

**Spurs Era San Antonio: Exploring the
Historical Antecedents and Evolution
of a Sports Fandom**

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Spurs Era San Antonio: Exploring the Historical Antecedents and Evolution of a Sports Fandom

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Abstract

Basketball's rise as a participation sport dates to the late nineteenth century. Over the twentieth century, the game's growing popularity resulted in its professionalisation and increased spectatorship across the United States. The San Antonio Spurs professional basketball franchise, established by 1973, and whose origins and evolution this thesis investigates was a clear example of this phenomenon. More importantly, it explores the historical antecedents of Spurs fandom. Although sports fans have been researched extensively, this thesis addresses a historiographical gap by examining sports fandom at macro and microsocial levels while acknowledging fans as complicated historical agents instead of passive exploited economic victims.

Elaborative archival research illustrates how the franchise, press, politicians, and fans established the Spurs into the nation's consciousness. An extensive prosopographical analysis of cyber obituaries details the characteristics of the Spurs fan community and contemplates broader historical inequities and disparities that have implications far beyond sport. A forensic examination of web cemeteries illustrates how San Antonians embraced the team and used their fandom to enhance relationships and cope with life and death. These methods facilitated the analysis of an elemental Spurs fan community, the Baseline Bums.

Serving as perhaps the first example of how to incorporate web cemeteries in historical research, this thesis forges a new path to develop interpretations on the human experience. Such a historical exploration unveils the experiences and values of ordinary people. Consciousness, sentience, and mortality define our humanity, imploring us to seek meaning and belonging in our fleeting existence; this thesis demonstrates, to varying degrees, how people found them through Spurs fandom. In so doing, this thesis significantly contributes to the field by offering a novel approach that enhances our understanding of the histories of sports fandoms and modern human communities.

Reflection and Acknowledgements

These past six years have been the most difficult of my entire life. A global pandemic, increased work demands, and countless personal losses and adversities nearly destroyed me. Mom, I lost you three years into this project, but the unrelenting spirit I inherited from you helped me get to the finish. I will never 'stop believing' or stop loving you. My brother Matthew, you left for your great gig in the sky five days before Mom. As teenagers we dreamed of becoming historians together; WE made it. My little cousin Chase, you headed to heaven in January. You always looked up to me, and I can only hope that now you gaze down on me with pride. When I embarked on this PhD journey, I was convinced it would be the greatest challenge I had ever faced and the most important thing I had ever written. I was wrong on both accounts. My mother's obituary is the most significant thing I've crafted, and eulogising her, Matthew, and Chase at their celebrations of life nearly made me collapse. Since 2018, I've attended eleven funerals of family and friends, and eight of these honoured lives shorter lived than my own. These experiences have made this project even more isolating than it already was as a distance PhD student with no cohort of peers. However, this lived experience has affirmed my appreciation and respect for the novel historical sources used in this thesis even more.

In the wake of these adversities, I have recently had the honour of becoming a father. My wife and I welcomed our twin boys, Leo and Gio, into the world on Leap Day. Unfortunately, our little Gio was born asleep. We will forever mourn our purple butterfly and what could have been. Our little Leo overcame a sixty-two-day stay in the neonatal intensive care unit and is now safe and home. Leo, I hope that as you grow older, you will understand I am not perfect, but I love you unconditionally and unrelentingly.

I leaned hard on my village these past several years, and I'd like to acknowledge a few of them. Dad, all I ever wanted to do was make you and mom proud. I hope I've done that. Amber, as my older sister, you've always looked out for me, and I find comfort in knowing that you've shown Leo that same level of care. Josh, my brother-in-law, your continuous calls and texts are appreciated and helped me endure this tumultuous time. To my best friend, Kody, we've shared many experiences, including our sons in the NICU simultaneously. Thanks for helping reduce my

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Contents

Introduction	1
Professional Sports in the United States	1
Basketball's Rise in the United States	4
The Evolution of the American Sports Fan	9
Research Aim and Objectives	13
Methodology and Sources	13
Thesis Structure and Contribution	18
Chapter 1- Uncovering Identities, Imaginings, and Communities in Modern Spectator Sports	22
(Imagined) Communities of Fandom in Sport	22
Sport's Role in the Development of Identity	27
Sport Spectators and Supporters	32
Sport in the City	36
San Antonio and the Spurs	41
Chapter 2- From the Archives: San Antonians and the Spurs Forge an Identity	49
The Dallas Chaparrals (1967-1973)	49
San Antonio Gets their Spurs (1973-1974)	50
The Spurs in the ABA and the Merger (1974-1976)	55
The Spurs Become a Force in the NBA (1976-1983)	59
Troubling Times and the McCombs Takeover (1983-1989)	70
Robinson's Ascension and Organisational Precarity (1989-1997)	76
An Era of Duncan, Dominance, and Stability (1997-2023)	93
A Half Century of the Spurs in San Antonio	100
Chapter 3- Spurs Fandom in Cyber Obituaries: A Prosopographical Analysis	104
Prosopography	105

Race and Ethnicity	109
Antemortem Segregation and Posthumous Collectivity.....	115
Gender	123
Age.....	129
Marital Status	131
Religious Affiliation	133
Educational Attainment	135
Occupations	137
Political Attitudes.....	142
Season Ticket Holders	143
Baseline Bums	146
Reflections on Prosopography and the Cyber Obituary in Spurs Fandom	147
Chapter 4- Fighting Against Oblivion: The Web Cemeteries of Spurs Fans	151
Web Cemeteries.....	151
Intrafamilial Spurs Fandom	153
Untimely Deaths.....	164
Disability	168
Older Women	175
Spurs Season Tickets, the Military, and a Personal Network.....	181
Friendship in Spurs Fandom	185
Organisational Perspectives of Spurs Fandom	189
The Value and Purpose of Web Cemeteries	194
Chapter 5- The Extremes of Spurs Fandom: Fifty Years of the Baseline Bums	197
.....	197
The Bums' Infancy (1973-1976).....	198
The Bums' NBA Reign in HemisFair Arena (1976-1993)	212
The Bums Fade in the Alamodome (1993-2002)	217
The Contemporary Bums (2002-2014).....	227

The Bums' Evolution and Legacy	246
Conclusion	252
Archival Investigations: Fifty Years of the Spurs in San Antonio	253
Spurs Fandom, Cyber Obituaries, and Prosopography	255
Spurs Fandom in Web Cemeteries	262
A Baseline Bums Community	267
Reflections – Originality and Contribution to Knowledge	273
Bibliography	276
Primary Sources.....	276
Periodicals.....	276
Obituary Archives and Funeral Homes.....	276
Census and Reports.....	277
Books and Interviews	279
Websites, Blogs and Videos.....	280
Secondary Sources	284
Books, Book Chapters and Edited Collections	284
Scholarly Articles.....	293
Theses, Dissertations and Encyclopaedic Entries.....	304
Articles, Websites, Blogs and Documentaries	305
Appendix 1. Prosopographical Questionnaire	313
Publications and Presentations Associated with this Thesis.....	314
Journal Articles.....	314
Academic Presentations.....	314
Public Engagement	315
Public Appearances	315

Introduction

Basketball's rise as a participation sport dates to the late nineteenth century. Over the twentieth century, the professionalisation of the game increased spectatorship. In the United States (U.S.), basketball has usurped all other sports in terms of popularity except American football. However, football's dominance may end this century due to the burgeoning research exposing how the game's violence is destructive to athletes and the country's social fabric.¹ If the last century is any indication, basketball may soon become the most prominent, popular, and lucrative national pastime. As a result of the sport's growing popularity, basketball fandoms have developed, and this thesis seeks to understand how and why such followings began, using the National Basketball Association's (NBA) San Antonio Spurs as an exemplar case study. Although basketball and the Spurs are integral to this thesis, fans are centred here to elaborate, modify, and complicate the historiography covering sports fandom and communities using a mixed-methodology and novel historical sources. These sources shed light on how ordinary individuals, with their imperfections and transient existence, foster relationships amidst a society marked by growing divisions and hostility. This thesis traces the franchise's origin and evolution while revealing how Spurs fandom developed and changed over time. The franchise and its fans recently celebrated the Spurs' semicentennial in 2023, but before detailing this relationship, a brief history of sports' ascendancy in the U.S. is necessary to contextualise where the Spurs and their fans fit into a broader historical movement of fandom.

Professional Sports in the United States

American historians have explored professional sport's development and impact in the U.S. since 1917 when Paxson articulated the theory that sport's ascendancy had contributed to the reform efforts of the Progressive Era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, expanding worker, civil, and political rights. For Paxson, the increase in sports participation was a significant factor in social change

¹ Michael L. Butterworth and Stormi D. Moskal, 'American Football, Flags, and 'Fun': The Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl and the Rhetorical Production of Militarism', *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2, no. 4 (November 6, 2009): 411-433; Michael L. Butterworth, 'Militarism and Memorializing at the Pro Football Hall of Fame', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (2012): 241-258.

and it had inspired a new Americanism. His Americentric perspective refuses to acknowledge Europe's contribution to modern sport and reinforces the notion of American Exceptionalism that is prevalent in public and academic discourses. Paxson describes how sports such as tennis, hunting, equestrian, pedestrianism, golf, baseball, archery, cricket, bicycling, boxing, and gymnastics had grown in popularity and evolved from leisurely to organised and professionalised pursuits by the late nineteenth century. With the rise of local associations, leagues, clubs, and competitions sports had become a substantial force in American life. Although Paxson romanticises the American experience and sport's role within it, he is perhaps the first U.S. historian to use sport as a lens to understand society.²

Most American historians refused to acknowledge sport as a serious research subject. Although, following the field's cultural turn, scholarship showed how the modernisation of athletics ameliorated societal ills that resulted from rapid urbanisation during the Second Industrial Revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³ In his analysis of nineteenth-century New York City, Adelman identifies how middle-class New Yorkers helped cultivate modern sport in America.⁴ Other middle-class New Yorkers utilised some of these same practices to popularise and commercialise baseball. Entrepreneurs, promoters, players, and community members supported baseball teams such as the New York Knickerbockers in 1845, who competed with other local and regional clubs.⁵ Teams nationwide collectively established and innovated the primarily regional baseball associations of the 1850s and 1860s. Some clubs within these associations abandoned amateurism as early as the 1850s. The first all-professional team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, was established in 1869, and the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players was created in 1871.⁶ The grassroots work of these early associations increased

² Frederic L. Paxson, 'The Rise of Sport', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 4 (1917): 143-168.

³ Peter Levin, 'The Promise of Sport in Antebellum America', *Journal of American Culture* 2 (1980): 623-634; Dominick Cavallo, *Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation and Community, 1865-1915* (Boston: Northeastern University Press: 1982); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁴ Melvin L. Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-70* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ 'The Red Stockings', 1869 Cincinnati Red Stockings, <https://www.1869reds.com/> (accessed November 29, 2023); BR Bullpen, 'National Association of Professional Base Ball Players', https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/National_Association_of_Professional_Base_Ball_Players (accessed November 29, 2023).

baseball participation and spectatorship and served as a model for the proliferation and professionalisation of other sports.⁷ This evolution culminated in the creation of the first professional sports league in the U.S., the National League, in 1876.⁸ Unlike the club models adopted throughout Europe, American teams were owned and operated by sports entrepreneurs and were not obligated to stay in the locality in which they were founded. This early franchising of professional teams established the system that has been adopted up to the present day. As professional sports grew in popularity, the leagues that franchise owners established essentially operated as cartels, creating new teams in or relocating them to more lucrative markets.

In his urban history of sport in the U.S., Reiss highlights baseball's growth and influence on the sporting and national culture of the country. For Reiss, sports helped promote racial and ethnic pride that contributed to community building in urban slums and he illuminated the critical contributions made by working-class people to promote sports participation and spectatorship. From humble and precarious beginnings, sports such as baseball, football, and basketball rose in popularity through the process of urbanisation. The evolution of the urban American landscape contributed to the commercialisation and professionalisation of spectator sports, making them nearly unrecognisable when compared to their humble nineteenth-century beginnings.⁹ Over the twentieth century, American football gained in popularity through the collegiate system. Sports entrepreneurs and coaches progressively professionalised and commodified the game making it the country's most popular and lucrative sport as shown through the vast historiography of the game's social, cultural, political, racial, ethnic, and economic impact.¹⁰

⁷ Melvin L. Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-70* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

⁸ BR Bullpen, 'National League', Baseball Reference, https://www.baseball-reference.com/bullpen/National_League. (accessed November 29, 2023).

⁹ Steven Reiss, *The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Ronald A. Smith, *Play-By-Play: Radio, Television, and Big-Time College Sport* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and the Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly and the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); John Watterson, *College Football: History Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Frank Guridy, *The Sports Revolution: How Texas Changed the Culture of American Athletics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021).

Basketball's Rise in the United States

A distanced third to the extensive histories of baseball and football is that of basketball. James Naismith, a Canadian immigrant of Scottish descent, invented basketball in 1891 while working for the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Massachusetts. Naismith's game valued passing and teamwork, avoided American football's physical violence, and was initially intended to be played indoors. Naismith listed the rules of basketball, explained the game's development and sketched a picture of the first contest in a January 1892 article featured in the YMCA's newsletter, *The Triangle*.¹¹ Subsequently, the game spread throughout the association's gymnasiums and promoters, coaches, and players adopted and adapted the sport. Basketball's fluid design organically facilitated player ingenuity and improvisation, and the game experienced numerous modifications during the twentieth century. As early as the 1940s and 1950s, leagues experimented with the three-point shot and shot clock, which spread and quickened the game, increasing its spectator appeal. Although spectatorship was limited in the game's first decades, player participation was not.¹² Baseball, boxing, horse racing, and college football were the most popular spectator sports in 1926, but a National Amateur Athletic Federation report indicated that basketball participation across schools in the U.S. dwarfed those of any other sport,¹³ and the YMCA's international reach initiated participation in numerous countries, facilitating its inclusion in the 1904 Olympics.¹⁴ Across the U.S., the game appealed to a broad demographic as immigrants and citizens expressed their ethnic, religious, economic, and occupational identities through team culture in urban and rural settings, and it was particularly popular within Jewish communities.¹⁵ In addition to basketball's appeal to people across a spectrum of classes and ethnicities, it also challenged gendered boundaries as women began playing in abundance.

¹¹ James Naismith, 'Basketball', *The Triangle*, January 1892, 144-147.

¹² Pamela Grundy, Murray Nelson and Mark Dyreson, 'The Emergence of Basketball as an American National Pastime: From a Popular Participant Sport to a Spectacle of Nationhood', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31 no. 1-2 (2014): 135.

¹³ Paul Gallico, *A Farewell to Sport* (New York City: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938); Grover Theis, 'Scrub Baseball Now Has Leagues', *New York Times*, May 2, 1926.

¹⁴ Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (New York City: Columbia University Press: 1994), 97-110.

¹⁵ Peter Levine, *Ellis Island to Ebbets Field: Sport and the American Jewish Experience* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1993); Adolph H. Grundman, *The Golden Age of Amateur Basketball: The AAU Tournament 1921-68* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

Women were barred from participating in many modern American team sports at the turn of the twentieth century, but that was not the case with basketball. They began competing as early as 1892, although many associations and schools developed and mandated women-specific rules that reduced a player's physical exertion. Stanford University defeated the University of California in the inaugural intercollegiate women's basketball game in 1896,¹⁶ but this embrace of women's intercollegiate basketball was fleeting, as many colleges and universities discontinued their programs and competitions over the following decades because of ideological and financial pressures.¹⁷ Despite this conservative backlash at the collegiate level, high schools embraced the game, establishing it as the most widespread team sport for girls and boys in the nation.¹⁸ Public interest and spectatorship increased due to growing youth participation as high school teams helped develop communal identities across the country, reflecting and reshaping the values of the community they represented. As state-wide high school competitions expanded throughout the 1920s and 1930s, rivalries developed along geographic, ethnic, and racial lines. Rural versus urban, rich versus poor, black versus white, and Mexican versus American were but a few of the polarising narratives that circulated the press reflecting the fractures, inequities, and prejudices within the country. Simultaneously, the players, coaches and supporters of these teams reshaped and complicated how outsiders came to understand them, using the game to forge new identities across America.¹⁹ Similar trends were observable at the adult amateur, collegiate and professional levels in the mid-twentieth century as basketball's growing appeal converged with technological innovation.

¹⁶ 'The First Game', Stanford University, <https://125.stanford.edu/the-first-game/#:~:text=Cal%20contest,first%20women's%20intercollegiate%20basketball%20game> (accessed November 27, 2023); Pamela Grundy and Susan Shackleford, *Shattering the Glass: The Remarkable History of Women's Basketball* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); 'Basket ball for women :as adopted by the Conference on Physical Training', held in June, 1899, at Springfield, Massachusetts (American Sports Publishing Company, 1905), 47-52.

¹⁷ Pamela Grundy, Murray Nelson and Mark Dyerson, 'The Emergence of Basketball as an American National Pastime: From a Popular Participant Sport to a Spectacle of Nationhood', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31 no. 1-2 (2014): 140.

¹⁸ Grover Theis, 'Scrub Baseball Now Has Leagues', *New York Times*, May 2, 1926.

¹⁹ Mark Dyerson, 'Basketball and Magic in "Middletown": Locating Sport and Culture in American Social Science' in *Rooting for the Home Team*, edited by Daniel A. Nathan, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 17–35; Jamie Schultz and Shelley Lucas, 'Six-Player Girls' Basketball: The Essence of Small-Town Life in Iowa' in *Rooting for the Home Team*, edited by Daniel A. Nathan, 80–92 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); Randy Roberts, '*But, They Can't Beat Us!*: Oscar Robertson and the Crispus Attucks Tigers', (Champaign: Sports Publishing, 1999); Ignacio Garcia, *When Mexicans Could Play Ball: Basketball, Race, and Identity in San Antonio, 1928-1945* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).

As high school basketball's popularity reached unprecedented heights, intercollegiate basketball expanded throughout the 1930s. By the decade's end, the National Invitation Tournament (NIT) attracted tens of thousands of fans to Madison Square Garden.²⁰ In its shadows, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) started their annual tournament in 1939 but did not surpass the NIT in terms of popularity until the 1960s. The NCAA tournament, now referred to as 'March Madness', is one of the largest sporting spectacles in the world. Concurrently, due to racial segregation in the U.S., the Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) was established in 1912 and hosted its first intercollegiate men's basketball tournament in 1946. The CIAA and its tournament featured the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) founded throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to the discriminatory practices of higher education institutions against African Americans. The CIAA tournament showcased black players' athletic abilities and academic achievements and helped establish basketball's popularity within the African American community throughout the middle of the twentieth century during the height of the black freedom struggle.²¹

Basketball's popularity amongst African Americans was not solely a result of the college game as youth, amateur, and professional teams created a greater appreciation for the sport in the first three decades of the twentieth century, highlighted by the success of the Harlem Globetrotters, initially founded in Chicago, and the New York Rens who also had ties to Harlem. In the 1920s and 1930s, Harlem was the epicentre for black cultural expression, and this movement, the Harlem Renaissance, inspired the Rens' moniker. In a time of racial segregation, the Rens won the inaugural World Professional Basketball Tournament in 1939. Defeating the champions of the then all-white National Basketball League (NBL), the Oshkosh All-Stars. The Globetrotters won the tournament the following year and again in 1948 and 1949 defeating the all-white Minneapolis Lakers, the last champions of the Basketball Association of America (BAA).²² At least partly inspired by the triumphs of the Rens and Globetrotters, pick-up or street basketball, later

²⁰ 'Temple Defeats Colorado for NIT Title before 14,497', *New York Times*, March 17, 1938.

²¹ Milton S. Katz, *Breaking Through: John B. McLendon, Basketball Legend and Civil Rights Pioneer* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007).

²² Claude Johnson, *The Black Fives: The Epic Story of Basketball's Forgotten Era* (New York City: Abrams Press, 2022); 'New York Rens', Black Fives Foundation, <https://www.blackfives.org/new-york-reus/> (accessed November 27, 2023); 'Globetrotter History', The Original Harlem Globetrotters, <https://harlemglobetrotters.com/about/#:~:text=1948-1949,excel%20on%20a%20professional%20level> (accessed November 27, 2023).

known as streetball, became a popular brand of the game played in black urban neighbourhoods across the country. Harlem's Rucker tournament, founded by a World War II (WWII) veteran of the same name, ushered in a new type of urban basketball that valued stylistic expression and psychological intimidation that grew in popularity throughout the latter half of the century.²³ As Americans of various backgrounds diversified American basketball culture, executives of various leagues worked to establish the professional game further. In 1949, the BAA absorbed the NBL and created the NBA.²⁴ The first black players integrated the league the following year, and some NBA franchises cultivated large followings, led by the New York Knickerbockers, Boston Celtics, Philadelphia Warriors and Minneapolis Lakers. Basketball promoters such as Ned Irish of New York City and Eddie Gottlieb of Philadelphia were integral to the success of the Knicks and Warriors, but they also promoted the game at the semi-professional and amateur level.²⁵

Seventeen franchises competed in the NBA's inaugural campaign, but that number dwindled to eight by 1955 as teams struggled to draw spectators and experienced financial turmoil. Adopting and modifying tactics from the country's older professional leagues, Major League Baseball (MLB) and the National Football League (NFL), NBA executives adapted to ensure their league's survival.²⁶ In his detailed economic history of the NBA, Surdam contends that the league's fortunes shifted following executives' embrace of racial integration, franchise relocations, rule changes, and television. Full racial integration facilitated the emergence of transcendent talents such as Bill Russell, Oscar Robertson, and Wilt Chamberlain. Franchise relocations to more populous cities increased team popularity and profits. Rule changes reduced players' physical contact, and the twenty-four-second shot clock increased the game's flow and speed, creating a more attractive product. The league's embrace of television generated regional and national viewership and displayed the talent and personalities of players and coaches, which motivated

²³ Dennis Gildea, 'From Basket Ball to Hoop Heroics: The City Game, 1891 to the Present', in *New York Sports: Glamour and Grit in the Empire City*, edited by Stephen Norwood, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 160-162.

²⁴ David George Surdam, *The Rise of the National Basketball Association* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 57.

²⁵ Rich Westcott, *The Mogul: Eddie Gottlieb, Philadelphia Sports Legend and Pro Basketball Pioneer* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); Sam Goldaper, 'Edward S. (Ned) Irish, Founder of the Knicks, Dies', *New York Times*, January 22, 1982.

²⁶ David George Surdam, *The Rise of the National Basketball Association* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 167.

entrepreneurs to expand the NBA to other markets and increased the value of existing franchises.²⁷

This confluence of factors occurred as the nation underwent a tumultuous social change, resulting in the expansion of civil rights, as federal legislation disbanded racial segregation and increased voter protections. Despite these legislative gains, de facto segregation and heightened racial tension persisted, as did the Vietnam War, which grew increasingly unpopular during Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency. Against this backdrop, renegade sports entrepreneurs challenged NFL and NBA hegemony. In 1960, the upstart American Football League (AFL) held its inaugural season and, by 1967, AFL and NFL executives agreed to hold the first Super Bowl that featured the two league's respective champions, with the AFL and NFL merging two years later. American Basketball Association (ABA) executives strategized to create a similar outcome and began operations in 1967. Although the NBA refused a merger for a longer time than ABA executives anticipated, they agreed to terms in 1973. The ABA experienced limited financial success but provided a platform for the diversification of American basketball culture. The ABA was the original league of the San Antonio Spurs, and some have noted how the expressive, improvisational, and seemingly lawless association was quintessentially 'black' compared to the 'white' traditionalist NBA.²⁸

This contrast between the NBA and ABA represented American society more broadly as the human rights struggles of the 1960s continued into the 1970s and contributed to heightened racial tensions. As black players began to appear on NBA rosters in mass, due to their community's recent empowerment through the work of those social movements, historians have noted how some white Americans searched for a 'Great White Hope' in professional basketball. Criblez details this phenomenon in his analysis of the 1970s NBA and traces the Great White Hope narrative back to pugilist James J. Jeffries in 1910. By the late 1970s, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, an African American Muslim who associated with black militants, was the NBA's best player and some observers blamed decreased viewership on the

²⁷ David George Surdam, *The Rise of the National Basketball Association* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 133-164.

²⁸ Todd Boyd, *Young, Black, Rich, and Famous: The Rise of the NBA, the Hip Hop Invasion, and the Transformation of American Culture* (New York City: Doubleday Press, 2008).

blackness of the league.²⁹ Criblez explains how the NBA moved to appease a predominately white fanbase by reserving roster spots for white players, many of whom rarely saw game time, and how the press constantly appraised prospective white talents as saviours and reinforced racial stereotypes related to player skillsets.³⁰ For Criblez, until the ascendance of Larry Bird in 1979, these Great White Hopes had disappointed. Bird's rivalry with Earvin 'Magic' Johnson Jr. of the Los Angeles Lakers defined the league in the 1980s, significantly increased the game's popularity and marketability, and established basketball as a 'full-fledged national pastime'.³¹ However, Michael Jordan's emergence in the late 1980s as the sport's greatest player and marketing phenomenon exponentially increased the game's popularity and fully established basketball as a global game. The fandom surrounding Jordan was arguably the largest for any athlete in U.S. history, although sports fandom was nothing new to the American experience.

The Evolution of the American Sports Fan

The etymology of the word fan has been debated in various academic circles. Most observers attribute the phrase's introduction into the English lexicon to Ted Sullivan, a late nineteenth-century baseball manager, who first used it in 1883 to abbreviate 'fanatic', a common title previously applied to sport spectators. However, researchers have credited sportswriter Ren Mulford Jr. for popularising the phrase fan in subsequent years.³² Before 'fan' and 'fanatic', '(the) Fancy', 'bugs', 'boomers', 'connoisseurs', '(c)kranks', 'maniacs', 'lovers', 'fiends', 'nuts' and 'rooters' were but a few of the terms used by reporters to describe sport and cultural enthusiasts.³³ There are examples of sports fandom being described as a type of illness, such as 'base ball fever' as early as 1876, a common practice among journalists who also used 'fever' and 'mania' to describe public enthusiasm for other sports and forms of culture.³⁴ While describing fandom as a pathology has often negatively and unfairly characterised fans as deviant or illogical, Cavicchi suggests that historians of

²⁹ Adam J. Criblez, 'White Men Playing a Black Man's Game: Basketball's "Great White Hopes" of the 1970s', *Journal of Sport History* 42 no. 3 (Fall 2015): 378.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 373.

³¹ Pamela Grundy, Murray Nelson and Mark Dyreson, 'The Emergence of Basketball as an American National Pastime: From a Popular Participant Sport to a Spectacle of Nationhood', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31 no. 1-2 (2014): 147.

³² David Shulman, 'On the Early Use of Fan in Baseball', *American Speech* 71 no. 3 (1996): 330.

³³ 'The Vocabularist: Are Fans Fanatical or Fanciful?', BBC News, September 22, 2015.

³⁴ Daniel Cavicchi, 'Fandom Before 'Fan': Shaping the History of Enthusiastic Audiences', *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History* 6 (2014): 67-68.

fandom can learn a great deal from historians of science who have forensically studied diseases to trace their antecedents and evolution.³⁵ For Cavicchi, if historians of fandom applied similar methodologies, they could potentially identify, describe, and define such phenomena and their evolution. As a relatively new academic field, fan studies have primarily focused on fandom after 1900, but there is evidence that such a thing existed long before ‘fan’ or ‘fanatic’ entered the popular discourse, and American sports played a significant role in defining who was involved and what it meant to be one.³⁶ As notions of the fan evolved, so too did the communities of which they were part. Understandings of these fan communities have changed over time and this thesis elaborates on the historiography’s application of Anderson’s concept of the imagined community, which essentially defines large abstract communities such as nation-states and sports fandoms as inauthentic given their impersonal nature and propagandised origins.³⁷ More importantly, this work complicates previous interpretations by showcasing how the larger imagined community of Spurs fandom was catalysed from a multitude of smaller personal communities. This recognition produces an enriched understanding of fans through macro and microsocial lenses that situates them in society while acknowledging their individual and collective agency.

Historians have identified how rising nationalist sentiments at the turn of the century contributed to the growing popularity of spectator sports and made international sporting sides more influential to the cultural fabric of the countries they represented.³⁸ While this is undeniable, American sporting culture contrasted with that of other nations, given that baseball was the most popular spectator sport by the late 1860s. Baseball’s ascendancy coincided with the rise of industrial capitalism and provided what some deemed a healthy leisure activity for working-class men,

³⁵ Joli Jenson, ‘Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization’ in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* edited by Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 9-10; Daniel Cavicchi, ‘Fandom Before ‘Fan’: Shaping the History of Enthusiastic Audiences’, *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History* 6 (2014): 55.

³⁶ Daniel Cavicchi, ‘Fandom Before ‘Fan’: Shaping the History of Enthusiastic Audiences’, *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History* 6 (2014): 52-72.

³⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 2016), 36-37, 7.

³⁸ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); John Harris, ‘Cool Cymru, Rugby Union and an Imagined Community’, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 27, no. 3/4 (May 2007): 151-162; David L. Andrews, Jacob Bustad, and Samuel Clevenger, ‘National Sporting Pastimes, Spectacles of Sporting Otherness and American Imaginings, 1880-1920’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, no. 1-2 (2014): 225.

whether competing or spectating.³⁹ The baseball ‘cranks’ of the 1880s highlight these early sports fans. Most ‘cranks’ were described as obsessed with baseball even though they often could not play the game well or at all, and some supported their local teams full-time. Some historians describe Arthur Dixwell as the prototypical baseball ‘crank’ and American sports fan. This Bostonian came from an affluent family and, for a time, abandoned all other ventures to focus his intellectual and financial abilities on supporting local baseball teams and leagues. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Dixwell modelled what early basketball entrepreneurs and enthusiasts would do in the 1930s, but baseball ‘cranks’ such as Dixwell fell into obscurity following the turn of the century as organised supporters’ groups were formed.⁴⁰

The nineteenth-century Boston sports scene contributed significantly to the development of sport spectatorship in the U.S. with innovations such as artificial lighting for night games, expansions of grandstands and the founding of an official fan club, the Royal Rooters. In 1897, two hundred and fifty baseball enthusiasts joined the Rooters to support the Boston Beaneaters. The Rooters went on to back the Boston Red Stockings and, subsequently, the Red Sox. Columnists of the early twentieth century detailed how they supported their team, harassed opponents, created a band and chants, and were provided with a designated stand section.⁴¹ Other fan clubs across American professional sports appeared, but MLB’s Chicago Cubs’ Bleacher Bums of the 1960s are particularly relevant to this study given that they provided a model for the San Antonio Spurs’ official supporters’ group, the Baseline Bums, which was established by the franchise in 1973. Some historians have described the Bleacher Bums as emblematic of the American sports fan experience, given their cultivation of a communal spectator experience and passionate expressions. In the 1970s, playwrights and movie directors produced

³⁹ ‘Baseball Crowds’, Encyclopedia.com, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/baseball-crowds> (accessed December 2, 2023).

⁴⁰ Joanne Hulbert, ‘Hi! Hi! Dixwell’, Society for American Baseball Research, <https://sabr.org/bioproj/person/hi-hi-dixwell/#:~:text=But%20there%20was%20one%20baseball,His%20name%20was%20Arthur%20Dixwell> (accessed December 2, 2023).

⁴¹ Peter J. Nash, *Boston’s Royal Rooters* (Arcadia: Charleston, 2005); ‘The Royal Rooters Win the World Series for the Red Sox with ‘Tessie’’, New England Historical Society, <https://newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/royal-rooters-win-world-series-with-tessie/> (accessed December 2, 2023).

screenplays based on them, further cementing their place in sports fan history.⁴² Another baseball fan club created in the 1960s showcased the growing role of women in American sports fandom.

Established in 1964, the Rosie Reds were founded in Cincinnati as an official supporters' group of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team. Margaret Zimmer and Jeanette Heinze founded the Rosie Reds after rumours spread that the franchise would be relocated to another city. Zimmer and Heinze aimed to increase local interest from women in the Reds through the press, television, and radio as part of a broader movement led by fans who worked in various ways to keep hold of their team. The Rosie Reds were marketed as an organisation open to all women, and by 1965, they had recruited nearly 450 members. In 2023, they were still entirely comprised of women and girls.⁴³ Taken together, the Royal Rooters, Bleacher Bums, and Rosie Reds represent how fan communities have changed over time and how historians and popular media have paid particular attention to baseball fan clubs. Professional basketball supporters' groups have not received the same kind of extensive coverage. The Baseline Bums' history contrasts with that of these other supporter groups because they were not a grassroots collective established by followers but a franchise-led initiative. However, a key similarity was that many of the people who comprised these supporters' groups were working class and reflected the civic identity of their locality. Another recent example of this trend is that of the NFL's Cleveland Browns' 'Dawg Pound', founded in 1985. Sport historians have illustrated how these fans worked to 'save' the Browns amidst franchise relocation rumours in the 1990s. Unlike the successful initiatives of Cincinnati Reds fans in the 1960s, the Browns departed Cleveland for Baltimore in 1995, but widespread public displays of disapproval from fans contributed to the franchise's reactivation in 1999.⁴⁴ This kind of fan agency, which is a critical focus for this thesis, is sometimes lost in the historiography. The agency the Rosie Reds displayed is of particular importance, as is how they underscore how women

⁴² Erin McCarthy, 'Review: "Chicago Sports You Shoulda Been There"', *Journal of Sport History* 31 no. 3 (Fall 2024): 381; George Castle, 'The Return of '69 Bleacher Bum Leader Ron Grosul- Close but No Cigar Yet', Chicago Baseball Museum, April 23, 2018, <https://chicagobaseballmuseum.org/chicago-baseball-history-news/chicago-baseball-history-feature/the-return-of-69-bleacher-bum-leader-ron-grosul-close-but-no-cigar-yet/>.

⁴³ 'History of the Rosie Reds', Rosie Reds, Inc. <https://rosiereds.org/history/> (accessed December 2, 2023).

⁴⁴ Andrew D. Linden, 'Blue-Collar Identity and the "Culture of Losing: Cleveland and the "Save Our Browns" Campaign', *Journal of Sport History* 42, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 340-360.

became an increasing presence in sports fandom over the twentieth century. Historians and sociologists have identified similar trends in different social, temporal, and geographical contexts, illuminating how women have helped diversify sports spectatorship and interpretations of fans. This thesis elaborates on this discussion by highlighting the growing role of women in San Antonio Spurs fandom, especially within the Baseline Bums.⁴⁵

Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this thesis is to explore the historical antecedents surrounding the generation and sustainment of Spurs fandom and provide a new interpretation on the interplay between place, a sports organisation, and its supporters. To achieve this aim six objectives were established: and are as follows, to conceptualise and examine the evolution of an imagined community of fandom in sport and interpret its meaning within the broader context of San Antonio; to collect a diversity of sources to create a narrative illustrating how the relationship between the Spurs franchise and their local supporters has changed over time; to humanise supporters of the Spurs through the use of intimate sources; to investigate how the Spurs and their supporters influenced one another's identities in this period; to analyse how the Spurs and their supporters altered the perception of the city of San Antonio to locals and outsiders; to evaluate the role the Spurs organisation played in the San Antonio community since 1973. To accomplish these objectives, this thesis adopts a new mixed-methods approach informed by conventional and unconventional historical sources.

Methodology and Sources

Through the increased participation, professionalisation, and commodification of sports in the U.S. during the twentieth century, spectatorship and the games that followers watched became increasingly influential to the American experience. To support the wide variety of secondary sources accessed during this research, this study adopted a novel mixed-methods approach using archival research,

⁴⁵ Stacey Pope, *The Feminization of Sports Fandom: A Sociological Study* (Routledge: New York, 2017); Lisa Gye, 'Mission Statements and Cake Stalls: The Women's Supporter Group in Australian Football League Clubs', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32 no.18, (May 2015): 2190-2202; Cheryl Cooky and Katelyn Esmonde, 'It's Supposed to be About the Love of the Game, not the Love of Aaron Rodgers' Eyes: Challenging the Exclusions of Women Sports Fans', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 32, no.1 (2015): 22-48; David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993', *Journal of Sport History* 49 no. 1 (Spring 2022): 37-52.

prosopography developed from cyber obituaries, and types of collective and individual biography informed by web cemeteries to understand the rise of sports fandom more deeply.⁴⁶

This thesis prioritises using obituaries as primary historical sources for several reasons. Survivors often honour the deceased by creating obituaries, which are fundamental artefacts in narrating people's lives. These sources counter the forces that might otherwise lead individuals into obscurity, provide valuable insights into the lives of ordinary people, present personalised biographies that reflect both the deceased's life and the values of those who remember them, and aid in bereavement. Despite some hagiographic tendencies, the functionality, sentimentality, intimacy, and liminality of obituaries make them unique and culturally significant historical sources. Obituaries can influence historians to humanise their subjects, fostering more empathetic and compassionate interpretations that counter purely dystopic renderings of contemporary society.

The decision to analyse obituaries emerged organically from the researcher's interest in how death fosters storytelling, which is fundamental to the historical craft. The researcher's suspicion that obituaries could be valuable historical sources was confirmed by scholars across various disciplines who have used them to deepen understandings of ordinary people's lives.⁴⁷ Lived experience also informs these decisions; anyone who has crafted an obituary for a loved one, commented in a web cemetery guestbook, eulogised them at a celebration of life, or attempted to commemorate the deceased in any public forum understands that it is no easy task and requires deep introspection. Long after commemorations are created, the dead continue to influence the living, and this thesis seeks to modify and enrich historical

⁴⁶ Dave Day and Wray Vamplew, 'Sports History Methodology: Old and New' in *Methodology in Sports History*, (London: Routledge, 2017), Chapter 1.

⁴⁷ DeVries and Rutherford, 'Memorializing Loved Ones on the World Wide Web', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no.1 (2004): 6; Janice Hume and Bonnie Bressers, 'Obituaries Online: New Connections with the Living-and the Dead', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 60, no. 3 (2009-2010): 255; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Last Words", *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (June 2002): 30–36; Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb, 'The Portrayal of Librarians in Obituaries at the End of the Twentieth Century', *Library Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2004): 152–180; Charles T. Clotfelter, 'Die-Hard Fans and the Ivory Tower's Ties that Bind*', *Social Science Quarterly* 96, no. 2 (June 2015): 381-399.

interpretations of sports fans by highlighting such phenomena.

Public obituaries and web cemeteries are voluntarily shared by communities to commemorate the deceased, and this thesis respects the intention behind these memorials. However, concerns related to the ethicality of using these sources in historical research are justified and must be addressed. Without a deliberate, respectful, sensitive, and humanistic approach, such research could be perceived as misrepresentative and exploitative. Therefore, this thesis employs a prosopographical analysis of cyber obituaries, complemented by a qualitative analysis of web cemeteries and reflections on their limitations. This mixed-methodology respectfully uncovers, characterises, and humanises Spurs fans and their survivors. By highlighting these personal narratives, this thesis provides a comprehensive interpretation, enhances understanding of diverse human experiences, and fosters a greater appreciation for the lives of ordinary people. The historian's affirmation and amplification of the experiences of those discussed ensure that this work is mutually beneficial. Overall, while these sources offer valuable insights, researchers must navigate these ethical concerns carefully, ensuring that their work respects the dignity and privacy of the people and families involved.

Archival Research: Physical and Digital

Johnes notes that archives 'have been at the heart of the practice of history'. They determine what historians know about the past, and while some can be limited in scope and biased in perspective, the historian who is 'inquisitive enough' can find an abundance of helpful information within them.⁴⁸ A critical feature of this project was the exploration of civic archives related to the establishment of the organisation and its ongoing relationship with the city, the most important being those in the San Antonio Public Library's Texana/Genealogy Department. This Spurs collection dates to 1973 and features physical clippings from influential local newspapers, including the *San Antonio Express*, *San Antonio News*, *San Antonio Express-News*, and *San Antonio Light*. The collection also includes physical copies of *San Antonio Magazine* and franchise publications. While investigating this archive, a systematic chronological exploration of significant dates in the franchise's history, supporter

⁴⁸ Martin Johnes, 'Archives and Historians of Sport', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1784 and 1795.

stories, and articles concerning city officials' considerations and decisions on the organisation was undertaken. The microfilm catalogue of the newspapers was used to supplement this research, as were their digital archives, which are available through multiple online databases. Johnes explains how the digitisation of archives has led to their democratisation, making them more easily accessible to researchers,⁴⁹ and the digital archives of local, regional, and national newspapers were integral to the development of the thesis due to the COVID-19 pandemic that closed the physical archives. Given that the archives inevitably had some limitations in providing different viewpoints, the biographies and autobiographies of those involved with the city and organisation were also consulted.⁵⁰

Prosopography and Cyber Obituaries

Much was gathered from an analysis of the Spurs' relationship with the city and the creation and sustainment of an imagined community of fandom by utilising prosopography, which at its most basic level is defined as the collective study of a group of actors that share common characteristics. While prosopographical practitioners have relied heavily on census data, this thesis uses cyber obituaries.⁵¹ Although obituaries have historically been selective and discriminatory, in recent years, this medium has been rapidly, although not totally, democratised.⁵² Hume and Bressers suggest that cyber obituaries are a 'rich narrative source' that provide a glimpse into the social life of ordinary people.⁵³ It seems appropriate to delve into a world left unseen by the historiography on this topic in this manner because 'death has always haunted the living' and 'death cultivates the creation of stories'.⁵⁴ Indeed, the dead are always with us, and the end of a life does not necessarily equate to the end of a relationship.⁵⁵ Historians have long attempted to explain attitudes and

⁴⁹ Ibid, 1789-1790.

⁵⁰ Red McCombs and Mickey Herskowitz, *The Red Zone: Cars, Cows, and Coaches: The Life and Good Times of a Texas Dealmaker*, (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002).

⁵¹ Katherine Keats-Rohan, *A Short Manual to the Art of Prosopography*, (Oxford: Unit for Prosopographical Research 2007); Samantha-Jayne Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sport History Research: Biography, Collective Biography, and Prosopography', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1855-1882; Murray Phillips, Gary Osmond, and Stephen Townsend, 'A Bird's-Eye View of the Past: Digital History, Distant Reading and Sport History', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1725.

⁵² Janice Hume and Bonnie Bressers, 'Obituaries Online: New Connections with the Living-and the Dead', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 60, no. 3 (2009-2010): 255.

⁵³ Janice Hume and Bonnie Bressers, 'Obituaries Online: New Connections with the Living- and the Dead', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 60, no. 3 (2009-10): 261.

⁵⁴ William Wood and John Williamson, 'Historical Changes in the Meaning of Death in Western Tradition', in *Handbook of Death & Dying* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications 2003), 2.

⁵⁵ DeVries and Rutherford, 'Memorializing Loved Ones on the World Wide Web', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no.1 (2004): 6.

values surrounding death and its role in developing culture and communities.⁵⁶ In his cultural history on mortal remains, Lacquer contends that the dead matter because ‘the living need the dead far more than the dead need the living...the dead make social worlds’ and ‘the dead are alive everywhere’; they dwell in us individually and collectively, and our remembrances of them, imagined or authentic, help give meaning to our lives.⁵⁷ While Lacquer concentrates on caring for mortal remains, this thesis focuses on another task the dead leave for the living: the completion of an abbreviated story of their lives. These cyber obituaries resemble more a commemoration than a biography of the deceased because they are a component of grief management enabling ‘the living to socially frame death, to acknowledge a life lived and to move on with their own lives’.⁵⁸ Given this cultural function, they are useful sources in historical research despite some hagiographic tendencies. All 1,823 spurs fan obituaries were retrieved from the Legacy Memorial online archive, affirming its usefulness in academic research.⁵⁹

Web Cemeteries

Using prosopography as a starting point, web cemeteries are used to explore Spurs fandom further. Cyberspace provides more than just obituaries to analyse since they are, but one component of a larger entity known as the web cemetery. The web cemetery lives in the public domain and includes, but is not limited to, a cyber obituary, memorial service and visitation information, posted memories from the family in the form of text, photographs, videos, and a guestbook. While web cemeteries have only existed for the last quarter of a century, their social significance has grown. Over this period, the web cemetery has evolved from strictly being presented on funeral home and newspaper websites to having an influential presence on social media. For example, Facebook recently added the option for users to memorialise personal profiles of the deceased as a form of commemoration

⁵⁶ Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes Toward Death Over One Thousand Years* (New York: Vintage, 2008), 603 and 613; Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief, and Mourning* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 192-199.

⁵⁷ Thomas Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 1, 18 and 17.

⁵⁸ Joyce Williams, ‘Obituaries’, in *Handbook of Death & Dying* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications 2003), 3 and 12.

⁵⁹ Janice Hume and Bonnie Bressers, ‘Obituaries Online: New Connections with the Living-and the Dead’, *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 60, no. 3 (2009-2010): 267; Charles T. Clotfelter, ‘Die-Hard Fans and the Ivory Tower’s Ties that Bind*’, *Social Science Quarterly* 96, no. 2 (2015): 389 and 397; Legacy, ‘About Us’. Legacy, (accessed July 27, 2020), <https://www.legacy.com/about-us/>.

in what they officially deem memorialised accounts.

Scholars have used these sources in their research to understand the changing nature of bereavement. The internet certainly has its fair share of critics who contend the internet creates a life of social isolation and harms people's holistic health. However, some counter that products of cyberspace, specifically the web cemetery, actually reduce social isolation through their ability to enhance relationships between the dead and their survivors, and among the living.⁶⁰ Others claim that the web cemetery is a site of meaningful personal expression and community building, offering researchers new sources to learn more about modern ritualising, grief, and relationships.⁶¹ One scholar argues that web cemeteries are a postmodern counter to society's 'institutionalization of death', providing the 'opportunity for ritual and remembrance' in a broadly accessible public place.⁶² For the purposes of this thesis, these sources were selected to counteract the impersonal deficiencies of prosopography. Unlike the quantitative prosopographical dataset of cyber obituaries, web cemeteries allow for qualitative research that humanises the dead and facilitates the employment of other biographical methods such as collective and individual biography.

Thesis Structure and Contribution

Chapter one delves deeply into the historiography on five critical subject areas to inform the reader of relevant scholarly contributions, situate where this thesis fits into the conversation, and contextualises the specific topic and geographical area that will be explored. Each subsection deals with a particular element that facilitates the rigorous historical analysis of Spurs fandom. It prioritises introducing the complex and often ambiguous notions of the imagined community, identity, and fandom within and outside of sport. Subsequently, it funnels broad studies covering sport spectators to their place in the modern city and then introduces and justifies the specific case study.

⁶⁰ Pamela Roberts, 'The Living and the Dead: Community in the Virtual Cemetery', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (2004): 57.

⁶¹ Brian de Vries and Judy Rutherford, 'Memorializing Loved Ones on the World Wide Web', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (2004): 23-24.

⁶² *Ibid*, 24.

Chapter two explores the fifty-year history of the Spurs in San Antonio, utilising physical and digital archives, and argues that the Spurs and their supporters developed a relationship with each other, reciprocally influenced one another's identities, and cultivated a community. The chapter is broken into distinct eras, which include the franchise's start in Dallas, ABA tenure, its place in the ABA-NBA merger, and subsequent periods dominated by influential shareholders and players. This narrative highlights changes in team performance, attendance, franchise marketing, media coverage, supporter demographics and experiences and concludes with a reflection on the franchise's evolution and an evaluation of its role in the San Antonio community. The chapter also examines the dynamics surrounding North American sports franchises and San Antonio's limited experience with professional sport prior to the Spurs' arrival.

Chapter three identifies some historical antecedents and characteristics of Spurs fandom and establishes a 'universe to be studied' to allow for the humanisation of supporters in later chapters by using a prosopographical analysis of 1,823 cyber obituaries retrieved from the Greater San Antonio Area.⁶³ The prosopography demonstrates the existence of Spurs fandom, reveals how cyber obituaries reflect the cultural and societal values of San Antonians and offers a window into how fandom communities in sport are sustained over time. Its composition challenges some previous assumptions about the historically male-dominated realm of sports fandom by exhibiting how female Spurs supporters comprised a significant proportion of membership and exerted an influence within the fan base.⁶⁴ Prosopography allowed for the geographical allocation of fans around San Antonio, highlighting symptoms of the historically segregated city, issues of economic inequality, the appeal of sports fandom to military veterans, and the problem of racial and ethnic minority underrepresentation that remains ever-present in sports fan communities; it also identifies fans' ages, marital statuses, religious affiliations, educational attainments, and political attitudes.

⁶³ Lawrence Stone, 'Prosopography', *Historical Studies Today* 100, no. 1 (Winter 1971): 63, 66, 46; Samantha-Jayne Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sport History Research: Biography, Collective Biography, and Prosopography', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1868.

⁶⁴ Cheryl Cooky and Katelyn Esmonde, 'It's Supposed to be About the Love of the Game, not the Love of Aaron Rodgers' Eyes: Challenging the Exclusions of Women Sports Fans', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 32, no.1 (2015): 23; Nathan Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2018), 119-122.

Chapter four utilises a novel source previously unexplored by sport historians in the form of the web cemetery and presents them in a type of collective biography. Web cemeteries fight against the currents of oblivion by broadcasting the deceased's story and counteract the impersonal deficiencies of chapter three by presenting Spurs fans as complicated persons who were active agents in history. To date, historians of sport, or of any variety for that matter, have not investigated such sources to explore the lives of ordinary people and a fandom's historical antecedents and evolution. Therefore, this chapter makes a unique contribution to the historiography through its analysis of the web cemeteries of San Antonio Spurs fans to uncover what they reveal about sports fandom. It argues that these web cemeteries promote, produce, and prolong social relationships, aid survivors of the dead during their bereavement, and facilitate familial and multigenerational Spurs fandom. The chapter humanises fans as fully complicated persons using these intimate sources and challenges other historians to do the same when developing historical interpretations.

Chapter five illuminates the history of the Spurs' official supporters' group, the Baseline Bums. It traces their membership, mission, activities, and demographics, and how the group evolved and endured as a franchise staple using physical and digital archives, web cemeteries, and interviews. Starting with the group's conception and infancy, it chronicles specific eras of the organisation from 1973 to the present day. The chapter complements the biographical methods of previous chapters by using an individual biography and suggests that the Bums were a collection not only of individuals but of friends and families, as spouses, and nuclear and extended families often comprised a significant portion of members. It highlights how fans assert their agency by creating community, culture, and conflict, and how the Bums' values changed over time and cultivated a legacy.

The conclusion reiterates the thesis' aim and objectives and details how each objective was achieved. It reiterates the novel mixed-methods approach adopted and the variety of sources utilised that facilitated key discoveries and contributions to the historiography. These elements are synthesised to further prove the thesis' value and ends with a reflection on its approach and signposts where future research could head.

The contributions of numerous scholars in various fields inform the direction of this thesis, which addresses several apparent gaps in the existing literature. Until now, no historian of sport has exhaustively researched the Spurs in San Antonio to investigate the relationship between a franchise and the people it supposedly represents. Doing this reveals the essence of the human experience and sports fandom's role in it. Informed by the social historians of the last half century, this research investigates how and why people follow the San Antonio Spurs revealing the experiences and values of ordinary people. The thesis highlights how the franchise, and its supporters, construct communities, influence one another's identities and shape the image of San Antonio. Also, it elaborates on the historiography covering sports fans and underscores their agency in fostering meaning, belonging and community through fandom in a way previously unseen. Addressing issues beyond the borders of San Antonio, the thesis tackles the historical antecedents and evolution of a sports fandom, identifying and examining fan agency and autonomy, and supporters' influence upon a franchise, apart and in combination, in a totally unique way. Sport historians have rarely used death as a lens to examine identity formation, community building, fan culture, and the extremes of fandom. This thesis fills those historiographic holes by researching these topics utilising a novel methodology, modifying previous approaches and providing future historians with an innovative approach to apply to their respective topics.

Chapter 1- Uncovering Identities, Imaginings, and Communities in Modern Spectator Sports

Far removed from the amateurism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, professionalised spectator sports rapidly grew in popularity following World War II, and a recent poll showed sixty per cent of Americans claimed to be a fan of a particular team.¹ In considering the growing influence that professional sports teams have on personal identity and communities (imagined or real), this thesis explores the historical antecedents and evolution of a particular sports fandom to provide a new interpretation of the interplay between a place, a franchise, and its supporters. Before examining the specific case study at the heart of this thesis, it is necessary to delve deeply into the historiography on five critical subject areas to inform the reader of relevant scholarly contributions, situate where this thesis fits into the conversation, and contextualise the specific topic and geographical area that will be explored. Primarily concerned with the lives of ordinary people, in this case, spectators and supporters of the NBA's San Antonio Spurs, this thesis follows the trail blazed by social historians of the last half-century.² Each subsection deals with a particular element that will facilitate the rigorous historical analysis of Spurs fandom. This chapter is ordered in this manner because it prioritises introducing the complex notions of the imagined community, identity, and fandom within and outside of sport. Subsequently, it funnels broad studies covering sports spectators to their place in the modern city and then introduces and justifies the specific case study.

(Imagined) Communities of Fandom in Sport

Communities engineered through the power of human imagination have allured scholars for more than half a century in attempts to understand how they are generated and sustained. In the 1950s, Kaufman asserted that a community was not only defined by a space, place, collective goals and actions, but was an

¹ Jeffrey Jones, 'As Industry Grows, Percentage of U.S. Sports Fans Steady', *Gallup*, June 17, 2015.

² This list is not exhaustive but the following works were particularly influential to the approach adopted here: Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2003); Drew Gilpin Faust, 'Culture, Conflict, and Community: The Meaning of Power on an Ante-Bellum Plantation', *Journal of Social History* 14, no. 1 (Fall 1980): 83-97; Louis Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970); Louis Terkel, *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War Two* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

interactional and evolving being.³ In the 1980s, Anderson's seminal work complicated the notion of a community by introducing the 'imagined community'. He suggested that ecclesiastical devotion and the rise of print-capitalism aggrandised the secular nation-state in the late eighteenth century. This process initiated the socialising of millions into believing religions and nations were something inherent and worth dying for, despite the presence of inequality and exploitation.⁴ Anderson's focus on the macro-level community and his conceptual understanding of the nation as imagined is central to the discussion in this thesis. However, it is essential to acknowledge that what was is *imagined* and what was is *real* in terms of human communities is contested terrain. Thomas' assertion that when people 'define situations as real, they are real in their consequences' influenced Pahl who noted in the early 2000s that 'communities in the mind are more potent than any imposed notion...and may endure more powerfully...may have more power to act' than other types of supposed communities.⁵ For Pahl, families and geography are influential in developing a personal community, but more important is positive social interaction. A personal community of just under twenty people creates what he terms a 'micro-social world'. Through exploring personal biographies, he illustrates how these worlds were 'made manifest in a willing cooperation' of the mind.⁶ Consequently, the term imagined community is used here on the understanding that all communities may well be imagined beyond the personal community and that these inventions are not inherent or eternal; they change over time and simultaneously exploit and serve members.⁷

In 1990 Hobsbawm explored imagined communities in sport, elucidating how sporting spectacles became symbols of expression for nation-states and how a team made a country's authenticity more lucid to observers.⁸ Nearly three decades later, Harris extended this discussion with his work on the Welsh national rugby

³ Harold Kaufman, 'Toward an Interactional Conception of Community', *Social Forces* 38, no.1 (October 1959): 9.

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 2016), 36-37, 7.

⁵ William Thomas and Dorothy Thomas, *The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs*, (Boston: Pimpton Press, 1928), 594.

⁶ Ray Pahl, 'Are All Communities Communities of the Mind?', *The Sociological Review* 53, no. 4 (November 2005): 634, 623, 637.

⁷ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family,' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (August 3, 2020): 670-691.

⁸ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 142.

team who, for him, defined and expressed a notion of Welshness. Harris also believes that the professionalisation and commodification of sport led to the erosion of sporting communities.⁹ Numerous scholars explored this concept in the U.S., observing how sporting pastimes influenced American identity and suggest that sport as a national symbolism enterprise generates dehumanisation, militarism, community deformation, and dystopic realities.¹⁰

In a contemporary sociological analysis, Kalman-Lamb elucidates how imagined communities are no longer circumscribed to their religious or nationalist roots. Their presence in sports fandom shows how they, and our understandings of them, have changed over time. For Kalman-Lamb, the imagined community of fandom in sport in North America is a product of a neoliberal capitalist society that produces a life of isolation for workers, who yearn for unifying symbols and achieve moments of solidarity through sports spectacles that exploit athletes and fans alike. This neo-Marxist perspective defines these fandom communities as imagined because they are arranged around an exchange of capital and a type of fetishism on the part of the fan. This interpretation humanises athletes and elucidates how their sacrifices in playing through injury solidify fan imaginings to accept such a community as authentic. For Kalman-Lamb, the valorisation of injury and marketing of the sporting spectacle exposes the present business of sport as physically destructive to the athletic labourer and economically exploitative to fans. If sports fandom has become another significant manifestation of influential imagined communities, it is critical to explore how community members' 'shrunken imaginings' were developed in a historical and humanistic way. Communities of fandom may well be 'fabricated for

⁹ John Harris, 'Cool Cymru, Rugby Union and an Imagined Community', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 27, no. 3/4 (May 2007): 154, 157.

¹⁰ Nathan Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport*, (Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2018), 119-122; Jean-Marie Brohm, *Sport, a Prison of Measured Time: Essays*, (London: Ink Links Ltd., 1989), 19; Roger Penn and Damon Berridge, 'Football and the Military in Contemporary Britain: An Exploration of Invisible Nationalism', *Armed Forces & Society* 44, no. 1 (2016): 128, 129, 132, 134; Michael L. Butterworth and Stormi D. Moskal, 'American Football, Flags, and 'Fun': The Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl and the Rhetorical Production of Militarism', *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2, no. 4 (November 6, 2009): 19; Michael L. Butterworth, 'Militarism and Memorializing at the Pro Football Hall of Fame', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (2012): 241, 255; Alan G. Ingham and Mary G. McDonald, 'Sport and Communities/Communitas', 2003, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Culture*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox, et al. (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2003), 24, 27-28; Ralph C. Wilcox et al., eds., *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Cultures* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 8-11; David L. Andrews, Jacob Bustad, and Samuel Clevenger, 'National Sporting Pastimes, Spectacles of Sporting Otherness and American Imaginings, 1880-1920', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, no. 1-2 (2014): 225.

the purpose of producing capital', but it appears the relationship between clubs and their supporters is more complicated, which is why this study allows influences to emerge from historical research rather than adhering to a specific sociological, anthropological, or psychoanalytical perspective.¹¹

Prior to Kalman-Lamb, researchers throughout the twentieth century had suggested that members of an array of fandoms, from art, music, television, and sports, were deluded sycophants. They claimed that fan culture was immersed in fetishism, fantasy, and alienation.¹² Given that many of these observations were motivated by theoretical or disciplinary positioning, Duffett argues that his predecessors' interpretations failed to observe the full complexity of fandoms and their composite personas. Duffett rejects the notion that fans became a part of their respective groups solely to fill personal or social inadequacies or to escape the confines of an oppressive political system. Instead, he highlights fandom origins and how fan agency and communities contribute to people's well-being.¹³ Contemporaries of Duffett, such as Jenkins, Hills, and Cavicchi, reach similar conclusions and argue that explicit anti-fandom contributes to the inaccurate, incomplete, and unfair representations of fans and fandom in the historiography.¹⁴ Other researchers explored previously unresearched fandoms and provided innovative ways to study them.¹⁵ However, sports fandom appears categorically distinct from others related

¹¹ Nathan Kalman-Lamb, 'Imagined Communities of Fandom: Sport, Spectatorship, Meaning and Alienation in Late Capitalism', *Sport in Society* (2020): 932-934; Nathan Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport* (Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2018), 164-165; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

¹² Modern examples on sport can be found in: Nathan Kalman-Lamb, 'Imagined Communities of Fandom: Sport, Spectatorship, Meaning and Alienation in Late Capitalism', *Sport in Society* (2020): 922-936; Nathan Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport* (Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2018). Earlier examples are often associated with the Frankfurt School. Notable scholars include Adorno, Fromm, and Benjamin who provided critical theories on culture throughout twentieth century. While the works of the noted sociological and philosophical theorists reached their apex from the 1930s to the 1960s their influence spans to contemporary thinkers as well.

¹³ Mark Duffett, *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 20-23.

¹⁴ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013); Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002); Daniel Cavicchi, *Tramps like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁵ Mark Duffett, *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); Michael Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2-3; Kathryn Fuller-Seeley, 'Archaeologies of Fandom: Using Historical Methods to Explore Fan Cultures of the Past' in Melissa A. Click and Suzanne Scott, *Routledge Companion to Media Fandom* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 27-35; Daniel Cavicchi, 'Foundational Discourses of Fandom' in Paul Booth, *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 27-46.

to folk, popular, and high culture. Duffett acknowledges sports fandom's pervasive tribalism, militarism, and male-hegemonic tendencies. Duffett's strategic omission of sports with the purpose of combatting anti-fandom left a historiographical gap that this thesis fills. Similar to the individualised person, fandoms are complicated but essentially exhibit some of Kaufman's community characteristics, so his interpretation that communities exist as living, breathing, growing and decaying entities was applied specifically to Spurs fandom here.¹⁶

Despite some positive interpretations of fandom, numerous contemporary sport-specific studies have reinforced Kalman-Lamb's negative assertions and illustrate how the sports industry creates 'irrational' adoration for athletes and teams.¹⁷ While valuable, this thesis expands, modifies, and complicates the discourse by utilising a historical analysis. Some researchers have failed to acknowledge that all communities historically, at any level and of any kind, were temporal and conditional. Also, previous work has not humanised fans within their personalised social worlds recognising how they often operate beyond orchestrated media and capitalist artifices to contribute in different and meaningful ways to the generation and sustainment of communities. For example, Ingham and McDonald suggest that utopian communities involve trust and obligation and determined that sports franchises in contemporary North America did not meet these criteria because of their provisional natures.¹⁸ Additionally, Kalman-Lamb contends that sports fandoms are not authentic communities because they did not share a collective goal, did not operate through collective action, and have no intimate or first-hand contact with most other members. Conversely, one could argue that supporters in the stands have a collective goal (for the home team to win), work towards it (cheered and jeered), and influence player performance and match outcomes. In the 1970s, Schwartz and Barsky illustrated how supporters affected game results and were

¹⁶ Harold Kaufman, 'Toward an Interactional Conception of Community', *Social Forces* 38, no.1 (1959): 9; Mark Duffett, *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁷ K. Damon Aiken, Richard M. Campbell, and Eric C. Koch, 'Exploring the Relationship Between Team (as brand) Personality and Geographic Personality: Linking Consumer Perceptions of Sports Teams and Cities', *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* 15, no. 1 (2013): 2-14; Gene Burd, 'Mediated Sports, Mayors, and the Marketed Metropolis', 2003, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Cultures*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 35-64; Erin Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 203.

¹⁸ Alan G. Ingham and Mary G. McDonald, 'Sport and Communities/Communitas', 2003, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Culture*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox, et al. (Albany: State University of New York, 2003), 28.

especially impactful with indoor sports such as basketball, showing evidence of the Home Court Advantage (HCA).¹⁹ In 1985, Mizruchi suggested five factors that contributed to a stronger HCA using an analysis of several teams in the NBA.²⁰ Additionally, for nearly a century, some fans had supported athlete activism in order to create a more equitable society. The collective actions of athletes such as Jim Brown, Muhammad Ali, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Vinicius Junior and their supporters highlight the significant role sport plays in generating social change. Therefore, the terms community and imagined community seem appropriate when discussing a sports fandom, which is a living, breathing, interactional thing. In one instance, it is inauthentic, based solely on economic exchange in a capitalist system. In another, it appears as a genuine collective comprised of numerous personal communities that bond and aim to achieve goals such as determining the outcomes of games, charitable donations, or even social justice reforms.

Another vital element to consider when examining sports fandom is fan agency and this research elaborates on this seemingly limited discussion. Cottingham concludes that professional sports in the U.S. facilitate more than just economic exchange due to the meaningful rituals such as weddings and funerals fans produced themed around favourite sports teams.²¹ Also, sport historians have highlighted how Spanish football supporters publicly dissented against the national government and how fandoms can sometimes function as genuine collectives.²² By focusing on a largely unresearched fan and franchise relationship, this thesis suggests that these supporters expressed agency using their sports fandom for their own purposes, not least in producing a collective identity through the generation of an imagined community.

Sport's Role in the Development of Identity

As international tensions decreased following the end of the Cold War, critiques of

¹⁹ Barry Schwartz and Stephen Barsky, 'The Home Advantage', *Social Forces* 55, no. 3 (March 1977): 657-658.

²⁰ Mark Mizruchi, 'Local Sports Teams and Celebration of Community: A Comparative Analysis of the Home Advantage', *The Sociological Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 507.

²¹ Marci D. Cottingham, 'Interaction Ritual Theory and Sports Fans: Emotion, Symbols, and Solidarity', *Sociology of Sport* 29 (2012): 181, 179.

²² Adam Winkel, 'National Dissonance: The Copa del Rey Soccer Final as a Site of Political Performance', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 1-2 (February 2020): 149. Matthew Gill, 'Communicating Organizational History to Sports Fans' in *Sports Fans, Identity, and Socialization: Exploring the Fandemonium*, ed. A. C. Earnhardt, et al. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012): 151.

the modern nation revealed the critical role sports had played in developing national pride and identity. Sport historians from the 1990s onward considered this relationship, with Cronin focusing on Ireland, Martin on Italy, and Keys on the U.S., Soviet Union, and Germany.²³ More recently, Foot explored sport's role in developing national identity when examining the framing of media narratives during and following Italy's 1982 World Cup triumph. Foot agrees with Hobsbawm's suggestion that international sporting events 'can make a nation itself seem real' but asserted that these happenings were fleeting and the nation itself was imagined, as Anderson had argued almost four decades earlier. Sporting spectacles such as the World Cup provided what Foot and Anderson call an 'emotional legitimacy' that facilitates feelings of nostalgia, which were powerful agents in national memory and mythmaking. Thus, triumphs and defeats in international competitions became a part of the nation's narrative, and the significance of sport within it grew.²⁴ Burd agrees that mass media used sport to provide a locality with pride while mediated messages linked together the team and the place in the minds of insiders and outsiders.²⁵ Unapologetically, Foot argues that this is all a façade. The happenings on the pitch had no bearing on the strength or longevity of the nation, but the 'emotional legitimacy' tied to how sporting triumphs were framed in the media influenced citizens and solidified their imaginings of and belongings to the nation-state. Foot emphasises that few scholars had researched the historical antecedents of an imagined community in sport and its impact on identity, an omission redressed in this thesis, which, did not focus on international or national events, but explores a city and a team, an emerging trend in recent historical research.

The significance of sport in developing identities has a rich and diverse lineage in historical scholarship, with works elaborating on sport's influence on nation-states

²³ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Mike Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic Games, Soccer, and Irish Identity since 1870* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999); Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The National Game under Mussolini* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Barbara Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); John Foot, 'How Italian Football Creates Italians: The 1982 World Cup, the 'Pertini Myth' and Italian National Identity', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33, no. 3 (2016): 341-358; Daniel Nathan, *Rooting for the Home Team: Sport, Community, and Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); John Hughson, Clive Palmer, and Fiona Skillen, *The Role of Sports in the Formation of Personal Identities: Studies in Community Loyalties* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012).

²⁴ John Foot, 'How Italian Football Creates Italians: The 1982 World Cup, the 'Pertini Myth' and Italian National Identity', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33, no. 3 (2016): 1,4-5.

²⁵ Gene Burd, 'Mediated Sports, Mayors, and the Marketed Metropolis', 2003, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Cultures*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 33-43.

throughout the twentieth century.²⁶ Importantly, these studies facilitated subsequent analyses at the sub-national level that considered how sports affected community building, identity formation, and local pride. In his research on twentieth-century Spanish clubs, McFarland suggests that teams united local communities and represented them nationally. This competitive outlet provided a 'longstanding institution of local pride' in a fractured country. Although football predominately contributed to the local community's place in the regional and national consciousness, basketball also provided much smaller towns with less influence and power one.²⁷ In a similar vein, Hochstetler identifies how a collegiate American football team provided a region's people with a distraction from economic uncertainty and a 'deep sense of regional identity' throughout the twentieth century. For Hochstetler, 'communal identity' was 'forged through football', and the farmers of the American heartland lived vicariously through their team in a time of collective difficulties.²⁸

Stokvis addresses how sport impacted a city in the Netherlands when he disagreed with pundits who claimed Ajax Amsterdam had lost its identity. He posits that the club, like everything else, has changed over time and that, although born in an era of amateurism, Ajax has since been professionalised. Stokvis examines the diversification and globalisation of the squad on the pitch and the consequent rhetoric that developed, much of which suggests that the players were not representative of the locality because of their diverse origins and the lack of local talent. For Stokvis, regardless of the changing player demographics, the team still represents the locality given that the stadium in which they play also has a rich history and had rooted itself in the community. Stokvis disagrees with the sentiment that modern football clubs like Ajax have lost touch with local identities due to professionalisation. Instead, he suggests they have taken on a new form and argues that attempts to discredit the authenticity of a club and its loyalty to its locality are

²⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The National Game under Mussolini* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Barbara Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Guttman, *Sports Spectators*, 1986.

²⁷ Andrew McFarland, 'A Team of Our Own: The Role of Local and Regional Identities in Spanish Sport', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 1-2, (2020): 2, 13 and 18.

²⁸ Douglas Hochstetler, 'America Needs Farmers': Communal Identity, the University of Iowa Football Team and the Farm Crisis of the 1980s', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 27:8 (2010): 1361-1362 and 1373; Parts of this appeared in David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993', *Journal of Sport History* 49, no 1. (2022): 37-52.

something of a 'nostalgic reaction' of an older generation defending the way things once were, which 'seems to be the predominant function of the rhetoric of identity'. In this respect, Stokvis demonstrates sport's role in identity formation and possible fractures within a supporter community. In this case, older Ajax supporters felt more represented by the club's past than present and therefore disassociated themselves from it in its modern form as a type of defence of a bygone era.²⁹

The scholarship covering sport's role in local identities expanded in the early twenty-first century. Rookwood's coverage of Liverpool Football Club fandom exhibits the competing notions of Britishness and how fan agency interplayed with locals' ambitions to distinguish themselves from the rest of Britain.³⁰ Nathan's edited collection focuses solely on the U.S., observing fandoms of professional sports franchises such as the Boston Red Sox, Los Angeles Dodgers, and Baltimore Colts.³¹ However, what is seemingly in short supply is any elaboration on the agency and autonomy that supporters held over the teams they backed, and this critical omission is one of the stimuli for this thesis. A focus on these factors can illustrate how supporters became ambassadors of their regions in the same way as players and teams.³²

The case study that provides the foundation for this thesis is the Spurs basketball franchise of the NBA, which has arguably increased the nation's awareness of San Antonio, the place and its people over the last half-century. Over that period, the team had attempted to incorporate elements of the city into their branding, and Heere and James discuss how North American sports teams turned to tactics such as these to recruit local support. They highlight two concepts, external group identities and team identities, showing how sports marketers target the external group identities of a locality and linked them to that of the team.³³ This popular

²⁹ Ruud Stokvis, 'Ajax isn't Ajax Anymore: on Power, Rhetoric, and Identity', *Soccer & Society* 9, no. 4 (2008): 499, 504, 504.

³⁰ Joel Rookwood, 'We're Not English, We Are Scouse!' Examining Civic Loyalty and Collective Fan Identities at Liverpool Football Club', eds. Hughson, *The Role of Sports*, 96.

³¹ Daniel Nathan, *Rooting for the Home Team: Sport, Community, and Identity*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

³² Andrew McFarland, 'A Team of Our Own: The Role of Local and Regional Identities in Spanish Sport', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, (2020): 2, 13, 18; Parts of this appeared in David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993', *Journal of Sport History* 49, no 1. 2022): 37-52.

³³ Bob Heere and Jeffrey D. James, 'Sports Teams and Their Communities: Examining the Influence of External Group Identities on Team Identity', *Journal of Sport Management* 21 (2007): 331-332.

practice for sports marketers influences the Spurs in San Antonio, as they regularly used the city's military history and Hispanic heritage to guide their marketing decisions and the signing and nicknaming of players. More recently, Aiken, Campbell, and Koch suggest that American sports teams strategically adopt the personality of their respective municipality, with locals and outsiders generally observing the two have shared characteristics.³⁴ However, Brawley modifies this interpretation by showing how a locality adopts the identity of the sports team which represents them. It is especially present where teams perform exceptionally well, after which supporters, civic leaders, and locals generally represent themselves to the outside world using the prestige built by the club.³⁵ Similarly, when discussing a postmodernist interpretation of identity, Hughson surmises that identity statuses constantly shift and are 'unresolved' at all levels, from individual to societal.³⁶ Tarver's work supports this perspective and concentrates on those often excluded in discussions about sport's role in identity formation. Examining those on the margins, Tarver situates females within fan communities and discovered that over recent years they had joined sports fan groups that had historically excluded them. It was in these recent shifting demographics that Tarver found hope. She describes sports as 'the most masculinised cultural arena' in the contemporary U.S. but highlights how fans have fought against the historic ills of violence, toxic masculinity, racism, exploitation, and heterosexism, optimistically suggesting the 'we' of sports fandoms may not be too far off after all.³⁷ This thesis contributes to the limited research on women in sports fandoms and focuses on their motivations to join groups who previously marginalised them. It also explores how these changing demographics affected the identities of individuals, a supporters' group, and the franchise, as the pendulum of borrowed identity from team to city swung back and forth over time.

³⁴ K. Damon Aiken, Richard M. Campbell, and Eric C. Koch, 'Exploring the Relationship Between Team (as brand) Personality and Geographic Personality: Linking Consumer Perceptions of Sports Teams and Cities', *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* 15, no. 1 (2013): 8.

³⁵ Sean Brawley, "Can You Imagine the Shire Without the Sharks!?: Building the Community Capital of the Cronulla-Sutherland Rugby League Club- from 1967 to the Eve of Super League in 1996", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 3 (2012): 493; K. Damon Aiken, Richard M. Campbell, and Eric C. Koch, 'Exploring the Relationship Between Team (as brand) Personality and Geographic Personality: Linking Consumer Perceptions of Sports Teams and Cities', *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* 15, no. 1 (2013): 15.

³⁶ John Hughson, Clive Palmer, and Fiona Skillen, *The Role of Sports in the Formation of Personal Identities: Studies in Community Loyalties* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), 4.

³⁷ Erin Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 203.

Sport Spectators and Supporters

Sporting spectacles have allured people for countless reasons. Some are drawn to sport due to its physical culture, the drive to push and test the physical limits of the body, finding pleasure in witnessing something performed with skill, tenacity, and talent that seems physically improbable. Others have found themselves caught up in the personal stories of adversity and triumph. Family, geography, and marketing undoubtedly influence those who spectate as does previous sporting participation. These provide but a few of the numerous reasons people follow sports, and they continue to be a topic of debate.

In the 1980s, Guttman explored sport spectatorship over two millennia. His wide-sweeping survey gave insight into the history and psychology of spectator motivations and sport's role in society. He challenges the neo-Marxist perspective on sports, rejecting the notion that they only served as a 'safety valve' for capitalism and a distraction from politics. For Guttman, this interpretation demeans the significant roles that sports play in various societies, from antiquity to modern communist states.³⁸ Contemporaneously, Lever contended that following local Brazilian football clubs assist in creating a collective identity for supporters.³⁹ In a less optimistic rendering, Alt observed that sport has changed from a practice of ritual to one of mass consumption. While sport remains an important part of human culture, he was dismayed at the increased levels of commercialisation and commodification. For Alt, an altruistic notion of sport may have existed previously, but in the modern era, capital drives the enterprise and destroys public traditions causing an older generation of supporters to lament the loss of playing the game as an end in itself.⁴⁰ Atkinson supports Alt's conclusions in his observations of modern spectators and ticket scalpers.⁴¹ Fans were thus priced out of the stadium, and those who once sold match tickets to fans were unemployed.⁴²

³⁸ Allen Guttman, *Sports Spectators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 158; Allen Guttman, 'Sports Spectators from Antiquity to the Renaissance', *Journal of Sport History* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 5-6.

³⁹ Janet Lever, *Soccer Madness: Brazil's Passion for the World's Most Popular Sport* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 14.

⁴⁰ John Alt, 'Sport and Cultural Reification: From Ritual to Mass Consumption', *Theory, Cultural & Society* 1, no. 3 (1983): 105.

⁴¹ A ticket scalper is an individual who is not associated with a professional organisation who buys tickets for sporting events and resells them at inflationary levels.

⁴² Michael F. Atkinson, 'Rounders or Robin Hoods? Questioning the Role of the Ticket Scalper As Entertainment Outlaw or Free Market Capitalist', 2015, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Culture*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015), 112.

Over thirty years after Guttman, Lever, and Alt addressed the changing dynamics of sport spectators, Gerke challenged the neo-Marxist stance on modern supporters and posits that they are active agents in the development of their respective fandom subcultures in his ethnography of soccer supporters in contemporary North America. While this interpretation empowers supporters, Gerke openly acknowledges the limited power these fans possess as they often dissented from, but eventually accepted, team and league decisions beyond their control.⁴³ Cottingham recognises that hooliganism, alcohol, violence, and commercialisation exist in the sporting world but challenges Alt's conclusion on the disappearance of ritual in sport, suggesting that closer observations of supporters' emotions and actions unveil group solidarity and sport rituals as a serious consequential phenomenon. While the commodification of sport presents an increasing barrier to consumption, there are various means beyond in-person attendance to watch. More importantly, within those non-stadium spaces, spectators share an experience and bond with others.⁴⁴

As researchers began observing supporters more closely, various typologies were created. Clotfelter utilises the term 'die-hard fan' to describe those he encountered in his analysis of obituaries,⁴⁵ while Giulianotti utilises a fluid spectrum matrix to classify fans. Giulianotti's uses four identity classifications and complicates this taxonomy using a hot/cool dichotomy to address the modern football viewer's manoeuvrability in the hypercommodification age.⁴⁶ His taxonomy suggests that levels of fandom are not static and an individual's loyalty to a particular club changes over time. While Giulianotti investigates fandom fluctuations, Koch and Wann explore fandom origins suggesting that on the one hand, most people's sports fandom derive from 'relationship-based origins', which revolve around a desire to 'maintain a connection with others', such as when a son develops an affinity for basketball due to his father's passion for the game. On the other hand, they perceive that a fan's specific team identification is linked with 'recognition-based origins',

⁴³ Markus Gerke, 'Supporters, not Consumers.' Grassroots Supporters' Culture and Sports Entertainment in the US', *Sport in Society* no. 21:6 (April 2017): 932, 933 and 942.

⁴⁴ Marci D. Cottingham, 'Interaction Ritual Theory and Sports Fans: Emotion, Symbols, and Solidarity', *Sociology of Sport* 29 (2012): 182, 179.

⁴⁵ Charles T. Clotfelter, 'Die-Hard Fans and the Ivory Tower's Ties that Bind*', *Social Science Quarterly* 96, no. 2 (June 2015): 397.

