Introduction, Background and Education

Jyoti Ann Burrett is a professional football player and a part of the Indian National Women’s Football Team. Jyoti is an alumnus of Welham Girls’ School, Dehradun, a place I feel proud to call my Alma Mater as well. I had the privilege of talking to Jyoti over email and phone for the purpose of this project. Jyoti’s interest in football, (called soccer in the USA), started out a little late. Initially, Jyoti was a hockey and squash player, and an athlete as well, going on to the state and national championships in all three sports. Her fascination with football started in the last year of high school, when she saw Francesco Totti playing free style football in an advert. She started juggling, first with a tennis ball and then progressed on to a size 5 football. When she shifted to New Delhi to do her undergraduate degree at the St. Stephens College, she continued with juggling and on being spotted by the Boy’s team coach, got involved in training with them, and eventually became a part of the Delhi University’s Women’s football team.

Jyoti went on to get her master’s degree from the University of Exeter, England in Sports and Health Science. Jyoti describes her experience in England as enjoyable and informative. In Tottenham, she was globally exposed to the ways and techniques of football and her training there gave her skills that she still incorporates into her game. She said, “It taught me the value of on-going long term opportunities for personal bonding and professional development for a team to evolve as a cohesive unit.” (Chaudhari 2013) This experience of Jyoti’s directly relates to the concept covered in Chapter 2, Developing a professional perspective in the section, Work Transition and Adjustment, where the book talks about ‘demonstrating your work ethic’, ‘refining your teamwork skills’, and ‘continuing your professional
development’. After that, Jyoti went on to train at the National camps, and qualified for the final 23 squad for the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) which recruited girls for the team from all over Asia. Jyoti’s first time representing India was for the AFC cup in Palestine where she also scored her first goal for the country which she also describes as the proudest moment of her life.

**Roles, Duties and Impact**

As Jyoti has a degree in Health Science, she oversees and contributes to the training and health of the football team. She is extremely passionate about keeping fit and being able to keep healthy both physically and mentally. Currently, when Jyoti not training with the team for the season, she is a professional trainer at a gym in New Delhi. Since football as a sport is not popular in India, despite the European Leagues’ fan following having a large base in India, women’s football has faced a lot of difficulties in terms of proper funding from the government, adequate facilities to train, etc. Also, the Indian Women’s team is ranked higher than the Indian Men’s team, to which Jyoti’s reaction is, “they still have more financial backing than us, but I can see changes happening in the right direction.”

Jyoti is also a Nike athlete, being endorsed by Nike after her success on the team. Jyoti has been involved with many Nike campaigns to promote fitness and being healthy and has spoken in various Nike events about the importance of fitness in various cities, on multiple occasions. Recently, Jyoti was part of Nike’s biggest ad campaign *Da Da Ding* that promotes women athletes in India. This is an empowering ad, with powerful music and features women athletes from various sports who have made India proud at the international levels who try and encourage girls in India to go out and play their sport no matter what challenges they face. It was an inspiring moment to see Jyoti among the top women athletes in India, in that video which went viral on the internet and resonated with thousands of girls across India,
including myself. Jyoti is also a certified Nike+ trainer, working closely with Nike to come up with and improve fitness regimes and customize them according to people’s needs. Her regimes are also on the Nike+ fitness app so people can follow them anywhere in the country.

Jyoti works closely with multiple non-profit organization to promote football, and sports in general, among young girls. She strongly believes in inculcating sports for fitness and strength at the “grass roots level.” One of the organizations she works with is called Kutumbh, where during the season she sometimes goes with the national team to play football with the girls there. This way, the girls see members of the team as role models and get a chance to play with the professionals of the game, and the it is also a way for the team to show a picture of dedicated women working for the betterment of the country, which helps in getting publicity for the team.

Jyoti has also used social media in an effective manner to promote her brand and her mission, a way that was discussed in class which related to every chapter; using social media to promote one’s brand. She has a Facebook page which she regularly updates with the developments in her career or the team. She also promotes her non-profit organizations through it and believes that it is an effective way in today’s world to get a message across to millions of people and make an impact.

**Challenges Jyoti faced**

Jyoti grew up in Dehradun, a small town in the foothill of the Himalayas, where she never thought she’d even play football as a hobby, let alone professionally. In India, it is difficult to be a sportsperson (except cricketers), and it is even more difficult to be a female sportsperson. Jyoti defied the norm and became both. She gave up a plush, high-paying corporate job to follow her passion. She stood her ground even when society did not support her and considered her stupid for giving up a job for football. Because football is not so
popular in India, Jyoti had to work doubly hard to stand her ground and succeed. She was extremely lucky to be constantly supported by her father and brother, people whose roles she considers monumental in her success.

**Conclusion**

Jyoti has achieved great milestones in her journey, overcoming all kinds of odds, and learning from every experience. I chose Jyoti as a leader to do this project on, because one day I would want to be able to make a difference and impact people’s life the way she is right now. Although, being a professional athlete is not the career for me, I would want to be a role model for a young girl in the same way Jyoti is to me. While talking to Jyoti, I realised the amount of hard work she put in to get where she is today. Not only training and practising as a professional footballer, but also being an inspiration to many young children and promoting sport and fitness as a way of living a healthy life. Not to overlook the mental strength she needed to stand up to society pressures being a girl in India trying to pursue football as a career. One question that I asked Jyoti was, *What legacy does she want to leave behind?* and the answer still resonates with me. She said, “I want girls to be able to freely follow their passion, whether sports or anything else, without anything holding them back, that’s the kind of impact I want to have on people’s lives.”

I would like to end by saying, I am more inspired by Jyoti now than I was even before I did this project. The three things that I would take away from interviewing Jyoti would be, first, to never be afraid of following your passion, no matter what people say. Jyoti quotes Franz Kafka, ‘*Follow your most intense obsessions mercilessly.*’. Second, never to give up on your dreams or what you believe in, even in the face of great odds. She says, “if you don’t try, how will you succeed?” Lastly, through Jyoti, I have realized that hard work is the key to success,
in any field. Jyoti continues to be an inspiration and it has been an absolute privilege and honour to be able to this project on her.

Works Cited:

