir, 2004). However, the absence of official sanctioned status clearly had a negative impact on APC's ability to transfer player

resources. As such, Patel experienced what Clough et al. (2019) refer to as the vulnerability that accompanies the power imbalance between entrepreneurs and resource holders.

Perhaps the only way APC was able to emerge from this power imbalance and secure at least some overseas signings was by offering credible sums of money to lure international players. For context, the average annual salary of a professional cricketer in the English county system in the mid-2000s was around \$75,000 (ESPN Cricinfo, 2006). APC were offering players \$60,000 for two months' work (Pierik, 2004). What is known about monetary valuations is that they serve as anchors meaning that the initial stated value influences perceptions of perceived worth. Importantly, even in the absence of anchor-affirming information, individuals exhibit a natural reluctance to alter anchors (Epley & Gilovich, 2001). At least for some players, therefore, the unsanctioned status of APC did not deter them from following through on their commitment to participate in APC due to the anchoring effects of the favorable monetary contracts involved. Yet, case sources point towards under-investment in other areas – most notably marketing. By the end of the first month of competition, the crowds were described as sparse, quiet, and more subdued than what was experienced in the first round of games, which was attributed to a lack of funds directed toward marketing and promotion (Giri, 2004; Sebastian, 2004c).

The resource dependency asymmetry experienced by APC was also evident from a financial perspective. After the 2004 season, APC

announced a promising alliance with American Desi, which was the first satellite channel aimed at American viewers of South Asian descent (Rajghatta, 2004). So, rather than the broadcast rights partnership being between APC and Dish Network directly, which it was the launch season, the broadcast rights were now to be between APC and American Desi who had a separate carrier agreement with Dish Network. American Desi took air in December 2004, but experienced significant fiscal hardship before filing for bankruptcy in July 2005 (Morley, 2005). Pierik (2004) had reported that APC was bankrolled by a media company (i.e., revenue stemming from media rights agreements). As such, the inability of APC to secure a longer-term agreement directly with Dish Network was one of the assumed contributing factors to the league's demise after just one season (Kirsch, 2016).

The failed attempts by APC to gain governing body endorsement points to another important factor impacting resource mobilization, which is the regulatory instability among the cricket federations charged with governing cricket in the United States. To this point, this research has referenced both USACA and USA Cricket. Specifically, USACA was the recognized governing body at the time where APC was brought to market whereas USA Cricket was the governing body in situ at the time where ACE were selected as commercial partners. USACA would be suspended three times by the ICC under Dainty's turbulent near 15-year tenure before being expelled by the ICC in 2017 (Della Penna, 2017). Among other institutions, regulatory bodies shape markets by breeding ecosystems that

enable the birth and growth of new business (Aarikka-Stenroos et al., 2014). USACA's governance of cricket in the United States was wrought with issues including significant debt caused by substantial legal fees and the refusal to ratify an ICC-approved constitution (Della Penna, 2017). In the highly regulated context of sport, it is difficult to see how this regime did not negatively impact the resource environment within which APC were attempting to secure resources to bring their product to market – especially players.

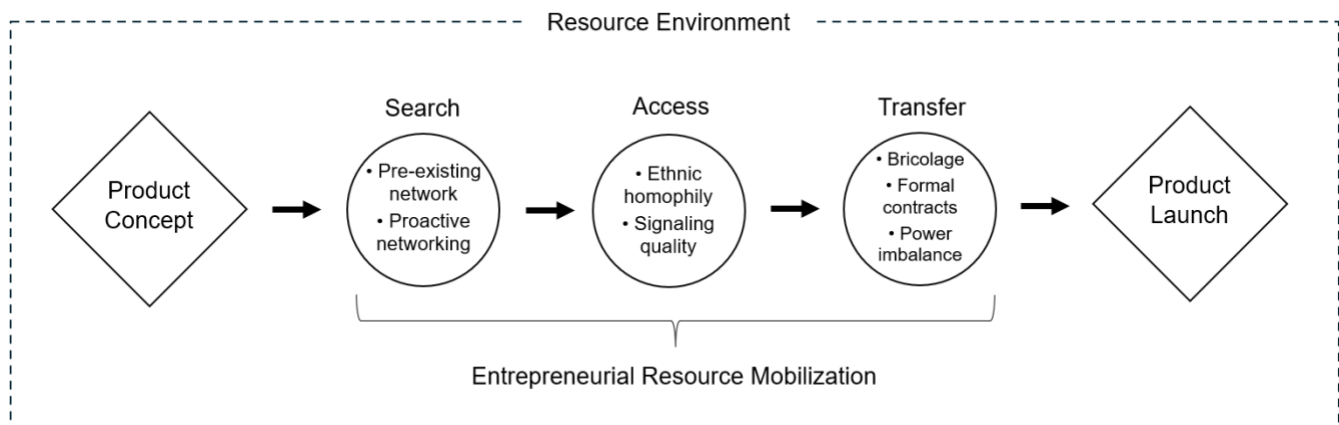
6. Conclusion

As shown in Figure 4, the case of first and biggest market movers in the commercialization of professional men's T20 cricket in the United States reveals multiple critical ERM success factors in the go to market strategies of APC and

MLC. In terms of searching for resources, this research emphasizes the importance of the focal actors' pre-existing networks, as well as implementing a foundational league structure that is conducive to proactive networking. With resource access, this research helps to establish the salience of signaling quality to prospective resource providers – whether that be through existing network ties and affiliations or demonstrated organizational capabilities. Access to resources was also influenced by ethnic homophily among owners and investors. In regards the transfer of resources, bricolage and contracts proved critical in the respective efforts to secure facilities, and the league-federation power dynamics and resource dependence provided useful context in understanding the relative successes of each entrepreneurial venture in securing player resources.

Figure 4

Salient entrepreneurial processes elicited from the first and biggest market movers in the commercialization of professional men's T20 cricket in the United States



Additionally, prior knowledge permits the exploitation of new knowledge and accumulating

absorptive capacity in one period will permit its more efficient accumulation in the next (Cohen &

Levinthal, 1990). In other words, entrepreneurs require know-how to exploit resources from their networks (Witt, 2004). The challenges faced by APC elicited several key learnings. In fact, following the launch season of APC cricket enthusiasts were inspired by the potential the game could ultimately have in the United States once "done right" (Holroyd, 2022). So, the time the focal actors behind MLC had to accumulate knowledge was a definite advantage, which could have been used to guide the way in which resources were accumulated by ACE. As examples, MLC took an incremental approach to developing and demonstrating organizational capabilities whereas speed-to-market was the assumed focus of APC leaving little time to test the product concept. Additionally, MLC gained access to professional-standard cricket-specific facilities whereas APC played out of baseball stadia altered to simulate cricket fields. In this case, demonstrating absorptive capacity could have also been a way in which ACE signaled quality to prospective resource providers by crafting a business plan that responded to the critical failures of prior attempts to commercialize cricket in the United States. Whether intentional or not, this case clearly highlights the importance of absorptive capacity for sport-based entrepreneurs when attempting to commercialize products in contexts where lessons can be learned from first and other prior market movers.

Limitations

Multiple limitations of this research are acknowledged. First, this research made inferences based on a narrative constructed

through secondary data. One of the major secondary data sources was press articles, which can be littered with inaccuracies and infused with bias (Kuypers, 2002; Maier, 2005). One way this research accounted for this potential discrepancy was through the triangulation of third-party media sources with organizational self-presentations. Second, this research was not representative of all units within the case. The decision to focus exclusively on the first and biggest market movers was more a resource limitation than a purposeful decision to restrict the research scope. As one poignant example, a joint venture in the early 2010s between USACA and New Zealand Cricket – under the guise of Cricket Holdings America – was postponed indefinitely following a lack of investment and infrastructure (Della Penna, 2018b). Rather, the first and biggest mover approach of this research enabled the creation of a detailed narrative of critical aspects of the case from a perspective of relative successes. However, consideration of all units within the case could have either further substantiated some of the key findings within the case or alternatively unearthed additional nuanced findings.

Future Research

Previous work has applied concepts of resource mobilization to sport and the process of commercializing new sport products. For instance, Corte (2013) explored an emerging sport ecosystem by considering the mobilization of resources in the commercialization of freestyle BMX at a micro-level. Dixon et al. (2020) used a resource-based view to understand the challenges of acquiring and mobilizing resources to introduce

new sport development programs for sport participants at risk of dropping out of sport. Still, opportunities exist to extend the specific application of ERM in the context of sport-based entrepreneurship. Along with this, the ERM-guided success factors and determinants of commercialization identified as salient in this research could be applied to other emerging sport markets (e.g., pickleball). Future research should also respond to the reliance on secondary data that was identified as a limitation of this research by

operationalizing ERM through qualitative or quantitative primary data collection methods, whether interviews or surveys. As demonstrated in this research, ERM has the potential to add to sport management knowledge and theory through an understanding of the entrepreneurial processes that underpin resource mobilization and how these actions interplay with the resource environment in a sport context

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