⁴⁶ Richard Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs: A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football', *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 26, no. 1 (February 2002): 25-46.

which involves wanting to be perceived as a particular type of fan.⁴⁷ At some point in their lives, a person became a sports fan and develops a specific team identification that is influenced by location, and team personality.⁴⁸

Another significant influence on fandom has been the evolution of the internet. Some scholars have investigated cyberspace to observe imagined communities of fandom in sport and note how fan habits, attitudes, and identities are constantly adapting to a changing sporting world. Using Wikipedia, Ferriter suggests that this popular information platform exhibits the elements of an imagined community online and provides fans with a socially constructed space to celebrate sporting symbols, myths, and events. This transition from a physical place to a socially imagined space highlights the impersonal realities of sports fandom in the modern era. Where once the stadium was the place for fans to rendezvous and mingle, now they gather on the internet. Arguably, an online environment could be more accepting and inclusive. After all, individuals can remain anonymous and it is undoubtedly less costly than a ticket to a match. However, Wikipedia is not the only hub where these online fan communities exist. They have created numerous fanzines of teams, blogs, and discussion boards and have invaded and proliferated on all social media platforms. Once there, fans share and engage with one another over their interpretations of events. In this type of relationship, they are isolated physically but connected through modern technology in a way no generation has been previously.⁴⁹ Other scholars draw similar conclusions regarding the growing influence of social media platforms to online sporting spectator communities suggesting they are essential to their sustainability. These platforms also offer current researchers a new array of sources when examining fandoms of various types.⁵⁰

The transition from physical space to a 'socially imagined space' online exhibits the changing nature of these fan communities. Historically, sports fandoms had existed

⁴⁷ Katrina Koch and Daniel L. Wann, 'Team Identification and Sport Fandom: Gender Differences in Relationship-Based and Recognition-Based Perceived Antecedents', *Journal of Sport Behavior* 39, no. 3 (2016): 278.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 278-279, 295.

⁴⁹ Meghan M. Ferriter, "Arguably the Greatest": Sport Fans and Communities at Work on Wikipedia', *Sociology of Sport* 26 (2009): 131-132.

⁵⁰ Jimmy Sanderson and Kelly Gramlich, "You Go Girl!": Twitter and Conversations About Sport Culture and Gender', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 33 no. 2 (2014): 113, 119-120.

as male hegemonic power structures.⁵¹ Recent discussions of gendered sports fandom complicate the historiography by looking beyond the male-female binary, examining women more closely using Foucauldian theory, and making recommendations on how to create more inclusive sports fan communities.⁵² This thesis considers this research and contributes to the debate regarding whether or not sports fandom became more inclusive to historically ostracised members of society by addressing various racial, ethnic, and gender categories, as well as older persons, the disabled, and children within the history of Spurs fandom. While in recent years there has been more focus on these categories with respect to athletes, supporters of this kind had largely been overlooked.⁵³ While this thesis only partially elaborates on these specific fans, it encourages future researchers to address this literature gap further. Undeniably, past supporters' groups have been exclusionary, racist, violent, and often representative of some of humanity's worse impulses. Historically hooliganism, tribalism, and even 'death and destruction' have been by-products of the world of sport because of its capacity for creating division.⁵⁴ However, Inoue, Wann, Lock, and Sato suggest that older adults' sports fandom increases their subjective well-being,⁵⁵ a study that is particularly relevant to this thesis given that many fans followed the Spurs later in life.

As with many cultural phenomena, some positives and negatives accompany sports fandom. Luther and Davidson plead with modern sports fans to be more critical of the content they consumed to challenge a sports industry that perpetually abuses

⁵¹ Katelyn Esmonde, Cheryl Cooky, and David L. Andrews, 'It's Supposed to be About the Love of the Game, Not the Love of Aaron Rodgers' Eyes': Challenging the Exclusions of Women Sports Fans', *Sociology of Sport* 32, no. 1 (2015): 23, 40–1; Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct*, 119–122.

⁵² Borer, 'Negotiating the Symbols of Gendered Sports Fandom', 1–4; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House US, 1978), 242, 295; Esmonde, Cooky, and Andrews, 'It's Supposed to be About the Love of the Game', 22, 42.

⁵³ Yuhei Inoue et al., 'Enhancing Older Adults' Sense of Belonging and Subjective Well-Being Through Sport Game Attendance, Team Identification, and Emotional Support', *Journal of Aging and Health* 32 no. 7-8 (2019): 530-542; Wann et al., 'Applying the Team Identification- Social Psychological Health Model to older sport fans', *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 74 no. 4 (2011): 303-315; Daniel Cheng-Hao Hunag, 'The lost bodies in sports, Taiwan: The history of sports for individuals with physical disabilities between 1945 and 2007', PhD Thesis, (Loughborough University, 2019); Kris Southby, 'Supporting the Fans: Learning-Disability, Football Fandom and Social Exclusion', PhD Thesis, (Durham University, 2013).

⁵⁴ Franklin Foer, *How Soccer Explains the World: An Unlikely Theory of Globalization* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2004), 197.

⁵⁵ Yuhei Inoue et al., 'Enhancing Older Adults' Sense of Belonging and Subjective Well-Being Through Sport Game Attendance, Team Identification, and Emotional Support', *Journal of Aging and Health* 32 no. 7-8 (2019): 530.

athletes and exploits fans, a point that many scholars stress in their research.⁵⁶ However, for fans and athletes to reform the sports world, they need lessons and models for emulation from the past. Examples of athletes who dissented and influenced their respective generations through their talent and activism must be reviewed on the understanding that sports were always political.⁵⁷ Fans must also acknowledge the complicated workings of public agreements and deceiving private collusions. Essentially, if a supporter does not feel conflicted, they are not thinking critically. Sports and their fandoms are a dialectical process that simultaneously reflects and challenges socio-political norms and one of the aims of this thesis is to provide an historical context for that debate.

Sport in the City

Over the twentieth century, sports in the U.S. were professionalised and commodified. Cities often housed sports teams and helped professional leagues grow in influence and prestige. In his study of the three largest sports leagues in North America: the NFL, MLB, and NBA, Dinces concludes that stadium gentrification, inflated ticket prices, and the exorbitant profits made by team owners illustrate how the business of sport operates within a 'fundamentally broken economic system', which he labels the 'New Gilded Age' of the late twentieth century.⁵⁸ For Dinces, this era, like its predecessor of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, is defined by economic inequality.⁵⁹ He researched over eighty per cent of the active facilities in the leagues and discovered that the working class were priced out of stadium experiences as early as the 1950s with the expansion of season ticket packages. As the twentieth century progressed, urban gentrification and post-war consumption increased, influencing how and where spectators watched.⁶⁰ Dinces also explains how game admission in major cities such as New

⁵⁶ Jessica Luther and Kavitha Davidson, *Loving Sports When They Don't Love You Back: Dilemmas of the Modern Fan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), 6-7; Craig Calcaterra, *Rethinking Fandom: How to Beat the Sports Industrial Complex at Its Own Game* (Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2022).

⁵⁷ Dave Zirin, *People's History of Sports in the United States: 250 Years of Politics, Protest, People and Play* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2008); Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2003).

⁵⁸ Sean Dinces, *Bulls Markets: Chicago's Basketball Business and the New Inequality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 225.

⁵⁹ Sean Dinces, 'The Attrition of the Common Fan', *Social Science History* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 360.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 339.

York and Los Angeles were the costliest.⁶¹

In his subsequent analysis of the Chicago Bulls of the NBA, Dinces concludes that, despite the achievements of the team, the global icon that became Michael Jordan, and the exponentially increasing wealth of ownership, the success of the Bulls was to the detriment of ordinary Chicagoans. While the team provided the city and their followers with excitement and championships, any sense of collective civic identity was fleeting. Summarily, the franchise latched onto the city of Chicago as a type of parasite. The franchise seized money from fans and civic accounts for new stadia and infrastructure that could have been allocated to improve urban life and address the pressing social problems plaguing the city.⁶² The significance of this research cannot be understated, given that its implications went beyond Chicago, since the Bulls' model was emulated by many professional sports franchises throughout North America and then spread globally. Ingham and McDonald also highlight how public funds often went to stadia and other franchise infrastructure before tackling a community's ills. They refuse to call any relationship between a city and a franchise an actual community due to the perverse nature of a "partnership" that is predicated on city managers, elected officials, journalists, and architects concealing their true motivations from the public and, in turn, falsely representing a municipality.⁶³

All these elements, in combination, are what Wilcox, Andrews, Pitter, and Irwin warn of in their edited collection on urban sport culture in North America. Authors highlight that the inequities within the sports business appear to be growing and have created some of what Wilcox et al. deem 'sporting dystopias'.⁶⁴ Several contributions counter claims that sports teams provide people and places with civic spirit, municipal rallying points, collective identity, civic betterment, civic esteem, shared urban identity, and local ties. Mathy addresses the issue of homelessness and the role that major sporting events had on host cities.⁶⁵ Admittedly, Spurs games do not

⁶¹ Ibid, 346.

⁶² Sean Dinces, *Bulls Markets: Chicago's Basketball Business and the New Inequality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 225.

⁶³ Alan G. Ingham and Mary G. McDonald, 'Sport and Communities/Communitas', 2003, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Culture*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox, et al. (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2003), 23-24.

⁶⁴ Ralph C. Wilcox et al., eds., *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Cultures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 8-11.

⁶⁵ Robin M. Mathy, 'No Christmas Dinner: The Effect of Major Sporting Events on Local Homelessness', 2003, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Makings and Meaning of Urban Sport Culture*, ed.

have the draw of events such as the Olympics or Super Bowl, but the franchise's current home venue sits in an impoverished and racially segregated area of the city, which has a large, unhoused population that has been occasionally targeted and removed.⁶⁶

In another contribution, Burd discusses the media's role in fabricating a world for the fan in which the city and the team fused. Implicating sportswriters, elected officials, sports marketers, and architects. Burd suggests that they create a false sense of belonging. In a utopic dream, sports teams represent a place and reflect the life, culture, attitudes, and values of the region's people. They are meant to provide outsiders with glimpses of the place and its residents while affording insiders recognition and prestige. However, Burd believes that this is perhaps a projected illusion strategically concocted by those who were out to profit from local and distant consumers who do not know any better.⁶⁷ Perhaps Johnson states this most effectively, 'In sum, although sports franchises can contribute social and economic benefits to a city, they can also be costly. Currently, sports entrepreneurs are at an advantage in negotiating with city officials because of their ability to relocate a scarce commodity'.⁶⁸ Therefore, this thesis explores how and why Spurs ownership has not transplanted the team for fifty years. San Antonio's high poverty rate and small television market provide a suboptimal setting for sports entrepreneurs.⁶⁹ Given that other cities could have potentially generated more revenue for Spurs' ownership, it appears there were other motivations that halted a franchise relocation.

Ralph C. Wilcox (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 92; Livia Gershon, 'How Olympics Host Cities Hide Their Homeless', *JSTOR Daily*, July 8, 2016, accessed April 26, 2021, <https://daily.jstor.org/how-olympics-host-cities-hide-their-homeless/>.

⁶⁶ Emilie Eaton and Liz Hardaway, 'City Crews Remove Homeless Tent Camp Near Downtown San Antonio, Displacing Dozens of People', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 3, 2021; Maria Luisa Cesar, 'Obama Makes S.A. 'Promise Zone' Official', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 9, 2014; Joshua Fechter, 'Map: Median Household Income in Bexar County by ZIP Code', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 21, 2015.

⁶⁷ Gene Burd, 'Mediated Sports, Mayors, and the Marketed Metropolis', 2003, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Cultures*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 35-64.

⁶⁸ Arthur T. Johnson, 'Municipal Administration and the Sports Franchise Relocation Issue', *Public Administration Review* 43, no. 6 (November/December 1983): 527.

⁶⁹ Camille Phillips, 'San Antonio Poverty Rate Tops List of Large Metro Areas', *Texas Public Radio*, September 26, 2019; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

Scholars of urban spaces highlight the benefits that recreational sports provide a community, but rarely cite the positives of the professional variety.⁷⁰ However, Slowikowski demonstrates the potentially positive influence professional sports can have on a city. She analysed urban statues from ancient Rome to contemporary Chicago. At the time, Chicago's most popular tourist attraction was Michael Jordan's statue. For Slowikowski, statues provide a liminal space for the viewer, and she contends that they did not form but deform the observer's thoughts. This deformation allows them to explore a 'third space' of consciousness where they construct and attach their meanings to the statue. Thus, these statues are not lifeless for Slowikowski; they are alive, allowing observers the opportunity to 'dehistoricise, create, and prolong liminality'.⁷¹ There is a sense of escapism associated with these monuments, and they alter and perpetuate false and accurate narratives. Although this work did not necessarily proclaim or deny the existence of an urban sporting dystopia, it illustrates how sports and those who play them mean different things to people and how those meanings, once made manifest in one's mind, are powerful influences on how one perceives their city and themselves. While the franchise has not yet honoured Spurs players with statues, San Antonians have created player and team tributes in various forms that have included, but are not limited to, obituaries, murals, and body art. One researcher discusses how football clubs are expressions of the local community and explains that tattoos, while often narcissistic, grew in importance in a fast-paced modernised urban society filled with strangers. Club-specific tattoos allow individuals to express themselves passively and share a collective, albeit sometimes tribal, identity.⁷² These works of art, along with the other forms of commemoration, produce the liminality Slowikowski describes, further demonstrating the influence professional sport has on city residents.

In a more explicitly positive analysis of sport in the city, Swindell and Rosentraub conclude that supporters, players, and owners benefit from the presence of professional sports teams in American cities, although locals who do not follow the

⁷⁰ Brian Wilson and Phil White, 'Youth Culture in a Recreation Drop-in Center', 2003, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meaning of Urban Sport Cultures*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox (Albany: SUNY, 2003), 171.

⁷¹ Synthia Sydnor Slowikowski, 'Urban(e) Statuary Times', 2003, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Cultures*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 66, 72.

⁷² Bryan S. Turner, 'The Possibility of Primitiveness: Towards a Sociology of Body Marks in Cool Societies', *Body & Society* 5, nos. 2-3 (1999): 42,49.

team are excluded, while still bearing the cost. Consequently, Swindell and Rosentraub propose that localities issue a particular user tax district to fund sports stadia publicly.⁷³ Others believe that numerous municipalities and regions benefit from the presence of a representative team and suggest supporters and organisations bond, work towards collective goals, and establish democratised spaces.⁷⁴ However, this democratised space was sometimes replaced with conformity and commodification by various measures over the late twentieth century. This claim concurs with the Dinces' contention that stadium gentrification was accelerated in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The studies above illustrate how those within the city's limits are impacted by sport, and how a team influences the locality's image and history. These are essential elements to consider when discussing the dialectical nature of sport in the city.

Any exploration of sport in the city needs to consider Giulianotti and Roberson's concept of the 'glocal', a notion that Edensor and Millington elaborate on when arguing that clubs and organisations cannot lose touch with the essence of any respective region when branding and marketing a team.⁷⁵ They suggest that these sporting cultures present an ideal space to explore identity formations and 'notions of place'. Unsurprisingly, they discovered that British sporting clubs are often far more embedded in their localities than North American sports franchises, which are in the habit of relocating for financial gain.⁷⁶ More importantly, they illustrate how the recent marketing campaigns of Manchester City FC attempted to attract local and global supporters in an example of a brand being 'reterritorialised'. They suggest that fan culture is dynamic, embedded in place, but responsive 'glocally'. For

⁷³ David Swindell and Mark S. Rosentraub, 'Who Benefits from the Presence of Professional Sports Teams? The Implications for Public Funding of Stadiums and Arenas', *Public Administration Review* 58, no. 1 (1998): 11.

⁷⁴ Douglas Hochstetler, 'America Needs Farmers': Communal Identity, the University of Iowa Football Team and the Farm Crisis of the 1980s', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 27:8 (2010): 1360-1378; Andrew McFarland, 'A Team of Our Own: The Role of Local and Regional Identities in Spanish Sport', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, (2020): 12-32; Mark Mizruchi, 'Local Sports Teams and Celebration of Community: A Comparative Analysis of the Home Advantage', *The Sociological Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 507-518; Schwartz and Stephen F. Barsky, 'The Home Advantage,' *Social Forces* 55, no. 3 (March 1977): 641-661; David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993', *Journal of Sport History* 49, no 1. (2022), 37-52; Matthew Gill, 'Communicating Organizational History to Sports Fans' in *Sports Fans, Identity, and Socialization: Exploring the Fandemonium*, ed. A. C. Earnheardt, et al. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 151.

⁷⁵ Richard Giulianotti and R. Robertson, 'Recovering the Social: Globalization, Football and Transnationalism', *Global Networks* 7 (2007): 144-186.

⁷⁶ Tim Edensor and Steve Millington, 'This is Our City': Branding Football and Local Embeddedness', *Global Networks* 8, no. 2 (2008): 182 and 190.

instance, football fandom goes well beyond the confines of the club's grounds, from in-stadium experiences and local personal interactions to conversations and debates globally online. Thus, fandom is informed by both the local and global or 'glocal'.⁷⁷ Andrews and Ritzer discuss the concept of the 'glocal' at length and modify it by including the 'grobal' contending that the local no longer exists in an increasingly connected sporting world. They stress that the global and local dichotomy should be disavowed in serious scholarship to allow for more complicated discussions.⁷⁸ These scholars are primarily concerned with situating branding, place, and identity but they did not address their evolution, which is the focus of this history of the Spurs in San Antonio. In addition to acknowledging the complex set of forces at play here, one cannot forget the importance of the city and the spaces it contains, and historians have emphasised that the place and space of sport history must continue to be researched and addressed.⁷⁹ This thesis focuses on spaces such as stadiums and other supporter rendezvous points to inform and deliver a narrative unveiling how these sites shaped the experiences of San Antonians.

San Antonio and the Spurs

To adequately appreciate a city's structures and events from an historical perspective, an understanding of its geographical, cultural, racial, and ethnic distinctiveness is essential.⁸⁰ San Antonio sits on the southern periphery of the U.S., but over the last three hundred years, Spain, France, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, and the Confederate States of America have laid claim to the city. In the centuries before the Spaniards arrived, indigenous peoples such as the Payaya resided there. The city was the provincial capital of Spanish Texas for more than half a century before the Mexican Revolution, with Misión San Antonio de Valero serving as the Spaniards' key regional fortification. That mission, more commonly known as the Alamo, is one of the most visited historical landmarks in the U.S., and the city is the top tourist destination in Texas. Some still consider the city a relic of the Old American West with its expansive ranches, open pastures, surrounding hill country, lengthy cattle drives, and historical battles and characters. However, to label San

⁷⁷ Tim Edensor, 'This is Our City': Branding Football and Local Embeddedness', *Global Networks* 8, no. 2 (2008): 175, 182.

⁷⁸ David L. Andrews and George Ritzer, 'The Grobal in the Sporting Glocal', *Global Networks* 7, no. 2 (2007): 149.

⁷⁹ Chris Perkins, 'Geography and the Methodological Ballpark: Putting Place into Sports History', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1761.

⁸⁰ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993', *Journal of Sport History* 49, no 1. 2022): 37-52.

Antonio as only part of the West is a misnomer as its history is also connected to the American South and a diversity of transnational and indigenous influences.⁸¹ Historians and popular culture have chronicled the place in its mythic form over the last century, especially in relation to the Battle of the Alamo that transpired during the Texas Revolution. Originating from those nineteenth and early twentieth-century historical narratives were notions of what it meant to be a Texan and the supposed Texas virtues of fearlessness and freedom. In this mythmaking process, historians, journalists, and storytellers marginalised those who were just as, if not more, important than the nearly two-hundred men who defended the old Spanish mission during the thirteen-day siege. Fortunately, over the last three decades, Texas historians have reviewed and critiqued the fables left by their Anglo predecessors concerning the region and its legacy.

The romanticisation of the Alamo and its defenders, the dehumanisation of their Mexican counterparts and the blatant disregard for black Texans have had rippling effects to the present. Buenger argues that Texas attempted to remake itself and rewrite its history in the decades following the defeat of the Confederacy after the American Civil War.⁸² Unlike much of their Confederate counterparts, past storytellers successfully disassociated Texas from its bigoted and racist roots as part of the Deep South, at least temporarily. They partially succeeded in this separation due to Texas' western proximity, mythic narratives, and legendary characters that represented a diversity of qualities and ideas. For instance, instead of taking on the tones of the southern redeemers in places such as Georgia and South Carolina, chroniclers focused on promulgating Texas as a part of the great Western tradition and as a place with an unwavering determination for independence minimising the fact that the state chose disunion due to white supremacist motivations.⁸³ Additionally, the fabled history of the Alamo divorced memory from reality, making it even more difficult for proud Americans to confront

⁸¹ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993', *Journal of Sport History* 49, no 1. 2022): 37-52.

⁸² Walter Buenger, 'Texas and the South', *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 103 no. 3 (2000): 324.

⁸³ Christopher Hooks, 'The Battle to Rewrite Texas History', *Texas Monthly*, October 2019; T. R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1968); *Texas. A Declaration of the Causes which Impel the State of Texas to Secede from the Federal Union* (Austin: Texas Library and Historical Commission, 1862).

the truth.⁸⁴ An awakening such as this was not easy, especially for Texans. In his revealing history of the Alamo, Crisp provides a personal and historiographical journey through how the siege and those who fought it were mythologised, noting that, as his research progressed, his cognitive dissonance turned into frustration, anger, and a lost sense of identity.⁸⁵ Crisp's identity crisis is reflective of the one his state continues to endure, highlighting that the cultural geography of a place is forever changing.⁸⁶ Making it critical that close attention must be paid to local identity formation and mythmaking's role in it.

Myths are unquestionably a contributing factor to the misleading narratives of Texas history. Sport historians have pointed to the importance of myths and legends and how their creation can increase a community's commitment to a club in various temporal and geographical contexts. This is partly attributed to the notoriety and prestige the team invokes within any constituency.⁸⁷ Similarly, Weber, a Texas historian, explains the importance of myths as they serve as a community adhesive that sometimes results in collective action. However, he questions whether myths were 'useful or pernicious', a driving factor towards 'constructive common action or to collective foolishness and disgrace'. He considers that the two might not be mutually exclusive, although the great Anglo myths from the Texas Revolution have undoubtedly contributed to the ethnic tensions and questionable historical memory that the region has experienced.⁸⁸ Battles over the identity of San Antonio endure partly due to this embrace of myths and legends, and this thesis explores their role related to sport in the city.

⁸⁴ Walter Buenger, 'Texas and the South', *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 103 no. 3 (2000): 324; *The Alamo*, produced by John Wayne, United Artists, 1960; *The Alamo*, directed by John Lee Hancock, Touchstone Pictures, 2004.

⁸⁵ James E. Crisp, *Sleuthing the Alamo: Davy Crockett's Last Stand and Other Mysteries of the Texas Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 23-25.

⁸⁶ Daniel D. Arreola, 'Urban Ethnic Landscape Identity', *Geographical Review* 85, no. 4 (October 1995): 1.

⁸⁷ Sean Brawley, 'Your Shire, Your Sharks': The Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks and Delocalization v. Glocalization in Australian Rugby League', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 11 (2009): 1697-1715; Sean Brawley, 'Can You Imagine the Shire Without the Sharks!?: Building the Community Capital of the Cronulla-Sutherland Rugby League Club- from 1967 to the Eve of Super League in 1996', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 3 (2012): 492-508; Junwei Yu, 'The Hongye Legend in Taiwanese Baseball: Separating Myth from Reality', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24, no. 10 (September 2007): 1264-1280.

⁸⁸ David J. Weber, 'Refighting the Alamo, Mythmaking and the Texas Revolution', in *Myth and the History of the Hispanic Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990): 142.

Although the city of San Antonio is part of the U.S., it is also part of a border region similar to, yet distinct from, the countries of which it was once composed. A confluence of indigenous, Spanish, French, Mexican, Tejano, German, African, and Anglo influences, have moulded it into a city unlike any other in the U.S. De La Teja illustrates that, since its inception, San Antonio has been a place with diverse peoples, languages, cultures, and heritage.⁸⁹ The South Texas region is also unlike any other in the nation. Arreola describes South Texas as ‘America’s largest subregion’, a place that is ‘terra incognita’ to the U.S., and a borderland that exhibits geographical, cultural, political and social distinctiveness compared with its New Mexico, Arizona, and California counterparts.⁹⁰ In essence, Tejano South Texas became a ‘beautiful’ Mexican American cultural province that even sought independence from the state.⁹¹ The breaking up of the state remains a topic of contention during election cycles, as the Texas Admission Act of 1845 states that Texas has the right to divide itself into upwards of five states while still admitted to the Union. Similarly, Arreola suggests that the battles over who ruled San Antonio and its projected image are still being fought. For him, although the city has been historically and ethnically Mexican, San Antonio’s non-Hispanic residents refuse to acknowledge this and instead promoted its Spanish roots to disassociate the city, its landscapes and heritage, from its Mexican past. Indeed, until cityscapes throughout the country embrace temporal diversity instead of opting for simple tourist charm, the full complexities of a city like San Antonio will never be fully represented or understood.⁹²

The city’s history is also linked to struggles over water, in terms of access to and safety from it, and the Latinx pursuit of full enfranchisement and dignity over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁹³ For some, San Antonio experienced a

⁸⁹ Jesús F. de la Teja, ‘A Spanish Borderlands Community: San Antonio’, *OAH Magazine of History* 14 no. 4, 28.

⁹⁰ Daniel D. Arreola, *Tejano South Texas: A Mexican American Cultural Province* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 5-6, 190.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5-6, 189.

⁹² Daniel D. Arreola, ‘Urban Ethnic Landscape Identity’, *Geographical Review* 85, no. 4 (October 1995): 5-6.

⁹³ Char Miller, ‘Streetscape Environmentalism: Floods, Social Justice, and Political Power in San Antonio, 1921–1974’, *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 118, no. 2 (2014): 177; Char Miller, *San Antonio: A Tricentennial History*, (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2018), 72-77; Gabriela Gonzalez, *Redeeming La Raza: Transborder Modernity, Race, Respectability, and Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); David Montejano, *Quixote’s Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Rodolfo Rosales, *The Illusion of Inclusion: The Untold Political Story of San Antonio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

peaceful transition into a desegregated world when it became the first southern city to integrate lunch counters in 1960 because it did not feel the same pressure as other places throughout the south, owing to its marginal African American and substantial Latinx population. These demographics and lack of tension allowed city leaders of the era to institute a policy of incremental integration. Nevertheless, the governance of San Antonio invoked controversy, and in 1975 the United States Justice Department contended that the calculated drawing up of city council districts diluted the voting influence of the city's non-white populations.⁹⁴ Other researchers have elaborated on the city's economic and racial segregation, but rarely has sport been used as a lens to improve understanding of the place.⁹⁵

Uniquely, Garcia explores the struggle against the segregated city in the 1930s and 1940s utilising sport, researching a San Antonio high school basketball team from the historically Latinx and impoverished Westside.⁹⁶ He concludes that basketball bonded an otherwise separated and civically disinterested constituency. However, this research has not been extended to explore the city's professional basketball team.⁹⁷ The Spurs have garnered minimal attention from city and sport historians, despite their fifty years in one of the nation's most populous, ethnically diverse, and culturally rich cities.⁹⁸ In his 2021 book *The Sports Revolution*, Guridy centres Texas in the national sporting narrative following the mid-twentieth-century civil and human rights struggles, arguing that Texans revolutionised sports participation, spectatorship, and marketing. He features the Spurs and their fans in one chapter highlighting the growing Latinx presence amongst supporters, how they influenced

⁹⁴ Charles Cotrell and R. Stevens, 'The 1975 Voting Rights Act and San Antonio, Texas: Toward a Federal Guarantee of a Republican Form of Local Government', *Publius* 8, no. 1 (1978): 79; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993', *Journal of Sport History* 49, no. 1. 2022): 37-52.

⁹⁵ Christine Drennon, 'Economic Segregation in San Antonio: How We Got Here, is it Real?', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 23, 2017; Rebecca Walter, Nathan Foote, and Corey Sparks, 'Historic Roots of Modern Residential Segregation in a Southwestern Metropolis: San Antonio, Texas in 1910 and 2010', *Urban Science* 1, no. 2 (2017): 19; Jesus de la Teja, "Buena gana tenia de ir a jugar": The Recreational World of Early San Antonio, Texas', 1718-1845, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 7 (2009): 889-905; Ignacio Garcia, *When Mexicans Could Play Ball: Basketball, Race, and Identity in San Antonio, 1928-1945* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013); Jorge Iber, ed., *More Than Just Peloteros: Sports and U.S. Latino Communities* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2014).

⁹⁶ Ignacio Garcia, *When Mexicans Could Play Ball: Basketball, Race, and Identity in San Antonio, 1928-1945* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).

⁹⁷ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family,' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (August 3, 2020): 670-691.

⁹⁸ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio "Spurs Family"', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37 no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

the organisation to adopt their values, and how they fostered a relationship that cultivated a unique culture.⁹⁹ Some journalists have created a few popular histories of the Spurs but they have primarily focused on team accomplishments and failed to engage with any rigorous analysis regarding the relationship between the team and San Antonians, a process that lies at the heart of this thesis.¹⁰⁰

To understand the relationship between club and city, one must first review the franchise's origins. The ABA struggled with an inferiority complex concerning the NBA in the 1960s and 1970s; it appeared San Antonians experienced a similar sentiment. Residents often felt small compared to their northern and eastern neighbours.¹⁰¹ Dallas established itself as a financial and transportation hub, while Houston housed the most extensive petrochemical facilities in the country and the Manned Space Center of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Both ranked in the top eight in national population and economic capacity and hosted several professional teams, while San Antonio played third fiddle in the Texas Triangle and failed to lure any major-league attention. In 1970, 654,153 people resided within San Antonio, ranking it the third most populous in Texas and the fifteenth largest city in the nation. However, the municipality's economy revolved around military bases and tourism and lacked the financial resources, infrastructure, and allure to attract entrepreneurs. As San Antonio's inner-city neighbourhoods and downtown district deteriorated, financial and petrochemical companies created skyscraper booms in downtown Dallas and Houston. Another stark contrast was the demographics, as the Latinx population in San Antonio accounted for most residents and was much higher than elsewhere. When word spread in the spring of 1973 that San Antonio would finally have a professional sports team, local journalists debated about whether or not the city was worthy of the title 'Big League' and what other

⁹⁹ Frank Andre Gurry, *The Sports Revolution: How Texas Changed the Culture of American Athletics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 259-301.

¹⁰⁰ Jan Hubbard, *The History of the San Antonio Spurs* (Florence: Whitman Publishing, 2012); Staff of the San Antonio Express-News, *Spurs Nation: Major Moments in San Antonio Basketball* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2016); Jimmy Sanderson and Kelly Gramlich, "You Go Girl!": Twitter and Conversations About Sport Culture and Gender', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 33 no. 2 (2014): 113-123.

¹⁰¹ Kemper Diehl and Alan Baily, 'The Question: Is S.A. Big League?', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 30, 1973; Ed Fowler, 'Our City Scoffed? Look Who's Talking', *Houston Chronicle*, May 28, 1995; 'San Antonio: Home of Margaritas, Minor Leagues', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 28, 1995; Thaddeus Herrick, 'Spurs' Defeat Deflates San Antonio- Yet Again', *Houston Chronicle*, June 3, 1995.

possibilities could appear if the franchise proved sustainable.¹⁰² Original Spurs owner B.J. 'Red' McCombs claimed that San Antonio had 'zero' reputation nationally before he and other investors brought in the Spurs, and journalists agreed, declaring that by 1975 the team served as the city's leading source of publicity.¹⁰³ However, as this thesis will demonstrate, fans also contributed to the increased awareness of the city and exercised a degree of influence over the franchise during its infancy.¹⁰⁴

San Antonio and the Spurs provide an ideal case study for this research because the Spurs were the only top-flight professional franchise in the city, they had a documented record of success on and off the court, and the franchise was viewed as having developed a 'familial' bond with residents.¹⁰⁵ San Antonio's demographic idiosyncrasies, size (currently ranks seventh in the nation), and historic diversity make it a compelling place to study.¹⁰⁶ Being a minority-majority city for nearly half a century has generated positive and negative responses that are considered here. The city's complicated profile as one of the most economically segregated and impoverished along with being the nation's fastest-growing shows convergence of past and present. While its moniker as 'Military City USA' based on the numerous military bases within its limits including Randolph Field, which was known as 'the West Point of the Air' since the 1930s, enhances its distinctiveness.¹⁰⁷ Another critical factor in selecting the Spurs as a case study was that, paralleling the argument that the current diversity of the city might foreshadow the future composition of the nation, the Spurs might well represent the future of the NBA

¹⁰² Kemper Diehl and Alan Baily, 'The Question: Is S.A. Big League?', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 30, 1973.

¹⁰³ William Reddell, 'Appreciation Games a Détente for Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 26, 1975.

¹⁰⁴ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993', *Journal of Sport History* 49, no 1. 2022): 37-52.

¹⁰⁵ Gilbert Garcia, 'In Tough Times, Family Bonds Connect City to Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 21, 2018.

¹⁰⁶ Rick Casey, 'San Antonio's Majority by Minority Should Serve as a Thriving National Example', *The Rivard Report*, December 11, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ 'Minority-Majority' in the United States refers to an area where one or more racial or ethnic national minority groups are the majority of a population; Timothy Brown and Lane Bourgeois, 'Randolph Air Force Base', *The Handbook of Texas*, July, 27, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/randolph-air-force-base> (accessed June 13, 2024).

Sabrina Travernise, 'Why the Announcement of a Looming White Minority Makes Demographers Nervous', *The New York Times*, November 22, 2018; Christine Drennon, 'Economic Segregation in San Antonio: How We Got Here, Is It Real?', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 23, 2017; Jackie Wang, 'Census Data: San Antonio Region's Poverty Rate Rises, Tops Nation', *The Rivard Report*, September 26, 2019; Candace Evans, 'San Antonio Is Enjoying The Country's Largest Population Boom – And Business Is A Big Reason Why', *Forbes*, July 13, 2018.

Chapter 1- Uncovering Identities, Imaginings, and Communities in Modern Spectator Sports
demographically, stylistically, and managerially.¹⁰⁸ As shown elsewhere, all of these factors made San Antonio as a city and the Spurs as a sports franchise a relevant and unique case study to examine the characteristics of an (imagined) community of fandom in sport, assess professional sports' role in the city, and observe how spectators and supporters have been impacted by the team's presence over time.¹⁰⁹ To begin, the origins of the Spurs franchise and their evolution in San Antonio must be explored through a rigorous analysis of archival resources, which will be the focus of the following chapter.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel A. Nathan, 'Review Essay: Traveling: Notes on Basketball and Globalization; or, Why the San Antonio Spurs are the Future,' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no. 6 (2008): 747.

¹⁰⁹ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio "Spurs Family"', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37 no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

Chapter 2- From the Archives: San Antonians and the Spurs Forge an Identity

This chapter explores the fifty-year history of the Spurs in San Antonio, utilising physical and digital archives and argues that the Spurs and their supporters developed a relationship, reciprocally influenced one another's identities, and cultivated a community. The chapter is broken into distinct eras, which include the franchise's start in Dallas, ABA tenure, its place in the ABA-NBA merger and subsequent periods dominated by influential shareholders and players. This narrative highlights changes in team performance, attendance, franchise marketing, media coverage, supporter demographics and experiences and concludes with a reflection on the franchise's evolution and an evaluation of its role in the community. The chapter also exhibits the dynamics surrounding North American sports franchises. Professional leagues in the U.S. historically and currently operate as cartels in that franchises have no obligation to remain in a particular locality and often relocate to maximise profits. There is no promotion or relegation, and current stakeholders (owners) must approve admission into leagues. Readers should also be aware that until the formation of the Spurs, San Antonio had minimal experience with professional sports, and the team has been the only top-flight professional sports franchise in the city for the last half-century.

The Dallas Chaparrals (1967-1973)

In 1967, ABA contributors Roland Speth and Gary Davidson approached Max Williams, a former college basketball player, about starting a franchise in Dallas. Williams recruited local entrepreneur Robert Folsom to help finance the project, and they assembled thirty investors contributing \$300,000.¹ Williams hired Terry Stembridge as the public relations director and radio game-caller, and together they conducted most of the business and team operations.² Stembridge recalled that the Chapparal Room restaurant and their roadrunner napkins inspired the team's moniker and logo.³ The Chaparrals had limited success on the court, earning a 222-260 win-loss record over six seasons. The franchise undertook a variety of

¹ Max Williams, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 53.

² Terry Stembridge, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 54-55.

³ Max Williams, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 55-56.

promotions to increase attendance, and created barbeque nights, kids' days, Miss Chaparral, a team mascot and offered alcohol when permitted by the venue. The team recorded their largest attendance of 7,500 in their first season but failed to maintain interest, so, in the 1970-71 season, they created a regional concept by changing the team's name to the Texas Chaparrals. They played home games in Dallas, Fort Worth and Lubbock but abandoned this campaign after one season as operational costs and the physical toll on players increased.⁴ The franchise operated at a financial loss for the next two seasons, and the owners refused to invest in the roster. At the start of the 1972-73 season, management traded away several African American players for little talent in return, and some of the black players who had stayed suggested that the front office hoped the growing number of white players on the roster would increase attendance. Given Dallas' deep history of bigotry, this was not out of the realm of possibilities. A sportswriter who attended a Chaparral home game that season described it as a 'wake', and the team finished with a franchise-worst 28-56 record with only 134 spectators attending their last home game.⁵

San Antonio Gets their Spurs (1973-1974)

In 1973, investors from New Jersey attempted to purchase the Chaparrals, but ABA commissioner, Mike Storen, blocked the transaction because of the buyers' alleged mafia connections.⁶ The Dallas front office searched for other possible investors, and Bob Briner, the team's general manager, recommended that Stembridge contact a San Antonio businessman named Red McCombs. After Stembridge met with McCombs and convinced him to buy, Dallas executives agreed to terms with McCombs and his friend and partner Angelo Drossos. McCombs leased the franchise for \$1 and was required to produce \$800,000 in operational costs. After two seasons, if McCombs and Drossos wanted to purchase the team outright, they could do so for \$1.6 million. Drossos, McCombs and several other San Antonio-based investors raised \$780,000. Investors recognised the risk but valued bringing professional sports to their city, while critics questioned the project's viability,

⁴ Jan Hubbard, *The History of the San Antonio Spurs*, (Atlanta, Whitman Publishing, 2012), 20-21.

⁵ Jan Hubbard, *The History of the San Antonio Spurs*, (Atlanta, Whitman Publishing, 2012), 21; Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 289.

⁶ Mike Monroe, 'How McCombs and Drossos Landed the Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 20, 2015.

sustainability and economic impact.⁷ After completing the deal, investors Jack Pitluk and Ankerson recommended changes to the team's name and colours, and a majority agreed.⁸ Thus, the San Antonio Spurs in silver and black were born.⁹ McCombs appointed Drossos as the franchise's top executive, who pledged to learn everything he could about the basketball industry, and, given the project's fragility, he took no salary.¹⁰ The two men became polarising figures over time, but without their immediate and sustained efforts, Spurs basketball probably would have never existed.

McCombs grew up in the small rural Texas ranching community of Spur during the Great Depression before his family relocated to Corpus Christi, where he spent most of his formative years. His father worked as an auto mechanic and sparked McCombs' interest in cars and business. McCombs attended Southwestern University on a football scholarship but left due to his 1946 military conscription, after which he attended the University of Texas before dropping out to sell cars.¹¹ After earning numerous sales awards, he became a manager, and at twenty-five, he decided to apply for a bank loan and go into business for himself. McCombs risked his assets and his new family's financial security, but his entrepreneurial skills eventually earned him generational wealth, acclaim, fame, and philanthropic opportunities. In the 1960s, McCombs opened Ford dealerships in San Antonio and Houston. Although his business tactics perplexed industry traditionalists, they clearly worked and within a few years he was a multi-millionaire, with his

⁷ Red McCombs and Mickey Herskowitz, *The Red Zone: Cars, Cows, and Coaches: The Life and Good Times of a Texas Deal Maker*, (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002), 57; Angelo Drossos, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 290; Original Spurs investors: Richard Alterman, William Alterman, Louis Bishob, Bill Braley, Wayman Buchanan, Art Burdick, Dr. Pedro DeLeon, Barbara Dreeben, Charles Dempsey, Angelo Drossos, Hubert Foreman, Sam Godfrey, Jack Guenther, Don Hickman, Maurie Holden, Dr. Mike Kaihlanen, Steven Lang, Bernard Lifshutz, Duck Lubel, Dan McCarthy, B.J. 'Red' McCombs, Irving Mathews, Jack Pitluk, Leo Rose, E.J. Rosenstein, John Schaefer, Stanley Schoenbaum, Dr. Walter Simmons, Frenchie Sterling, Marshall Steves, Joe Straus Sr., Dan Sullivan, William Troy Jr., Curtis Vaughan and Dr. Linton Weems; San Antonio Spurs, 'Episode 2- "Origins| The Ring of the Rowel: San Antonio Spurs Docuseries', YouTube video, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W721d2BBG-Y> (accessed November 16, 2022); Kemper Diehl and Alan Bailey, 'The Question: IS S.A. Big League?', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 30, 1973; 'Major League In San Antonio?', *San Antonio Express*, August 15, 1973.

⁸ Mike Monroe, 'How McCombs and Drossos Landed the Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 20, 2015.

⁹ Jan Hubbard, *The History of the San Antonio Spurs*, (Atlanta, Whitman Publishing, 2012), 26-27.

¹⁰ Red McCombs and Mickey Herskowitz, *The Red Zone: Cars, Cows, and Coaches: The Life and Good Times of a Texas Deal Maker*, (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002), 58.

¹¹ 'Red McCombs '49', Southwestern University, https://www.southwestern.edu/live/profiles/58/_ingredients/templates/details/prev.php (accessed August 25, 2022).

dealerships' sales perennially ranked among the top in the nation.¹² McCombs prided himself on generating capital and negotiating deals, pursuing ventures in telecommunications, agribusiness, petrochemicals and sports franchises, and, after convincing banks and other investors, like Paul Schaefer, to become involved, he provided essential financial support to the Spurs.¹³

Drossos and McCombs grew close over the years. A San Antonio native of Greek descent, Drossos promoted boxing matches and operated a hot dog stand before selling cars at a McCombs dealership, working his way up to management and completing a stock brokerage program in New York. Stembridge observed that Drossos 'had to work and sweat and push for everything he ever had, and he gained a reputation as a very tough negotiator, a guy who put together some great deals'.¹⁴ For his part, Drossos noted that 'I had no training in basketball, informal or otherwise, when I took over the Spurs. Everything was on-the-job experience. If I made a mistake, I paid for it the hard way'.¹⁵ Regardless of Drossos' inexperience, his adept negotiating abilities paid off almost immediately.

San Antonio's downtown HemisFair Arena became the Spurs' new home, and Drossos quickly purchased the rights to concessions for \$200,000. The organisation inherited a contract with Coca-Cola, but Drossos negotiated a more lucrative deal that made Pepsi and Coca-Cola cosponsors.¹⁶ Drossos acquired Virginia Squires' rookie prospect Swen Nater for \$300,000 by persuading Squires owner, Earl Foreman, to sell during a soiree at a Greek nightclub in New York City. Nater went on to earn ABA All-Star and Rookie of the Year honours in the 1973-74 season.¹⁷ Drossos also acquired head coach Tom Nissalke and key role players like George Karl, but this was not inexpensive and in the course of three months, the \$780,000 raised by investors for the team's first two years was exhausted. However, Drossos used this to his advantage and informed the Dallas group that the lease needed to

¹² Red McCombs and Mickey Herskowitz, *The Red Zone: Cars, Cows, and Coaches: The Life and Good Times of a Texas Dealmaker*, (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002), 20-24, 34-35.

¹³ *Ibid*, 58.

¹⁴ Terry Stembridge, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 290.

¹⁵ Angelo Drossos, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 291.

¹⁶ Terry Stembridge, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 291.

¹⁷ Angelo Drossos, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 292-293.

be terminated unless they agreed to sell the team outright for \$800,000, resulting in the Dallas investors selling the franchise to Drossos nearly two years early and for half the initial price.¹⁸

Around 6,000 spectators attended the Spurs' first-ever home game, which they lost to the San Diego Conquistadors.¹⁹ The team started poorly, but they improved as the season progressed, and a total gate attendance of 258,434 outnumbered any Chapparal mark by over 100,000.²⁰ John Lopez, a teenager at the time, recollected that there was not much excitement surrounding the team initially, but it offered children \$1 tickets if they joined the Spurs' kids club. Lopez and four friends registered, and his father drove them to games. The boys discovered an unsecured backdoor and pitched in to purchase one ticket to future games for one friend, who let their peers in through the unattended entry point. The boys executed this ploy approximately thirty times, and Lopez, who recalled changing seats at every game and moving as close as row six, noticed growing crowds as the season progressed.²¹

Stembridge argued that Drossos saved the Spurs that first season through his enthusiasm and the acquisitions of Nater and George Gervin, which added to his reputation and improved the Spurs' roster.²² Drossos had again approached Foreman on the understanding that the Squires were struggling financially, and offered \$225,000 for the rights to Gervin, but this was initially rejected over concerns about supporter reactions and the fact that the Squires franchise was hosting the 1974 ABA All-Star Game. Drossos countered with a 'delayed-delivery deal', meaning he would pay upfront, but the two parties would not make the agreement public until after the All-Star game. The Squires' owner reluctantly agreed but refused to relinquish Gervin following the league's showcase. Commissioner Storen declared the deal illegal and threatened to suspend Drossos and the Spurs if they

¹⁸ Ibid, 302-303.

¹⁹ Madalyn Mendoza, 'The Spurs Played Their First ABA Game in San Antonio Nearly 50 Years Ago', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 12, 2020.

²⁰ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 107; The Association for Professional Basketball Research, 'NBA/ABA Home Attendance Totals' <https://www.apbr.org/attendance.html> (accessed August 25, 2022).

²¹ John Lopez, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 304-305.

²² Terry Stembridge, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 295-296.

played Gervin, but he lost his case after suing the Spurs in a San Antonio federal court, and Gervin officially became a Spur.²³

Along with Drossos, several others contributed to the Spurs' early survival. Ankerson helped run the organisation, and his talents earned him the ABA's Executive of the Year Award. John Shaefer contributed his money and time and served as the team's first chairperson.²⁴ Spurs public relations director Wayne Witt educated San Antonians about basketball, while Stenbridge enthusiastically recruited fans over the radio.²⁵ Franchise staff acquired thousands of full and part-time season ticket holders by advertising discounted prices in the local press.²⁶ Vice president John Begzos supported staffers Larry Braun and David Doyle in creating the team's official supporters' group, the Baseline Bums, who have been a consistent source of organisational support. Bums, as season ticket holders, were charged \$1 for admission and offered discounted beer.²⁷ Bernie LaReau left job security with the NFL's Chicago Bears to serve as the Spurs' athletic trainer, business manager and travelling secretary.²⁸ The financial anchor of the organisation, McCombs, whose dealerships thrived because he invested substantially in local and regional advertising, understood how vital the media would be to sustain the Spurs project, and he convinced Charlie Kirkpatrick of the *San Antonio Express-News* and Frank Bennack of the *San Antonio Light* to promote the team.²⁹ Coaches and players also contributed to the Spurs' first-season survival. Head coach Tom Nissalke provided stability and experience while young players like Nater, Gervin, and James Silas showed their quality on the court. Thanks to the commitment of individuals inside and outside the organisation, the Spurs became a

²³ Angelo Drossos, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 300.

²⁴ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 107.

²⁵ Paul Attner, 'Crowd Becomes 6th Man at HemisFair', *Washington Post*, April 18, 1978; John Lopez, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 306-307.

²⁶ 'Major League In San Antonio?', *San Antonio Express*, August 15, 1973.

²⁷ David Galindo, 'From Clamorous to Charitable: An Abbreviated History of the Baseline Bums', *Playing Pasts: The Online Magazine for Sport & Leisure History*, February 22, 2021, <https://www.playingpasts.co.uk/articles/team-sports/from-clamorous-to-charitable-an-abbreviated-history-of-the-baseline-bums/> (accessed August 25, 2022); Jan Hubbard, *The History of the San Antonio Spurs*, (Atlanta, Whitman Publishing, 2012), 38.

²⁸ Terry Frei, "Spurs' Baseline Bums Just 120 Pro Basketball Fans Having Fun," *Denver Post*, April 28, 1985; Loose Balls, 291.

²⁹ Mike Monroe, 'How McCombs and Drossos Landed the Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 20, 2015.

force in the league over the next two ABA seasons and consolidated their position as a viable basketball enterprise.

The Spurs in the ABA and the Merger (1974-1976)

Before the start of the 1974-1975 season, Drossos detailed the team's economic impact, claiming that they generated the city \$6 million of revenue annually. The city directly profited from concessions, admissions, and visitor expenses, and the chamber of commerce, who believed that Drossos' approximation was conservative, anticipated higher revenues as the team established itself. Despite the local economic impact, investors lost \$750,000 following the first season and Drossos aimed to reduce deficits to \$225,000 for the second and break even by the third.³⁰ In December 1974, Drossos fired Nissalke and appointed Bob Bass, who valued player autonomy, quickened the speed of play, and increased the team's offensive output, producing a more attractive playing style. Bass moved Gervin from guard to forward, making him an offensive focal point, and Gervin became the Spurs' leading scorer, as they finished second in the standings (51-33) and qualified for the postseason. Gervin, Nater, and Silas were selected to the All-Star team, and, despite San Antonio's brief stint in the ABA, the league selected the city as host for the 1975 ABA All-Star Game.³¹

At the 1974 All-Star Game in Virginia, Spurs and city representatives convinced league operators that San Antonio would be an ideal host destination. Drossos and T.G. Peters, a local entrepreneur, delivered the pitch, with Drossos predicting that the 1975 showcase would 'be the biggest professional sports happening in the history of San Antonio. Not only will it benefit the club, but the national publicity given to San Antonio will be enormous'.³² With attendance averages over 6,000, Drossos highlighted that the Spurs regularly outdrew the NBA's premier franchise, the Boston Celtics, and one local editorial, which reported an average attendance of over 7,000, argued that the team was the city's leading source of publicity.³³ Drossos appointed Witt as the All-Star Game chairperson, and the organisation spent thousands

³⁰ Warren Jennings, 'Spurs Provide "Tip-In" For Alamo City Economy', *San Antonio Light*, October 13, 1974.

³¹ Jan Hubbard, *The History of the San Antonio Spurs*, (Atlanta, Whitman Publishing, 2012), 38.

³² Bob Boyd, 'ABA All Star Game: The Proof in the Pudding', *San Antonio Magazine*, January 1975, 47.

³³ Bob Boyd, 'ABA All Star Game: The Proof in the Pudding', *San Antonio Magazine*, January 1975, 44-47; San Antonio Express Editorial, 'Appreciation Games a Détente for Spurs', *San Antonio Express*, December 26, 1975, 10-A.

providing players with televisions, radios, rings, and furniture. Additionally, organisers and local merchants treated the All-Stars to Texas-themed glasses, mugs, cigars, fruit baskets, beer, and hats. Witt booked country music star Willie Nelson to perform and procured a horse as an award for the game's most valuable player.³⁴ A capacity crowd of 10,449 spectators attended, and journalists and league representatives considered it a success, especially given the extensive media attention.³⁵ Lopez, the young supporter turned sportswriter, recollected that that game affirmed his affinity for the sport and the Spurs, as he supported them for the next four decades.³⁶

Despite producing a successful All-Star game, the organisation recorded a deficit of \$1 million, and, given their debt to the city, rumours spread that the organisation would offer San Antonians free tickets as a means to settle, although that never materialised.³⁷ Drossos proposed that the city council and Lila Cockrell, San Antonio's first female mayor, buy the franchise and this bluff, together with the announcement of the team's financial fragility, pressured city leaders into approving favourable contracts and timetables. Previously, city leaders had charged the Spurs \$500 and ten per cent of gross admissions per game to lease the arena, but, following Drossos' proposition, politicians waived the admission percentage for as long as the team continued operating at a financial loss. However, the city manager reserved the right to review the organisation's finances, demand payment, and bar the organisation from the arena.³⁸

³⁴ A Quarter Horse is an American breed of racehorse reputed to perform well in quarter-mile courses. Wayne Witt, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 307-308.

³⁵ David King, 'San Antonio's Lone Star Game', *San Antonio Express-News* and reprinted by *Remember the ABA*, 1996.

³⁶ John Lopez, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 308-309.

³⁷ Bob Boyd, 'Rohde Wants to Know Why Spurs Have Not Paid 2-Year Debt', *San Antonio News*, December 17, 1975; Bob Boyd, 'Rohde Wants to Know Why Spurs Have Not Paid 2-Year Debt', *San Antonio News*, December 17, 1975; San Antonio Express Editorial, 'Appreciation Games a Détente for Spurs', *San Antonio Express*, December 26, 1975, 10-A.

³⁸ San Antonio Express Editorial, 'Appreciation Games a Détente for Spurs', *San Antonio Express*, December 26, 1975, 10-A; Deborah Weser, 'Spurs Boss Offers City Gift of Team', *San Antonio Express*, December 6, 1975; Deborah Weser, 'Spurs Debt Hit Again', *San Antonio Express*, December 17, 1975; 'Spurs' Debt to S.A. Tallied', *San Antonio Express*, December 23, 1975; 'Ho, Ho! Spurs Given \$53,000 Christmas Bill', *San Antonio Express*, December 23, 1975.

In the 1975-76 season, the Spurs went 50-34 and broke their franchise attendance record (336,083).³⁹ In the postseason, they pushed the eventual and last ABA champions, New York Nets, to a decisive seventh game in a series whose competitiveness, controversy, drama, and violence made it one of the most memorable in ABA history.⁴⁰ In the spring of 1976, the apparent talents of Spurs players and executives, along with an increased following in terms of spectatorship, earned them a place at the ABA-NBA merger negotiating table. Murphy had sought a merger with the NBA since the ABA's inception, and one had seemed imminent in 1971 after NBA executives had accepted an ABA proposal. Given both leagues' exorbitant legal fees resulting from lawsuits, it made financial sense to merge, but a suit brought by star player Oscar Robertson, and supported by the National Basketball Players' Association (NBPA), halted negotiations.⁴¹ The NBPA argued that a merger would create a monopoly and unfavourable working conditions, and its archaic reserve and option clauses proved problematic because they removed a player's ability to change teams.⁴² Despite its faults, the ABA empowered players. Before its inception, professional basketball salaries were modest, and NBA owners exiled players, but the creation of the ABA provided players with another venue to pursue the profession and earn better wages. In 1972, the United States Senate Antitrust Subcommittee proposed a settlement with new terms that eliminated the reserve clause, but owners from both leagues resisted.⁴³ In April 1976, the NBA and NBPA agreed to terms, and Robertson won his suit. The settlement instituted free agency, abolished the reserve and option clauses, allowed players to enter the draft directly after high school, gave those drafted the option to refuse to sign with a franchise and paid \$4.3 million to 479 players for unfair treatment. This settlement assured players that the merger would not strip them of their rights to work and petition and displayed how unionisation could empower athletic workers. Player associations in the NFL and MLB emulated the NBPA's tactics and eventually achieved free agency protections and more equitable revenue shares.⁴⁴

³⁹ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004): 107.

⁴⁰ 'A.B.A. Levies Basketbrawl', *New York Times*, April 22, 1976; Tom Orsborn, 'HemisFair Arena Memories', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 2017.

⁴¹ Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 422.

⁴² *Ibid*, 424.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 423-425.

⁴⁴ Oscar Robertson: Player of the Century, 'The Oscar Robertson Rule: Landmark Court Decision Changed the Balance of Power in Professional Sports', <https://www.oscarrobertson.com/oscar-robertson-rule> (accessed August 25, 2022).

ABA franchises lost approximately \$50 million over the league's nine years. Six franchises remained, but only four were eligible to join the NBA and in the summer of 1976, the Denver Nuggets, Indiana Pacers and Spurs, who each paid \$3.2 million, and the New York Nets, who paid \$8 million, joined the league. Labelled expansion teams, these franchises were excluded from television revenues for three seasons and voting on league decisions or realignment for two. They also submitted to a dispersal draft of the ABA players from the now-defunct Kentucky Colonels and Spirits of St. Louis. John Brown, the Colonels owner, agreed to fold his franchise for \$3 million, while the St. Louis owners negotiated one of the most lucrative deals in league history by agreeing to a \$2.2 million settlement and a share of television revenues from former ABA teams in perpetuity. NBA commissioner Larry O'Brien and his legal advisor David Stern led the merger's negotiations, while Drossos served on the ABA consortium.⁴⁵ He was pleased that the Spurs had been accepted into the NBA but recognised it came at a significant cost and, on return to San Antonio, he attempted to persuade local banks to help raise \$5 million. Drossos later acknowledged that the risk had paid off, but his usual confidence had wavered at the time.⁴⁶

San Antonio newspapers followed the merger closely, and, after learning of its completion, Mayor Cockrell discussed an arena expansion that Drossos, business leaders, and residents all supported.⁴⁷ San Antonians claimed the merger was 'the greatest thing that ever happened to San Antonio' and 'We need sports. I think it's terrific. San Antonio is getting better known all over the nation'. Other residents discussed the economic benefits of having the Spurs compete with historic NBA franchises. Another commented, 'San Antonio is tired of being second best. I don't see why we shouldn't have top sports and other entertainment'.⁴⁸ Business leaders also supported the Spurs' move, but emphasised it would take a collective effort to ensure the financial success of the franchise and city and they called on residents

⁴⁵ Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 428, 431, 432-433.

⁴⁶ Angelo Drossos, Interview, 1990, in Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association*, (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 433.

⁴⁷ Ray Evans, 'Spurs Alive in NBA Merger Plan', *San Antonio Light*, June 1, 1976; 'News Thrills Lila', *San Antonio News*, June 17, 1976; Ed Castillo, 'Spurs Merger- S.A. Fans Elated', *San Antonio Light*, June 18, 1976; Ed Castillo, 'Business Leaders Greet Merger With Enthusiasm', *San Antonio Light*, June 20, 1976; Paul Thompson, 'Spurs' Sales \$1 Million?', *San Antonio News*, June 18, 1976.

⁴⁸ Ed Castillo, 'Spurs Merger- S.A. Fans Elated', *San Antonio Light*, June 18, 1976.

to support the organisation in order to reap its civic and economic benefits.⁴⁹ Journalists gloated that San Antonio had achieved what Dallas never could and praised McCombs, Drossos, Shaefer, Stembridge, the Baseline Bums, fans, players, coaches, and local newspapers for securing the Spurs' future.⁵⁰ So, as part of the revamped NBA, the Spurs entered a new era.

The Spurs Become a Force in the NBA (1976-1983)

Before the Spurs' first NBA season, Drossos and twelve San Antonio banks raised \$5 million for operational and merger costs. The organisation established a regional television network that covered 60,000 square miles and doubled the previous year's ticket sales.⁵¹ The Spurs went 44-38 during the regular season, qualified for the playoffs and tallied franchise records for total (376,136), average (9,100) and single-game attendance (12,594).⁵² Fans and coaches selected Gervin and eleven other former ABA players to the 1977 NBA All-Star Game, but the Boston Celtics defeated the Spurs in their first-round playoff series primarily due to injuries sustained by Gervin and Silas. Local journalists claimed the Spurs had enhanced San Antonio's national reputation because they did what the city's historic Spanish missions, Riverwalk, and downtown skyscrapers never could. They 'put San Antonio in every daily newspaper from California to New York three days a week, six months a year'.⁵³ The team's performance in their debut NBA season proved they belonged at this level, and San Antonians embraced the franchise.

In their second NBA season, the Spurs went 52-30 and won their first Eastern Conference Central Division title. The team's success generated media attention and promising revenues, but Drossos remained concerned about the team's financial standing, although postseason qualification created the opportunity to earn approximately \$85,000 for every home game. Total attendance decreased slightly (373,707) due to a \$4 million arena renovation that reduced capacity, but Drossos

⁴⁹ Ed Castillo, 'Business Leaders Greet Merger With Enthusiasm', *San Antonio Light*, June 20, 1976; Paul Thompson, 'Spurs' Sales \$1 Million?', *San Antonio News*, June 18, 1976.

⁵⁰ Ed Castillo, 'Everything Went Right', *San Antonio Light*, June 20, 1976; 'Spurs Now Play With "Big Boys"', *San Antonio Light*, October 26, 1976.

⁵¹ Dan Cook, 'How San Antonio Won Its Spurs', *San Antonio Magazine*, January 1977; John Throwbridge, 'Spurs Have Come a Long Way Since Dallas Days', *San Antonio Light*, March 31, 1978.

⁵² Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 107.

⁵³ Dan Cook, 'How San Antonio Won Its Spurs', *San Antonio Magazine*, January 1977.

anticipated that the raised roof and additional six-thousand seats would increase admissions and revenues the following season.⁵⁴ Team success accompanied individual accolades as Drossos won the Executive of the Year Award, and Larry Kennon and Gervin earned All-Star selections.⁵⁵ Gervin also earned All-NBA honours, the scoring title, and the Seagram Seven Crowns Award, which ranked him as the best player in the league. Mayor Cockrell attended Gervin's award ceremony and thanked him for his exceptional play, and Gervin suggested that 'when you think of San Antonio, you always remember the Alamo, but now they'll remember the Spurs'.⁵⁶ Perhaps Gervin's assertion was not hyperbolic, given the subsequent reactions of local politicians, newspapers, and businesses. A welcome championship delegation headed by Cockrell consisted of city councilpersons, team shareholders, the chamber of commerce, the Spurs Tipoff Club, and the Baseline Bums who greeted the Spurs at the airport, along with thousands of San Antonians.⁵⁷ Subsequently, the city council awarded a plaque and a city keying to the team.⁵⁸

Team success increased local media coverage as the *Light* and *Express-News* printed extensive season preview and championship commemorative editions.⁵⁹ They also provided more detailed player features, although Gervin received more coverage than others.⁶⁰ Player features usually detailed one's play, but that changed in April of 1978 when, in an article titled 'Breadlines to Headlines for Gervin', Ray Evans illustrated how Gervin's exceptional talent had helped him escape Detroit's poverty, crime, and violence.⁶¹ Much like the character development in literature and film, mediated messages from the press increased interest, and this watershed moment transformed how Spurs players were covered

⁵⁴ John Throwbridge, 'Plenty of Loot For Franchise', *San Antonio Light*, April 16, 1978.

⁵⁵ Ray Evans, 'Knowing Spurs' Drossos is Love...or Hate', *San Antonio Light*, October 14, 1979.

⁵⁶ Barry Robinson, 'Gervin Named NBA's Best', *San Antonio Express*, April 14, 1978.

⁵⁷ 'Mayor Sets Spurs Welcome', *San Antonio News*, March 31, 1978; Bob Ostrum, 'Mayor Plans Big Welcome', *San Antonio Light*, March 31, 1978; *San Antonio Express*, 'Spurs Welcome Planned', April 1, 1978; 'The Championship: It's Spurs-ific', *San Antonio Light*, April 1, 1978.

⁵⁸ San Antonio Light Staff, 'Things Not Always Rosy for Franchise', *San Antonio Light*, April 16, 1978; *San Antonio Express*, 'The Spurs Winners', April 7, 1978.

⁵⁹ San Antonio Express-News Staff, 'Spurrific! The Champs Are On Their Way', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 1978; Clifford Broyles, 'Spurs Special', *San Antonio Express*, April 11, 1978.

⁶⁰ Kevin O'Keefe, 'Life After the Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 1, 1978; San Antonio Light Staff, 'Kenon: Mr. (K)wick, Allan: Mr. Hustle', *San Antonio Light*, April 16, 1978; San Antonio Light Staff, 'Coby Dietrick: The Glue, Gale: Mr. Defense, Olberding: Young Bull', *San Antonio Light*, April 16, 1978; Elaine Noll, 'Coby Earns His Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 8, 1978; Jim Hutton, 'Silas is Better Late Than Never', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 1978;

⁶¹ Ray Evans, 'The Iceman Cometh: Breadlines to Headlines for Gervin', *San Antonio Light*, April 16, 1978.

in subsequent years, as the media continued to encourage fandom across the city.⁶² The *Light* attempted to increase reader engagement through their coverage, with Spurs sections featuring many colour photographs, full-page posters, team logo patches, watch party locations, and game-day bussing information. They also encouraged supporters to vote for their favourite player through mail-in ballots. The *Express-News* increased coverage of the Spurs and their followers, and, together, these newspapers generated many new fan features. Hundreds of supporters camped overnight outside the arena box office, hoping to procure playoff tickets, with one fan comparing the popularity of the Spurs to that of the Rolling Stones.⁶³ Although the Spurs lost to the Washington Bullets in the Eastern Conference Semifinals, large numbers of supporters greeted them at the airport, while local and national merchants competed to purchase advertising space in Spurs newspaper sections.⁶⁴

Advertisements in Spurs sections increased, diversified, and evolved following the team's success. Typical male-targeted marketing, such as those about weight and hair loss or gentlemen's clubs, were replaced with advertisements for various local businesses who appealed to Spurs fans by explicitly embracing the team in their postings. Lone Star Beer inventively produced a multilingual campaign, which the franchise and others would emulate and, as Gervin had noted, the Spurs increasingly symbolised civic pride, as local merchants allied themselves with the team.⁶⁵ While the Spurs did not win an NBA championship, this season provided a watershed moment due to the increased commitment of journalists and businesses to promote 'Spursmania', resulting in elevated fan enthusiasm.⁶⁶ Even local musicians got in on the act claiming they created the first Spurs theme song titled, 'Spurs Fever'.⁶⁷ The *Light* and *Express-News* printed a Spurs season preview and special playoff editions in every season that followed.

⁶² Bob Ostrum, *San Antonio Light*, April 18, 1978.

⁶³ Michael Quintanilla, 'Something Spurred Them On', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 16, 1978; Carolyn Elliott, 'Strange Bedfellows in Ticket Line', *San Antonio Light*, April 16, 1978; Kevin O'Keeffe, 'Playoff Fever Affects Wives', *San Antonio Express*, April 20, 1978; Bob Ostrum, 'Right On, Spurs! Now the 'Biggie'', *San Antonio Light*, April 18, 1978.

⁶⁴ Ray Evans, 'Fans Still Love the San Antonio Spurs', *San Antonio Light*, April 30, 1978.

⁶⁵ Ray Evans, 'The Iceman Cometh: Breadlines to Headlines for Gervin', *San Antonio Light*, April 16, 1978.

⁶⁶ 'The Championship: It's Spurs-ific', *San Antonio Light*, April 1, 1978.

⁶⁷ Wiley Alexander, 'Spurs Have Own Theme Song', *San Antonio Light*, September 4, 1978.

Contractors completed arena renovations prior to the 1978-79 season, making the new capacity 16,057, and, as a result, gate attendance reached a record high (489,207), a figure that would not be matched for over a decade.⁶⁸ The team finished with a 48-34 record and won their second consecutive division title, with newspapers recording this triumph with more Spurs special editions.⁶⁹ Historically, postseason disappointment had followed regular season success and, since arriving in San Antonio, the team had failed to win all five of their playoff series and were 1-12 overall as a franchise.⁷⁰ Sportswriters had labelled them 'chokers', but All-Stars Gervin, who earned All-NBA honours and the scoring title for a second consecutive year, and Kennon proved doubters wrong when they defeated the Philadelphia 76ers in the Eastern Conference Semifinals.⁷¹ In the Eastern Conference Finals, the Washington Bullets overcame the Spurs' 3-1 series lead to earn a spot in the championship series, becoming the third team in league history to overcome such a deficit.⁷² In the decisive seventh game, the Spurs relinquished a five-point lead with minutes to play, losing 105-107. Stembridge, the Spurs' radio voice who commented on 1,100 games over twelve seasons and who was the last front office holdout from Dallas, departed after the loss to pursue a career in petrochemicals. Twenty-eight years later, he admitted the pain from that game still lingered.⁷³ Journalists wrote more player features than ever before, and a few included personally revealing biographical information.⁷⁴ These biopics along with special editions and fan engagements recruited more committed Spurs fans.⁷⁵ While fans

⁶⁸ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 108.

⁶⁹ San Antonio Light Staff, 'Spurs Special: San Antonio Spurs Central Division Champs', *San Antonio Light*, April 15, 1978; San Antonio Express-News Staff, 'Spurs Playoff Guide', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 15, 1979.

⁷⁰ Jeff Grossman, 'Spurs Shoot for Lucky 7', *San Antonio Express*, May 2, 1979.

⁷¹ Barry Robinson, 'Champs or Chokers? Tonight Will Tell', *San Antonio Express*, May 2, 1979; Elaine Noll, 'Spurs Fighting Playoff Jinx', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 1978; Jeff Cohen, 'Champs Did It: Spurs Win 111-108; S.A. Squad Quiets Long Time Critics', *San Antonio Light*, May 3, 1979.

⁷² Sports Illustrated Staff, 'NBA Playoff 3-1 Comebacks', *Sports Illustrated*, May 18, 2015.

⁷³ Jeff Grossman, 'Stembridge Quits as Spurs Announcer', *San Antonio Express*, May 2, 1979; Tim Griffin, 'Stembridge Reminisces About Days as Spurs' First Announcer', *mySA*, June 6, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081204220542/http://www.mysanantonio.com/sports/columnists/tgriffin/stories/MYSA061107.02S.COL.BKNgriffin.spurs.3220c54.html> (accessed June 7, 2023).

⁷⁴ Kevin O'Keeffe, 'Kennon Manifests His Destiny', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 8, 1978; Jim Hutton, 'Silas is Better Late Than Never', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 8, 1978; Elaine Noll, 'Coby Earns His Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 8, 1978; John Throwbridge, 'Long Road Back for Silas', *San Antonio Light*, April 15, 1979; San Antonio Express-News Staff, 'More Profiles of Central Champs', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 15, 1979; San Antonio Express-News Staff, 'S.A. Spurs, Briefly', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 15, 1979.

⁷⁵ San Antonio Express-News Staff, 'Spurs Team Autographed Photo', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 1979; San Antonio Express-News Staff, 'Spurrific! The Champs Are On Their Way', *San*

waiting in long queues for tickets seemed unremarkable, the fact that supporters camped out for tickets to games that never transpired and trespassed to steal Spurs artefacts revealed a zeal previously unseen.⁷⁶ This passion was observed in the joys of experienced and anticipatory victories and in reactions to relocation threats. So, while the Spurs became a unifying symbol in the city, there were always negative undercurrents, such as when a disagreement over an additional row of seats in the arena pushed Drossos to threaten to uproot the franchise if city leaders did not capitulate.⁷⁷

Drossos recognised the financial implications of postseason play which included monetary league bonuses and additional revenue from home games of upwards of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Previously, he had only focused on maximising profits, but during the 1979 postseason, he claimed that he valued team success more than revenue streams and that he took pride in what the players achieved. It seemed the fan momentarily overcame the executive, although those personas were not mutually exclusive.⁷⁸ Drossos often bluffed to procure agreeable terms on negotiations, but his unapologetic business approach alienated supporters. Some San Antonians did not trust him, despite his occasional lapses into the fan they could empathise with, and their concerns were warranted, as he had threatened to send the franchise back to Dallas following a renovation disagreement. This distrust continued for the remainder of Drossos' tenure and beyond, unsurprisingly, given the conditional nature of American sports franchises.⁷⁹

Gervin won his third consecutive scoring title, but the team underperformed during the 1979-80 season.⁸⁰ Executives fired head coach Doug Moe and replaced him

Antonio Express-News, April 9, 1978; Clifford Broyles, 'Spurs Special', *San Antonio Express*, April 11, 1978; San Antonio Express-News Staff, 'Meet Your Favorite Spur at Sears!', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 8, 1978; San Antonio Light Staff, 'Bus Service', *San Antonio Light*, May 16, 1979; 'Spurs Backers Wait for Tickets', *San Antonio News*, May 14, 1979.

⁷⁶ Bill Graham, 'Spurs Fans Camp Out for Game that May Never Be', *San Antonio News*, May 17, 1979; 'Ardent Fan Steals a Net', *San Antonio Light*, May 10, 1979.

⁷⁷ San Antonio News Staff, 'Giant Spur Billboard', *San Antonio News*, May 18, 1979; Greg Thompson, 'Graduation Plans Yield to Spurs: School Officials' Vote Clears Way for Playoffs', *San Antonio News*, May 16, 1979.

⁷⁸ Barry Robinson, 'Champs or Chokers? Tonight Will Tell', *San Antonio Express*, May 2, 1979; San Antonio Light Staff, 'Playoff Teams Share Pot of Gold', *San Antonio Light*, April 18, 1979; Kevin O'Keeffe, 'Just Call Him Angelo Dro\$\$oS', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 1978.

⁷⁹ San Antonio News Staff, 'Good News for Fans" Spurs Won't Move: Seating Cleared Up', *San Antonio News*, October 9, 1979; Ray Evans, 'Knowing Spurs' Drossos is Love...or Hate', *San Antonio Light*, October 14, 1979.

⁸⁰ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 108, 50.

with general manager Bob Bass, but players and fans recognised that the organisation's issues extended beyond one individual.⁸¹ The team finished 41-41, attendance dropped (468,657), and the Houston Rockets defeated the Spurs in their first-round playoff series. This unremarkable season led to numerous changes, with team management hiring Stan Albeck as head coach and procuring eight new players for the 1980-81 season with the aim of complementing the team's scoring prowess by improving its defence and rebounding.⁸² Concurrently, a confrontation between the Baseline Bums and Boston Celtics made national headlines. On January 5, 1980, some Celtics and Bums got into a verbal and physical altercation with Johnny Merla, a truck driver and Bum, claiming that players Larry Bird and Dave Cowens had assaulted him. He also argued that coach Bill Fitch slandered him, and he filed a \$1.8 million civil lawsuit. Both sides claimed victory following the court's dismissal of the case. Bird's attorneys successfully argued that he acted in self-defence, while Merla's showed that he was physically assaulted.⁸³ This incident appears to be the first serious altercation between Spurs fans and opponents and highlights increased levels of fanaticism among some Spurs supporters.

In the fall of 1980, the Spurs and city council agreed to a new five-year HemisFair Arena lease, with the city taking 7.5 per cent of gross sales, twenty-five per cent of advertising revenue and \$1,400 for each home game.⁸⁴ League executives dealt with increased player drug use (predominately cocaine), installed safer basketball rims, and continued a multiyear realignment plan which transplanted the Spurs from the Eastern Conference Central Division to the Western Conference Midwest.⁸⁵ Management's acquisitions of Albeck and rebounding and defensive talent helped the team earn a 52-30 record, matching the best finish in team history. Albeck won Coach of the Year, Gervin earned All-NBA honours, and the team secured their first

⁸¹ Jeff Cohen, 'News Isn't Shocking For Spurs' Players, *San Antonio Light*, March 2, 1980; Jeff Cohen, 'Spurs Fans' Reactions', *San Antonio Light*, March 2, 1980.

⁸² Bob Ostrum, 'Ax Falls on Spurs' Doug Moe', *San Antonio Light*, March 2, 1980; Jeff Cohen, 'Albeck Named New Coach: Spurs Say "Stan is the Man"', *San Antonio Light*, June 12, 1980; Bob Ostrum, 'Albeck No Stranger to the Arena', *San Antonio Light*, June 12, 1980.

⁸³ Danny Garcia, 'Spurs Fan, Celtics Players Claim Lawsuit Victory', *San Antonio Light*, September 19, 1981; Diana Gonzales, 'Jury Begins Deliberation in \$825,000 Damage Suit', *San Antonio Express*, September 18, 1981; Diana Gonzales, 'Jury Says NBA Players Bird, Cowens Owe Merla Nothing', *San Antonio Express*, September 19, 1981; Diana Gonzales, 'Officer Says Merla Did Spitting', *San Antonio Express*, September 17, 1981. Danny Garcia, 'Witness: Merla was Intoxicated', *San Antonio Light*, September 17, 1981.

⁸⁴ Deborah Weser, 'Council to Get New Spurs Pact', *San Antonio Light*, November 11, 1980.

⁸⁵ UPI, 'O'Brien Says NBA Drugs Use Small', *San Antonio Light*, October 5, 1980; UPI, 'NBA Testing "Dunk-Proof" Rims', *San Antonio Light*, October 5, 1980.

Midwest Division title, although gate attendance dropped for a third consecutive year (440,553).⁸⁶ Some league executives accused Drossos of unethical practices when acquiring Albeck and criticised his new team bonus incentive plan, which awarded players extra money based on total team wins. Albeck claimed the program cultivated players' selflessness and sustained intensity as games previously deemed meaningless now mattered, but other league executives argued it alienated fans and damaged the spirit of competition (perhaps they were attempting to protect their margins). Drossos dismissed criticisms, arguing that the over half a million dollars awarded to players was well spent, and that he planned to implement the program permanently.⁸⁷ In the playoffs, the team lost a decisive seventh game to the Houston Rockets in the Western Conference Semifinals. Although attendance numbers faltered, one journalist argued that fan fervour did not in her 1981 article.⁸⁸ Through interviews with the wives and girlfriends of Spurs players, she uncovered a story that her predominantly male counterparts had previously overlooked. Women shared how their support of their partner allowed them to travel, and they discussed issues surrounding fame and their aspirations. Some worked in real estate, television, and healthcare, and most of them had attended college. Many of these women were eager to invest and maximise the earned capital of their partners to ensure their family's future.⁸⁹

That same year, newspaper player features increased, and player monikers became even more widespread. Gervin (The Iceman) and Silas' (Captain Late) nicknames had dominated Spurs lore, but when Kevin O'Keeffe nicknamed Dave Corzine, Paul Griffin, George Johnson, Reggie Johnson, Mark Olberding, and Kevin Restani as the 'Bruise Brothers', their popularity grew. Witt and Kinney Shoe Stores created a poster featuring these six players dressed in fedoras, ties, and sunglasses as a homage to the popular film *The Blues Brothers*.⁹⁰ Many supporters appreciated the

⁸⁶ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 108; 'Albeck & McHone- A Division Title Their First Year', *San Antonio Light*, October 28, 1981.

⁸⁷ 'Gervin Sacrifices Scoring for Victories', *San Antonio Light*, April 5, 1981; 'Incentive Plan Termed Success', *San Antonio Light*, April 5, 1981.

⁸⁸ 'Attendance Average', *San Antonio Light*, April 5, 1981.

⁸⁹ Marcy Meffert, 'Spurs' Wives Can't Be 'Just Like Other Fans', *San Antonio Light*, January 18, 1981.

⁹⁰ Mark Rybczyk, 'Did You Have this Poster When You Were a Kid? Remembering the Bruise Brothers', *San Antonio Uncovered: Fun Facts and Hidden Histories*, January 12, 2014, <https://www.sanantoniouncovered.com/2014/01/did-you-have-this-poster-when-your-were.html> (accessed November 8, 2022); Jerry Briggs, 'Bruise Brother' Defied Image' *San Antonio Express-*

“blue collar” players who did the team’s “dirty work” for comparatively modest sums.⁹¹ Over forty local merchants continued purchasing substantial advertising space in Spurs newspaper sections, sometimes featuring players and coaches as endorsers.⁹² It seems then, that, while the season had mirrored a typical Spurs campaign, noticeable changes had taken place around the organisation, including innovative marketing and an increased coverage of women by women.

Before the 1981-82 campaign, management traded the last original Spur and team captain Silas, a fan favourite who held franchise records for most games played and assists, to the Cleveland Cavaliers. Albeck then appointed Gervin as captain as they aimed to overcome their playoff jinx.⁹³ Marketers attempted to rebrand a squad that went ‘belly up’ during the playoffs by creating the slogan ‘No More Mr. Nice Guy’ on their season ticket advertisements. Spurs players embraced the mantra but understood it would take more to improve the team’s performance. Bass acquired All-Star forward Mike Mitchell to give the team a secondary scoring option to Gervin, and the two impressed.⁹⁴ For instance, they combined to score ninety-five points in a 171-166 win against the Milwaukee Bucks in what was then the NBA’s highest-scoring game.⁹⁵ For Bass, the team’s two main objectives were to retain their division title and improve their playoff performance, and they accomplished both goals, qualifying for their first Western Conference Finals before losing to the eventual champion Los Angeles Lakers.⁹⁶ Gervin won his fourth NBA scoring title in

News, May 1, 2010; Kevin O’Keeffe, ‘By George, He Has Other Interests’, *San Antonio Express*, January 23, 1981; Johnson Hopes He’s Found a Home in S.A.’, *San Antonio Light*, October 6, 1980; ‘San Antonio Spurs: New Season, New Spurs Look’, *San Antonio Light*, October 5, 1980; ‘George Johnson Thrives on Blocking Foes’ Shots’, *San Antonio Light*, April 5, 1981; ‘Olberding Becomes Consummate Team Player’, *San Antonio Light*, April 5, 1981; ‘Moor Makes His Mark’, *San Antonio Light*, April 5, 1981; ‘Spurs Gamble on Brewer, Win’, *San Antonio Light*, April 5, 1981; ‘Reggie Johnson Takes Up Where Kennon Left Off’, *San Antonio Light*, April 5, 1981; ‘Mayor’ Restani Begins Second Term’, *San Antonio Light*, April 5, 1981; ‘Midwest Champs Ready For Playoffs’, *San Antonio Light*, April 5, 1981.

⁹¹ ‘The Bruise Brothers’, *San Antonio Express-News*, January 22, 1981; ‘Branding the Bruise Brothers’, National Basketball Association: San Antonio Spurs, April 12, 2015, <https://www.nba.com/spurs/branding-bruise-brothers-0>, <https://www.nba.com/spurs/branding-bruise-brothers> (accessed November 8, 2022); ‘Incentive Plan Termed Success’, *San Antonio Light*, April 5, 1981.

⁹² ‘Midwest Champs Ready For Playoffs’, *San Antonio Light*, April 5, 1981.

⁹³ ‘Spurs Deal Silas to Cavaliers’, *New York Times*, June 17, 1981; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 50.

⁹⁴ Staff, ‘From Average to the Top, but ‘No More Mister Nice Guy’, *San Antonio Light*, October 28, 1981.

⁹⁵ ‘Milwaukee Bucks at San Antonio Spurs Box Score, March 6, 1982’, Basketball Reference, <https://www.basketball-reference.com/boxscores/198203060SAS.html> (accessed November 8, 2022); Glenn Rodgers, ‘Points in Time’, *San Antonio Express-News*, March 6, 2002.

⁹⁶ Jim Hutton, ‘Strategy: How to Build a Better Team’, *San Antonio Express-News*, November 29, 1981.

five seasons and earned All-NBA honours, but, despite team success, gate attendance lagged for a third consecutive year (434,243).⁹⁷

In the summer of 1982, McCombs sold his twenty per cent share of the team, with Drossos insisting that they could only be bought by existing owners. McCombs capitalised on the financial fragility of the Denver Nuggets and purchased complete control of the franchise for \$10 million.⁹⁸ Drossos assured the press that the split was amicable, that McCombs would not hurt the Spurs and that the franchise was financially sound after netting \$1,344,526 from the previous season.⁹⁹ Following the loss to the Lakers, executives traded all but one of the Bruise Brothers away to acquire the perennial All-Star Artis Gilmore from the Chicago Bulls in the hope that he could challenge Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who had dominated the Western Conference Finals. Some questioned the move, given Gilmore's age and the extensive loss of assets, but Gilmore performed well and was selected as an All-Star with Gervin.¹⁰⁰ The Spurs earned a then franchise record fifty-three wins, secured their third consecutive Midwest Division title and a tenth consecutive playoff appearance, but gate attendance dropped again (434,243) and this, along with the extended incentive bonuses for wins, decreased profits by more than half (\$667,369).¹⁰¹ Drossos brokered a deal with a cable television network, The Sports Channel, which broadcasted all home games locally for the first time, and the increase in subscriptions for the channel suggests that this new form of consumption may at least partially account for decreased attendance.¹⁰² Increased admission costs could have also contributed, but Drossos argued that Spurs' tickets were the most affordable in the NBA, with only two out of twenty-three teams offering tickets cheaper than the \$4 low of the Spurs. Journalists, however, argued that these \$4 seats offered poor and obstructed views. Additionally, the most expensive tickets

⁹⁷ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 108.

⁹⁸ Tom Orsborn, 'San Antonio Spurs to Honor Former Owner Red McCombs on Saturday Night', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 8, 2022; Staff, 'Nuggets, Rockers are Sold', *New York Times*, June 16, 1982; Jeffrey Morton, 'How the NBA and the Nuggets Made History...', SB Nation- Denver Stiffs, June 27, 2016, <https://www.denverstiffs.com/2016/6/27/12031196/how-the-nba-and-the-nuggets-made-history-then-messed-it-all-up-part-1> (accessed November 8, 2022); Chris O'Connell, 'Late the Game: The McCombs School of Sports Ownership', *Alcade*, December 17, 2015.

⁹⁹ Mike Bruton, 'Spurs Plan No Changes', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 16, 1982; Jerry Briggs, 'State of the Spurs: The Bottom Line', *San Antonio Light*, August 7, 1983.

¹⁰⁰ Charles McCoy, 'Spirited Debate Centers on Gilmore's price, age', *San Antonio Light*, July 23, 1982.

¹⁰¹ 'Spurs Playoff Streak Reaches 10', *San Antonio Light*, April 24, 1983.

¹⁰² Jerry Briggs, 'State of the Spurs: The Bottom Line', *San Antonio Light*, August 7, 1983.

cost \$15, and represented a substantial increase that placed the average Spurs ticket in the middle of the NBA. Drossos claimed the new television deal could decrease admission costs but ticket hikes left critics unconvinced.¹⁰³ After qualifying for the playoffs, supporters and teammates praised Gilmore, but some journalists remained sceptical of what the team could achieve in the postseason.¹⁰⁴ The Spurs defeated McCombs' Nuggets in the Western Conference Semifinals and then lost to Los Angeles again in the Western Conference Finals in a competitive series. Overall, however, the disappointment surrounding previous postseason defeats was replaced with pride as most considered the Spurs' tenth anniversary season the best in franchise history.¹⁰⁵

Local newspapers continued their extended coverage of the Spurs, including several special editions and staff features, and one issue uncovered previously unseen elements of the organisation by challenging supporters to learn about more than just the team and discover who else contributed to the organisation. Readers were introduced to the team's secretary-treasurer, ticket manager, ball boys, equipment courier, concessions manager, athletic trainer, marketing director, public relations director, business manager, arena custodian, and the Quicksilver dance troupe founder and choreographer.¹⁰⁶ Drossos had previously disapproved of team cheerleaders because 'they just got in the way', but the Quicksilver head, Lisa Hawes, argued that her professionalised group valued technical precision and were dissimilar to cheerleaders. More than 600 dancers applied, over 450 auditioned, and only twenty-two were selected to join the group, which rehearsed for sixteen hours a week and regularly featured in local newspapers.¹⁰⁷ To the dancers' dismay, Spurs management ended their relationship at season's end, but Quicksilver modelled how future competitive dance groups like the Silver Dancers could diversify in-game entertainment.¹⁰⁸ The Coyote mascot also debuted that season

¹⁰³ Elaine Noll, 'A Nice Price for 'Ice' in San Antonio', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 12, 1982.

¹⁰⁴ Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs Ride 'A Train' Into Playoffs', *San Antonio Light*, April 24, 1983; Buck Harvey, 'The Verdict's Still Out On this Spurs Team', *San Antonio Light*, April 24, 1983.

¹⁰⁵ Mike Bruton, 'Spurs Proud of Year', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 22, 1983; Mike Bruton, 'Spurs Finish One Era, Open Another', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 22, 1983; Kevin O'Keeffe, 'Hats Off to the Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 22, 1983.

¹⁰⁶ Kevin Rashad "Slick" Hines, Obituary, *San Antonio Express-News*, April 3, 2003; 'They Spark the Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 21, 1982.

¹⁰⁷ 'They Spark the Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 21, 1982.

¹⁰⁸ Madalyn Mendoza, 'Spurs Quicksilver Dancers, Precursor to the Silver Dancers, are Searching for Long- Lost Teammates', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 5, 2018; Cynthia Trinidad,

and expanded the Spurs' game experience.¹⁰⁹ Pitluk, an original Spurs investor, arranged a mascot audition for a former college athlete, Tim Derk, who impressed Spurs general manager Bob Bass with his athleticism, creativity, and ball skills. Derk created the Coyote and recalled that during the mascot's infancy, his role was improvised and precarious, since some thought the character detracted from the franchise's professionalism. Despite many requests, Derk never revealed his identity, and his twenty-one-year career solidified the Coyote into an organisational staple.¹¹⁰ The female presence at Spurs games increased, especially within the Baseline Bums, with President Rudy Hettler pointing out that nearly half of the group were now women, who were regarded by some as bringing passion, sentimentality, and noise that their male counterparts could not match. The principal prerogative for the Bums was having fun, and as one staff writer put it, 'having fun knows no gender'.¹¹¹ Despite some of these women's initial limited knowledge of the sport and originally attending to accompany a spouse, they claimed and moulded their fandom over time, as can be seen in more detail in chapter five. Bum Becky Hettler, for example, explained that she often encountered frustration and used games as a form of therapy. As the number of females surrounding the organisation grew, so too did their influence.¹¹²

The 1982-83 season represented the continuity and change witnessed during the Spurs' first decade. The organisation had constructed a winning team and an attractive product and adapted when needed; supporters remained despite increased costs, and, after nine years, McCombs had departed, and Drossos had acquired forty-two per cent of the franchise. Cable television, changing spectator demographics, and an ageing roster would drive further organisational

Instagram Page, <https://www.instagram.com/cynthialtrinidad/?hl=en> (accessed November 8, 2022); Chris Quinn, 'A Look Back at the Silver Dancers, a Spurs Staple for More Than Three Decades', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 24, 2018; Robert Trinidad, 'The Making of the NBA San Antonio Spurs Quicksilver Dancers', YouTube video, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rd0KTUUY6_4 (accessed November 8, 2022); Robert Trinidad, '35-Year NBA Spurs Quicksilver Reunion', YouTube video, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZDkhJ1Mrwo> (accessed November 8, 2022).

¹⁰⁹ JRobbins, 'Tim Derk Takes on a New Role', Spurs, August 30, 2004, https://www.nba.com/spurs/news/derk_announcement_040830.html (accessed November 8, 2022).

¹¹⁰ Jim Hutton, 'It's All a Howl to Him', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 28, 1984; Staff, 'Coyote's Identity', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 7, 1985; Tim Derk, *Hi Mom, Send Sheep! My Life as the Coyote and After* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2006): 9-11, 13-14, xvii.

¹¹¹ Sarah Pattee, 'This Lady is a Bum', *San Antonio Light*, January 30, 1983; Terry Frei, 'Spurs' Baseline Bums Just 120 Pro Basketball Fans Having Fun', *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1985.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

adaptation.¹¹³ Unfortunately for the Spurs, financial strength, community support, and team performances faltered throughout the remainder of the decade.

Troubling Times and the McCombs Takeover (1983-1989)

By the summer of 1983, Drossos' relationship with Coach Albeck had deteriorated to the point that Drossos procured a restraining order against him. The Spurs traded Albeck to the New York Nets for a future draft pick and \$300,000, while new head coach Morris McHone was fired after only thirty-one games.¹¹⁴ Bass then served as coach, and the team finished with a 37-45 record failing to qualify for the postseason after back-to-back Western Conference Finals appearances.¹¹⁵ Inconsistent coaching and playing performances allied to an ageing roster led to a disappointing season, and attendance numbers dropped to 375,900.¹¹⁶ On a positive note, the organisation ceremoniously retired the jersey number of long-time captain James Silas, the first Spur to be honoured in this manner.¹¹⁷

In May of 1984, management appointed Cotton Fitzsimmons as head coach in a move approved of by many supporters.¹¹⁸ The team slightly improved, finishing with a 41-41 record, but the Denver Nuggets defeated them in their first-round playoff series, and gate attendance fell for the sixth consecutive year (364,398).¹¹⁹ Ageing stars Gervin and Gilmore still contributed on the court, and Gervin earned his ninth consecutive NBA All-Star selection but he skipped mandatory preseason workouts, leading to his trade to the Chicago Bulls just before the start of the 1985-86 season. Gervin struggled with cocaine addiction, and while the Spurs prided themselves on dealing with these issues, teams across the league experienced the fallout of a national drugs crisis.¹²⁰ Gervin's substance abuse contributed to his divorce in 1984;

¹¹³ Nelson Allen, 'Angelo Drossos: Does the Spurs' Biggest Fan Have Something Up His Sleeve?', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 30, 1983.

¹¹⁴ Roy S. Johnson, 'Agreement Opens Way for Albeck to Be Net Coach', *New York Times*, June 8, 1983; Jerry Briggs, 'McHone Admits Mistakes as Spurs' Head Coach', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 20, 1984.

¹¹⁵ Nelson Allen, 'The Little Franchise that Could', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 30, 1983.

¹¹⁶ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 109.

¹¹⁷ Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs to Retire Silas' No. 13', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 20, 1984.

¹¹⁸ Wilfredo Ramirez and Rob Leibold 'Cotton-Picking Spurs Cheered', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 10, 1984; John Hutton, 'Why this Man was Chosen to Save the San Antonio Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 22, 1984.

¹¹⁹ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 109.

¹²⁰ Buck Harvey, 'Spurs Receive Kudos from Around the World', *San Antonio Light*, April 19, 1987; Jim Lefko, 'Mitchell Goes to Drug Clinic', *San Antonio Light*, March 12, 1987.

he became depressed and made destructive decisions, subsequently overdosing and being rushed to the hospital in a critical condition.¹²¹ The Gervin era in San Antonio thus ended unceremoniously, and the franchise searched for ways to improve.

The Gervin-less Spurs finished 1985-86 with a 35-47 record, were defeated in the first round of the playoffs, and attracted a gate attendance of 336,407.¹²² Construction on and around HemisFair Arena's grounds along with public disagreements over the franchise's future inconvenienced and agitated supporters.¹²³ Drossos threatened San Antonians, stating that if attendance did not improve, 'the handwriting is on the wall that NBA basketball is through in San Antonio', although journalists identified Drossos' coaching appointments as the culprit that had ruined a 'grand franchise'.¹²⁴ Some Spurs players alleged that management pulled contributing players from the court to ensure the team would lose games to win a higher selection in the NBA Draft, and while Drossos denied the allegations, it was a common practice in the U.S. given that there was no promotion or relegation and losing teams were rewarded with access to top

¹²¹ Patrick Canty, 'Divorce Settlement Frosts Spurs' 'Iceman', *San Antonio Light*, January 9, 1985; Staff, 'Gervin Will Ask New Divorce Trial', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 12, 1985; Neil Landsman, 'Spur Officials Push for NBA Crackdown on Drug Problems', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 27, 1985; Staff, 'Former San Antonio Spurs Star George 'The Iceman' Gervin Went to a Hospital', *Associated Press*, February 28, 1989; Jim Litke, 'Iceman' Out in the Cold, Battles for Comeback', *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1989; John Harris, 'The Iceman' Overcomes the Cold Curse of Drugs', *Tampa Bay Times*, May 13, 1991; Harvey Araton, 'The 12-Step Coach', *New York Times Magazine*, April 11, 1993.

¹²² Staff, 'Ticket Sales Lag for Spurs' Playoff', *San Antonio Light*, April 21, 1986; Jim Lefko, 'Turnout of 7,918 Smallest in Spurs' NBA Playoff History', *San Antonio Light*, April 24, 1986; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004): 109.

¹²³ Staff, 'Spurs Owner Discussing a Move to Coliseum', *San Antonio Light*, May 8, 1985; Neil Landsman, 'Warning: Don't Call Spurs Owner's Bluff', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 12, 1985; Jim Wood and Rob Liebold, 'Spurs Must Stay in S.A., Mayor Says', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 9, 1985; Tim Griffin, 'Time Against Stadium Move', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 31, 1985; Paul Thompson, 'Spurs Boss Drossos Gave Wrong Impression Over Arena', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 7, 1985; Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs Staying in Arena', *San Antonio Light*, June 6, 1985; Jerry Briggs, 'Drossos is Leaning Toward Keeping Spurs in S.A.', *San Antonio Light*, May 11, 1985; Buck Harvey, 'What is Real Reason for Drossos' Move?', *San Antonio Light*, May 9, 1985; Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs Face Uncertain Future', *San Antonio Light*, May 26, 1985; Susie Phillips, 'Drossos, Cisneros Meet Regarding Arena Contract', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 12, 1985; Susie Phillips, 'City Studies Suing Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 20, 1985; Tim Griffin, Susie Phillips and Richard Smith, 'Drossos Turns Down City's \$1.9 Million Offer', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 31, 1985; Jim Wood and Susie Phillips, 'Drossos, City Talks Collapse', *San Antonio Express-News*, August 16, 1985; Mike Tolson, 'End May be in Sight for Spurs' Bouncing', *San Antonio Light*, August 4, 1985; Kathryn Kase and Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs, City Reach Tentative Agreement', *San Antonio Light*, January 11, 1986; Buck Harvey, 'Red Should Polish Spurs' Rusty Image', *San Antonio Light*, May 7, 1986; Kevin O'Keefe, 'Red's Back in Spurs' Fold', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 7, 1986.

¹²⁴ Glenn Rogers, 'Drossos Warns Fans', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 3, 1985; Buck Harvey, 'Red Should Polish Spurs' Rusty Image', *San Antonio Light*, May 7, 1986.

prospects.¹²⁵ Following the season's end, McCombs returned and purchased more than twenty per cent interest in the organisation, which comforted some supporters, and Drossos hoped the pair could devise a franchise rebuild.¹²⁶ Despite the turmoil, Spurs forward Gene Banks worked with local advocates to create a philanthropic organisation to serve San Antonio's historically black and impoverished east side neighbourhoods. He established the 'Fiesta League', which provided hundreds of San Antonio youths with a summer program focused on basketball, academics, and community service.¹²⁷ Future players and the organisation would emulate the trend set by Banks as the franchise increased its community outreach youth programs.¹²⁸

In the spring of 1986, Spurs executives replaced Fitzsimmons with Bob Weiss, who promised to cultivate an exciting offensive style like that seen during Gervin's prime.¹²⁹ Spurs marketers parted with Pitluk's group and hired the Goerner-Vrba advertising agency to generate new promotions. The organisation doubled their advertising spending to attract new season ticketholders and purchased six billboards and ad space at one-hundred and twenty bus stops to promote the Clark Kent inspired 'Suit up, San Antonio!' campaign. They also sought the endorsements of current and former mayors Henry Cisneros and Lila Cockrell.¹³⁰ Supporters bought an encouraging number of tickets over the summer, but that momentum faded.¹³¹ Despite investing in advertising and some inspiring play from guards Alvin Robertson and Johnny Moore, the organisation recorded lows in gate attendance (328,368) and wins (28) since joining the NBA.¹³² That season the Spurs unveiled the first centre-mounted jumbotron (Figure 2.1), which was thirty feet wide and twenty feet tall, which other professional sports teams emulated over the following

¹²⁵ Jerry Briggs, 'Drossos: Charges 'a Joke', *San Antonio Light*, April 8, 1986.

¹²⁶ Buck Harvey, 'Red Should Polish Spurs' Rusty Image', *San Antonio Light*, May 7, 1986; Jim Lefko, 'McCombs Back with Spurs', *San Antonio Light*, May 7, 1986.

¹²⁷ John Jeter, 'Spurs Helps Kids 'Reach Heights'', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 14, 1985.

¹²⁸ Keri Guten, 'Having a Ball with the Spurs', *San Antonio Light*, January 6, 1985; Staff, 'Spurs Notes', *San Antonio Light*, April 8, 1986.

¹²⁹ Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs Send Cotton Packing', *San Antonio Light*, April 24, 1986; Kevin O'Keeffe, 'Weiss Faces Toughest Act', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 28, 1986; Jim Hutton, 'Spurs Make Weiss Choice', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 28, 1986; Jim Hutton, 'Bob Weiss: Will this Unassuming Man Save the Spurs?', *San Antonio Express-News*, August 17, 1986.

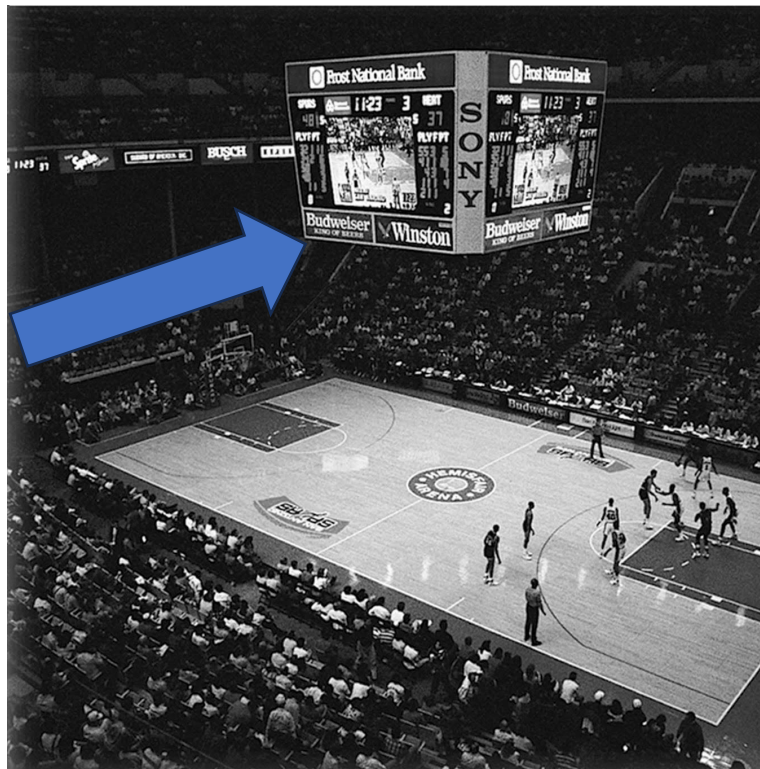
¹³⁰ Jerry McCarthy, 'The San Antonio Spurs: It's a Whole New Ball Game', *San Antonio Magazine*, September 1986, 42.

¹³¹ Staff, 'Suit Up or Shut Up, San Antonio', *San Antonio Express-News*, August 17, 1986.

¹³² Jerry Briggs, 'Robertson NBA's Newest Star', *San Antonio Light*, February 9, 1986; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 116; Jim Lefko, 'A Year to Forget for Spurs', *San Antonio Light*, April 19, 1987; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 109.

years. The franchise remained marginally profitable due to concessions, but Drossos' diatribes, team performance, and financial fragility caused franchise relocation rumours to spread.¹³³ Drossos often threatened supporters with statements such as 'We need fans in the arena... If the city doesn't support the team, then that means the city doesn't want the team'.¹³⁴ The franchise appeared to be on the brink until luck 'bounced' their way.

Figure 2.1: HemisFair Arena's Jumbotron¹³⁵



The NBA created a draft lottery in 1985 to de-incentivise losing, and the Spurs and six other teams had a fourteen per cent chance of winning the number one selection in 1987. After NBA commissioner David Stern announced that the Spurs had won, an elated Bass shared that they intended to draft the college player of the year, David Robinson, out of Navy.¹³⁶ Robinson had pledged to serve two years in the military, so the team would have to wait, but Bass and Spurs supporters were

¹³³ Glenn Rogers, 'Concessions Helps Spurs Turn Profit', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 2, 1987; Mike Tolson, 'You Name if for the Right Price', *San Antonio Light*, June 15, 1986.

¹³⁴ Glenn Rogers, 'Concessions Helps Spurs Turn Profit', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 2, 1987.

¹³⁵ Ken Rodriguez, 'Introduced by the Spurs, the JumboTron Marks a Sports Arena Milestone', *San Antonio Report*, April 22, 2017.

¹³⁶ Zach Dimmit, 'A Look at Spurs' NBA Draft Lottery History', *Sports Illustrated*, May 17, 2022.

excited about the opportunity to acquire such a talent.¹³⁷ The problem was that Drossos still needed to convince Robinson to sign with the team; otherwise, he would be eligible to re-enter the next draft.¹³⁸ Robinson's apprehension about joining a losing team in a small market was understandable, but Drossos brokered a \$26 million eight-year agreement.¹³⁹ The team's performance became seemingly less important in the shadows of the Robinson drama, and under Weiss, the team marginally improved, earned a 31-51 record, qualified for the playoffs, and were defeated by the Los Angeles Lakers in round one. On the plus side, gate attendance rose for the first time in eight years, while McCombs and Drossos increased and consolidated their ownership shares, buying out more than half of the stockholders.¹⁴⁰ At the time, McCombs argued that these changes were insignificant, but his later actions illustrate that he aimed to seize control of the organisation.¹⁴¹

During the 1988 offseason, Drossos and McCombs clashed as Drossos attempted to sell his shares and those of others to Boston and Houston business magnates.¹⁴² Mayor Cisneros and the city council feared a sale to outsiders could lead to a franchise relocation, so when McCombs subsequently offered to buyout Drossos and others for \$47 million, public sentiments approved of his proposed takeover

¹³⁷ Staff, 'Spurs Grab Top NBA Draft Pick', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 18, 1987; Glenn Rogers, 'Spurs Hit Jackpot', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 18, 1987; Roddy Stinson, 'Mayor, Forget the Stadium, Sign David Robinson', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 23, 1987; Glenn Rogers, 'Spurs Go Tall in '87 Draft', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 23, 1987; NBA, 'Spurs Win the 1987 Draft Lottery', NBA on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKmKAwcM9u4> (accessed November 9, 2022); Tom Orsborn, 'Drossos Confident Spurs Will Get Robinson to Sign', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 23, 1987; Tim Griffin, 'Fans Cheer Robinson, Boo Barry', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 23, 1987.

¹³⁸ Glenn Rogers, 'Robinson Says He'll Visit S.A.', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 24, 1987.

¹³⁹ Sam Goldaper, 'Robinson Will Receive \$26 Million From Spurs', *New York Times*, November 6, 1987, A33; Jim Lefko, 'Spurs Made Up Long Chapter in Drossos' Life', *San Antonio Light*, May 28, 1988.

¹⁴⁰ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 110.

¹⁴¹ Jim Lefko, 'Spurs Stock Changes Hands', *San Antonio Light*, February 3, 1987.

¹⁴² Tom Orsborn and Glenn Rogers, 'Drossos Won't Go Out Without a Fight', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 5, 1988; Jim Lefko, 'Spurs' Feud has Sale Stalled', *San Antonio Light*, May 21, 1988; Paul Thompson, 'Drossos Says Spurs Buy-Out Offer Took Him by Surprise', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 6, 1988; Glenn Rogers, 'Spurs Mystery Buyer Revealed', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 15, 1988; Tom Orsborn, 'Drossos, Lee Meet in Boston', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 10, 1988; Glenn Rogers and Tom Orsborn, 'Report: Houston Group Will Buy Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 12, 1988; Tom Orsborn, 'Spurs Back on Wolff's Shopping List', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 17, 1988.

given that he was a local.¹⁴³ Drossos denied McCombs for months, but he eventually capitulated and sold his shares (37 per cent) for \$17.39 million. McCombs then bought out all but four owners increasing his stake in the team to over 90 per cent.¹⁴⁴ Drossos hated losing, and McCombs' takeover was difficult to accept. Since 1973, Drossos had served as the organisation's lead executive and largest shareholder, and he was emotional after selling, although he apparently relished the opportunity to simply be a fan.¹⁴⁵ While Drossos had alienated many supporters with his arrogance and deceitful negotiating style, journalists admitted that, despite his flaws, he had made significant contributions to the sport and city, and, after initially refusing, Drossos eventually accepted McCombs' offer to join the new board of directors.¹⁴⁶ McCombs fired Weiss and appointed Larry Brown from the University of Kansas on a five-year \$3.5 million coaching contract, which was the largest in the NBA, and while there were San Antonians who had negative perspectives on Brown, dating back to the ABA, his appointment was generally seen as a positive step.¹⁴⁷ In the 1988-89 season, the team went 21-61, then a franchise worst, but supporters remained optimistic given Brown's reputation and Robinson's imminent arrival. As a result, gate attendance increased to the largest in nine years (459,514), and in the

¹⁴³ Jim Lefko, 'Proposed Owner: Spurs Not Moving', *San Antonio Light*, April 15, 1988; Glenn Rogers, 'Cisneros: Court Action Possible', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 14, 1988; Glenn Rogers, 'Council Upset By Sales Talks', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 15, 1988; D.L. Grant, 'Leaders Celebrate Purchase of Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 28, 1988; Buck Harvey, 'The Perfect Buyer had More Than Money', *San Antonio Light*, May 28, 1988.

¹⁴⁴ Glenn Rogers, 'Red is in, But Who's Out?', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 28, 1988; Glenn Rogers, 'McCombs' Victory Ends Spurs Dispute', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 28, 1988; Staff, 'McCombs' Spurs Buyout Positive for San Antonio', *San Antonio Light*, May 30, 1988; Jim Lefko, 'McCombs Regime Begins', *San Antonio Light*, May 28, 1988.

¹⁴⁵ Tom Orsborn, 'Drossos Bittersweet About Leaving Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 28, 1988; Jim Lefko, 'Spurs Made up Long Chapter in Drossos' Life', *San Antonio Light*, May 28, 1988.

¹⁴⁶ David Flores, 'Spurs Fans Would Welcome New Face in Owner's Office', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 5, 1988; Kevin O'Keeffe, 'Despite All of His Quirks, Drossos Will be Missed', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 29, 1988; Tom Orsborn, 'McCombs Asks Drossos to be on Team's Board', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 15, 1988.

¹⁴⁷ Jim Lefko, 'AD: Brown Expected to Make it Official Today', *San Antonio Light*, June 13, 1988; Glenn Rogers, 'Brown Agrees to Try on Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 14, 1988; Glenn Rogers, 'Spurs Begin Larry Brown Era', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 14, 1988; Mike McAllister, 'Brown Suddenly the Toast of the Riley's World', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 14, 1988; Red McCombs and Mickey Herskowitz, *The Red Zone: Cars, Cows, and Coaches: The Life and Good Times of a Texas Dealmaker*, (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002), 79; Jim Lefko, 'Kansas' Loss is Spurs' Gain', *San Antonio Light*, June 14, 1988; Glenn Rogers, 'New Spurs Coach Turns Picnic Into Pep Rally', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 17, 1988; David Migdal, 'Players Enthused About New Coach', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 14, 1988; Jerry Briggs, 'To Larry With Love, and Lots of Guacamole', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 14, 1988.

draft lottery, the Spurs selected the college player of the year, Sean Elliott, from the University of Arizona, which generated more optimism.¹⁴⁸

Robinson's Ascension and Organisational Precarity (1989-1997)

On the eve of the 1989-90 season, the organisation had hosted numerous events that featured players and staff across the city, and approximately 7,000 season tickets had been purchased.¹⁴⁹ This success partially resulted from the efforts of executive vice president Russ Bookbinder, who, in 1988, initiated a series of marketing campaigns that aimed to rebrand the team. Bookbinder believed the organisation needed to do more than sell tickets; it needed to create the perception that the Spurs were a first-class organisation invested in the community. Consequently, the franchise established the non-profit Spurs Foundation, which raised money for local charities and initiated community outreach projects. According to Bookbinder, 'You have to create an emotional bond between your fans and the team, and you do that by having good community relations...You do it because it's good for the community, but it's also good for business'.¹⁵⁰ This technique was not new to sports marketing, but, clearly, McCombs valued such efforts more than Drossos.¹⁵¹ A few years later, President George H.W. Bush awarded Spurs assistant coach, Gregg Popovich and the organisation with a Point of Light Award which recognised those who significantly impact their community through service, after Popovich co-founded of the Spurs Drug Free Youth League.¹⁵²

Robinson's arrival led to the greatest single-season turnaround in NBA history at the time. The team finished with a 56-26 record and a Midwest Division title; Robinson

¹⁴⁸ Tom Orsborn, 'Spurs Get No. 3 Draft Pick', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 22, 1989; David Flores, 'Spurs Pick Up Arizona Star', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 28, 1989; Glenn Rogers, 'Spurs Grab UA's Elliott', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 28, 1988; Tom Orsborn, 'McCombs Predicts Elliott Will Be Great Player', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 28, 1988.

¹⁴⁹ Diana Fuentes, 'Spurs, Fans Enjoy Visits of Tip-off Fete', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 30, 1989; 'Dunk and Dine: Restaurants Catering to Spurs-Mania', *San Antonio Light*, May 9, 1990.

¹⁵⁰ David Flores, 'Bookbinder Spiffs Up Spurs' Image In Community', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 10, 1988; Blair Corning, 'Spurs Foundation Starts Fast', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 20, 1989; Marina Pisano, 'Spurs Appeal: Cagers Revitalizing Sagging Spirits With Off-Court Player-to-People Push', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 11, 1988; Marina Pisano, 'Spurs Players Held Center Court With Community Outreach Projects', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 16, 1989; '¡Gracias, San Antonio!', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 22, 1989.

¹⁵¹ Loydean Thomas, 'Spurs Will Remain in S.A., Owner Says', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 6, 1990.

¹⁵² 'Bush Pays Tribute to Spurs Anti-Drug Effort', UPI Archives, February 27, 1992, Spurs Sports Academy, 'Spurs Youth Basketball League', <https://www.spurssportsacademy.com/sybl> (accessed October 24, 2023).

earned his first All-Star appearance and was named the Rookie of the Year, while Bob Bass was named Executive of the Year.¹⁵³ A confluence of factors resulted in the largest gate attendance in team history (603,600).¹⁵⁴ The Spurs defeated the Denver Nuggets in their first-round playoff series but lost in their second to the Portland Trailblazers that went to a decisive seventh game.¹⁵⁵ Around 4,000 fans greeted the team upon their return to the San Antonio airport. Robinson admitted the loss was difficult to accept, but after years of disappointment and disinterest, the team had earned the attention of its supporters, although rumours then swirled of a franchise relocation.¹⁵⁶ Cisneros and McCombs were at odds, and the powerlessness of civic leaders was represented in newspaper cartoons (Figure 2.2). McCombs calmly denied the sale gossip citing his continuous experience with them since the 1970s.¹⁵⁷ Uncertainty lingered over the next year, but it became clear that if the Spurs stayed, they would abandon HemisFair for a new taxpayer-funded 64,000-seat stadium named the Alamodome, which Cisneros and others had campaigned for over several years with the hopes of acquiring an NFL franchise.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ '54!: Spurs Set Franchise, NBA Marks', *San Antonio Light*, April 19, 1990; Glenn Rogers, 'Monsters of the Midwest: Spurs Rip Suns For Title', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 23, 1990; Tim Griffin, 'Spurs Snatch Playoff Victory', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 27, 1990; Kelley Shannon, 'Robinsons Help Son Feel Right at Home', *Associated Press*, May 13, 1990; Tom Orsborn, 'NBA Executive of the Year: Trade Happy Bass Honored By League', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 5, 1990; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 110, 114.

¹⁵⁴ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 110; Donna Tuttle, 'He'd Rather Have Been 408,209th: Lawyer Suffers Wrath of Spurs Fans', *San Antonio Business Journal*, April 6, 1990.

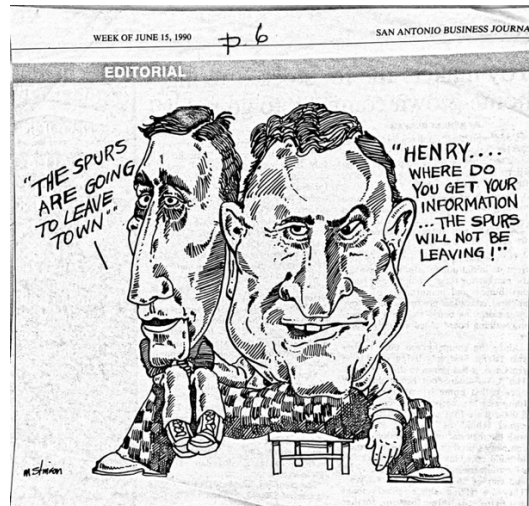
¹⁵⁵ Brad Townsend, 'It's Over in Overtime: Season Ends for Spurs in Game 7 Loss to Blazers', *San Antonio Light*, May 19, 1990.

¹⁵⁶ Adolfo Pesquera and Tom Orsborn, '4,000 Fans Cheer Spurs at Airport', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 20, 1990; Loydean Thomas, 'Spurs Will Remain in S.A., Owner Says', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 6, 1990; 'Playing Defense to Keep the Spurs', *San Antonio Business Journal*, June 15, 1990.

¹⁵⁷ Loydean Thomas, 'Spurs Will Remain in S.A., Owner Says', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 6, 1990.

¹⁵⁸ James Coburn, 'Spurs: No Plans to Change Stance On Minority Firms', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 8, 1990; Glenn Rogers, 'McCombs Touts Expertise of Spurs Management' *San Antonio Express-News*, June 3, 1990; Glenn Rogers, 'True or Not, Spurs Sale Rumors a Fact of Life', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 14, 1991.

Figure 2.2: Cisneros and McCombs¹⁵⁹



Expectations rose following the 1989-90 campaign, and Brown's assistants Popovich and R.C. Buford believed the team was primed for another impressive run, but to the fans' dismay, admission costs increased for a third consecutive year.¹⁶⁰ McCombs cited the cost of operations, league-wide ticket price averages, an improved product, and growing demand as justifications. The cost of admission for Spurs games was cheaper on average than twenty other NBA teams, but the spending power San Antonians possessed was lower than most. However, Bookbinder's campaign to burgeon the number of season ticketholders through marketing and community outreach continued to be a success as season ticketholders grew from 3,000 (1988-89) to 9,200 (1989-90), and he anticipated around 12,500 for 1990-91.¹⁶¹ A regular season gate attendance of 651,965 broke a franchise record.¹⁶² The team won fifty-five games, which secured their second consecutive Midwest Division title and the franchise's thousandth all-time victory, while Robinson earned All-NBA honours and his second consecutive All-Star appearance.¹⁶³ Supporters' growing affection for the team resulted in the repeated

¹⁵⁹ *San Antonio Business Journal*, June 15, 1990.

¹⁶⁰ Glenn Rogers, 'Piecing Together a Championship Team', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 2, 1990; Tom Orsborn, 'McCombs Building a Model Franchise', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 4, 1990; Glenn Rogers, 'Popovich Seeking Storybook Ending', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 2, 1990; Staff, 'Spurs Duo has Worked for Brown for 8 Years', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 2, 1990; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 54.

¹⁶¹ Tom Orsborn, 'Spurs Hike Prices on 1990-91 Tickets', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 18, 1990.

¹⁶² Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 110.

¹⁶³ Staff, 'A Grand Milestone for Spurs: 1,000 Wins', *San Antonio Light*, March 3, 1991; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 114.

thievery of jersey and championship banners, but the Spurs lost to the unfavoured Golden State Warriors in their first-round playoff series.¹⁶⁴

In 1991 *Financial World* valued the franchise at \$46.5 million, given their operating income of \$300,000, although Spurs president Gary Woods disagreed with the estimation claiming the Spurs were worth double that amount. Regardless, the Spurs ranked in the bottom quartile of NBA teams and eightieth among all major professional sports franchises in the U.S. and Canada in terms of value.¹⁶⁵ McCombs admitted that increased costs troubled him, and when he expressed his desire to pursue other ventures, specifically the NFL, supporters became concerned. McCombs did not plan to pass the franchise on to his kin, and he believed San Antonio could only retain it through a large group of individual and corporate stakeholders.¹⁶⁶ Drossos admitted he advised McCombs to sell the franchise because, although he hoped it would stay in San Antonio, he felt the city lacked the affluence and spending power of other major markets.¹⁶⁷ San Antonio's television market ranked forty-fifth in the U.S. and Canada, and, despite having one of their most successful seasons, the organisation earned less than \$1 million in profit.¹⁶⁸ However, team ownership was not solely about money. McCombs' affection for San Antonio inspired his pledge to increase the city's reputation, and he believed that the Spurs partially accomplished that. He hoped the Alamodome would continue the momentum as the Spurs' move from HemisFair appeared inevitable.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Tim Griffin, 'Banner Thieves Have Hit Arena Several Times', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 14, 1991; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 110.

¹⁶⁵ Tom Orsborn, 'Spurs Say Franchise Worth More Than Reported', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 12, 1991; Brad Townsend, 'Spurs Owner McCombs the Playmaker for City's Sports', *San Antonio Light*, June 23, 1991.

¹⁶⁶ Brad Townsend, 'Spurs Owner McCombs the Playmaker for City's Sports', *San Antonio Light*, June 23, 1991; Brad Townsend, 'Drossos Prefers View From Outside', *San Antonio Light*, June 23, 1991; Tim Griffin, 'McCombs May Cough Up \$100,00 for NFL Bid', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 26, 1991.

¹⁶⁷ Brad Townsend, 'Drossos Prefers View From Outside', *San Antonio Light*, June 23, 1991.

¹⁶⁸ Glenn Rogers, 'True or Not, Spurs Sale Rumors a Fact of Life', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 14, 1991; 'Playing Defense to Keep the Spurs', *San Antonio Business Journal*, June 15, 1991; Kevin O'Keefe, 'Fate of Spurs Rests with Local Investors', *San Antonio Light*, August 1991.

¹⁶⁹ Brad Townsend, 'Spurs Owner McCombs the Playmaker for City's Sports', *San Antonio Light*, June 23, 1991.

Despite success during the 1990-91 season, the franchise experienced several issues related to player misconduct, injury, and commitment.¹⁷⁰ The Spurs' young core of Robinson, Elliott, Willie Anderson and Terry Cummings exuded talent, but they lacked experienced leadership, so Brown adjusted his approach and hoped for better results.¹⁷¹ Optimism abounded, with Spurs broadcaster Jay Howard arguing that San Antonio was the 'fastest growing sports community in the country'.¹⁷² Indeed, the Spurs' popularity grew as McCombs and Bookbinder instituted new marketing tactics. Bookbinder and Bruce Guthrie, the Spurs' director of marketing, transformed games into nonstop spectacles that combined the game, interactive fan experiences, jumbotron, concessions, outside entertainment, merchandise stands, and promotional giveaways, which resulted in a better overall experience, according to fan surveys. These changes ushered in the expected modern gameday spectator experience.¹⁷³ The organisation increased ticket prices again for 1991-92, and it now ranked among the most expensive in the NBA at \$26, with only Los Angeles, New Jersey, Chicago, and Detroit charging more.¹⁷⁴ Despite increased costs during an economic recession, season ticketholders increased, and gate attendance reached another record high (658,337).¹⁷⁵

However, dissension spread among players, coaches, and supporters as they grew weary of McCombs. After a mediocre 21-17 start, Brown's ousting confused assistant coaches, players and fans.¹⁷⁶ Brown said he was fired, but McCombs claimed he quit and he subsequently appointed long-time executive Bass as head

¹⁷⁰ Staff, 'Spurs Guard Wingate Faces Rape Charges in Maryland', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 18, 1990; Tom Orsborn, 'Grand Jury Indicts Wingate', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 21, 1990; Tom Orsborn, 'Charge Filed Against Spurs Guard in Seattle', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 23, 1991.

¹⁷¹ Brad Townsend, 'Three to Get Ready: Spurs Hope New Mentality Delivers Third Division Title', *San Antonio Light*, October 2, 1991.

¹⁷² Tom Orsborn, 'Howard Calling the Shots for Spurs' Fans on Radio', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 20, 1991; Glenn Rogers, 'Spurs Find Renewed Spirit', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 27, 1991.

¹⁷³ Jim Hutton, 'Lights, Camera, Action...and Don't Forget to Watch the Spurs Game', *San Antonio Express-News Magazine*, November 17, 1991.

¹⁷⁴ Dan Cook, 'TV 'Handouts'- and Spurs' Prices', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 9, 1991.

¹⁷⁵ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 110; Dan Cook, 'TV 'Handouts'- and Spurs' Prices', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 9, 1991.

¹⁷⁶ Staff, 'San Antonians React to Brown's Firing', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 22, 1992; Joe Alexander, 'Fans Divided Over Firing', *San Antonio Light*, January 22, 1992; David Whitley, 'Players Shocked by Brown's Sudden Departure', *San Antonio Light*, January 22, 1992; Brad Townsend, 'Assistant Coaches Agonize Over Departure', *San Antonio Light*, January 22, 1992.

coach.¹⁷⁷ A few weeks later, Brown joined the Los Angeles Clippers.¹⁷⁸ A disillusioned Robinson complained about McCombs' lack of investment in an open letter, and he and his teammates demanded a chartered jet for travel and routine facility maintenance due to dingy locker rooms and damaged showers.¹⁷⁹ Twelve season ticketholders also penned an open letter to McCombs requesting he guarantee their current seats upon renewal, televise games for free locally, stop raising ticket prices, give fans access to the arena lounge, bring back the dancers, provide players with a jet, and 'Talk to your fans more, like you used to'.¹⁸⁰ McCombs appeased players by leasing a private jet but did not publicly respond to the season ticketholders.¹⁸¹ The team finished 47-35, but Robinson suffered an injury, and the Phoenix Suns won their first-round playoff series.¹⁸² McCombs then shared his intentions to sell the team along with his plan to keep the Spurs in San Antonio and have them compete in the Alamodome following its completion.¹⁸³ He also appointed Jerry Tarkanian as head coach, although his tenure was brief.¹⁸⁴

The 1992-93 season would be the last played in HemisFair and marked the Spurs' twentieth year in San Antonio, for which they created numerous promotions, including the return of the Quicksilver Dancers.¹⁸⁵ The coaching and player turnover Robinson experienced in his first three years continued.¹⁸⁶ After a 9-11 start, McCombs fired Tarkanian, and then Rex Hughes coached one game before John

¹⁷⁷ Glenn Rogers, 'Interim Coach Steers Spurs to Win Over Clippers', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 22, 1992; Red McCombs and Mickey Herskowitz, *The Red Zone: Cars, Cows, and Coaches: The Life and Good Times of a Texas Deal Maker*, (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002), 81.

¹⁷⁸ 'Brown Thinks He Can Win With Clippers', *San Antonio Light*, February 7, 1992.

¹⁷⁹ Glenn Rogers, 'The Plane. The Plane', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 25, 1991; Dan Cook, 'Red In No Position to Defend Himself', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 27, 1991.

¹⁸⁰ 12 Season Ticket Holders, 'Fanstands', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 8, 1991.

¹⁸¹ Glenn Rogers, 'Charter: Spurs Have Own Plane for Rest of Season', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 7, 1992; Staff, 'It's Happy Landings Now for the Spurs', *San Antonio Light*, January 9, 1992.

¹⁸² David Moore, 'Decline After Break Makes Spurs, Robinson a Mystery', *Dallas Morning News*, April 28, 1993; Staff, 'Robinson to Miss 6 Weeks With Injury', *Tampa Bay Times*, March 29, 1992; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 110.

¹⁸³ Loydean Thomas, 'McCombs Reveals His Game Plan for Selling Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 17, 1992; Denise Swibold, 'Spurs Ponder Dome Proposal', *San Antonio Light*, June 29, 1992.

¹⁸⁴ Glenn Rogers, 'Tark the Shark' to Coach Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 16, 1992; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 111.

¹⁸⁵ Randy Riggs 'Sinking Spurs Embarrassed', *Austin American-Statesman*, April 17, 1993; '1994-95 Official Yearbook', San Antonio Spurs, 1994, 63.

¹⁸⁶ Glenn Rogers, 'Tarkanian Faces New Basketball Challenge', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 5, 1992; Brad Townsend, 'Shark Repels Discord', *San Antonio Light*, November 1, 1992.

Lucas, a former Spur, took over.¹⁸⁷ Previously, Lucas had struggled with alcohol and cocaine addictions, but since recovering, he had led numerous regional drug rehabilitation programs.¹⁸⁸ McCombs also had issues with alcohol, and that contributed to their bond. McCombs admired Lucas' lived experience, leadership and how he kept things in perspective. Lucas attempted to cultivate a culture of character by giving players more autonomy, and the team's performance improved immediately. He also appointed Gervin as an assistant coach.¹⁸⁹ The league selected Robinson and Elliott for the All-Star Game, but one day before the league's showcase, McCombs announced he had sold the franchise, relinquishing all his shares for \$75 million to a local coalition led by Bob Coleman. Coleman and twenty-one other individuals, businesses and corporations also purchased President Woods' fifteen per cent stake in the team, although both McCombs and Woods agreed to maintain their executive roles until the season's end.¹⁹⁰ McCombs had considered selling the team a few years earlier, but he waited for a more opportune time for local investors, and in that respect, he stayed true to his pledge to keep the Spurs in San Antonio.¹⁹¹

The team finished 49-33, spectators set a record gate attendance for the fourth consecutive year (658,337), and the organisation reported revenues of approximately \$250,000 due to their postseason concession and merchandise sales.¹⁹² The team won their first-round playoff series against the Portland Trailblazers but lost to the Phoenix Suns in the second. At the series' conclusion,

¹⁸⁷ Glenn Rogers, 'Red Throws in Tark's Towel', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 19, 1992; Red McCombs and Mickey Herskowitz, *The Red Zone: Cars, Cows, and Coaches: The Life and Good Times of a Texas Dealmaker*, (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002), 88; David Flores and Tom Orsborn, 'So Long Tark: Hello Lucas', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 19, 1992.

¹⁸⁸ Jill Lieber, 'Image of Hope: John Lucas, the New Coach of the San Antonio Spurs', *Sports Illustrated*, January 11, 1993.

¹⁸⁹ David Flores and Tom Orsborn, 'Players Welcome Surprise Naming', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 19, 1992; Scott Howard-Cooper, 'Winning Isn't the Only Thing: It Is Not Even the No. 1 Consideration For John Lucas', *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1993.

¹⁹⁰ 'Spurs Owner Sells Club for \$75 Million', *Dallas Morning News*, February 20, 1993; Tom Orsborn, 'Spurs Sale Won't Bring Any Changes This Season', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 20, 1993; Bill Lumpkin, 'Spurs' New Man In Charge', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 20, 1993; Glenn Rogers and Jerry Briggs, 'Local Leaders Praise Purchase of Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 20, 1993.

¹⁹¹ Ron Lesko, 'Ex-Spurs Owner Buys Vikings', *Associated Press*, July 2, 1998,

¹⁹² David Moore, 'Decline After Break Makes Spurs, Robinson a Mystery', *Dallas Morning News*, April 28, 1993; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 116; Adolfo Pesquera, 'Fans Net Tickets', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 9, 1993; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 111; Paula Moore, 'Suns Toss Spurs Out Of Playoffs But San Antonio Franchise Still Ends Up In The Money', *San Antonio Business Journal*, June, 3, 1993.

one fan, Carol Muir, described a sense of confusion and sadness as 'Auld Lang Syne' quietly played, while former Spurs coach Stan Albeck described the moment as bittersweet. On the one hand, the team had just experienced a devastating loss, and they would never compete in HemisFair again, but on the other hand, he was proud of how San Antonians had embraced the team, educated themselves on the sport, and created an inimitable environment. Robinson was concerned that the arena's intimacy would be lost, and Bookbinder commented, 'The fans have been great. This may be the smallest market in the NBA, but it probably has the biggest heart'.¹⁹³ HemisFair was demolished two years later, and although many complained about the venue's obstructed views and antiquated nature, it had provided a more inclusive fan experience than any of its successors.¹⁹⁴ Thereafter, the inequity and exploitative nature of the sports industry that numerous scholars have observed became more apparent as long-time fans were hit with skyrocketing ticket prices.¹⁹⁵

Supporters and the organisation experienced significant changes during the Alamodome move. New sightlines in a cavernous dome created a less-than-ideal setting for basketball, while distanced seating configurations and higher admission costs irritated many. George Meeks, an original season ticketholder, commented, 'In the old days, we were like a family...Nowadays the Spurs are a bottom-line, financially driven oriented operation'.¹⁹⁶ After a public outcry, Coleman defended himself by claiming ticket prices were set by previous executives, and he was merely

¹⁹³ Roger B. Brown, 'NBA Report', *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 23, 1993; Jerry Briggs, 'Phoenix Slams Door on Arena Era Memories Flow Freely After Spurs' Last Game Before Move to Dome,' *San Antonio Express-News*, May 21, 1993.

¹⁹⁴ Denise Swibold, 'Spurs Commit to Dome', *San Antonio Light*, September 25, 1992; Tom Orsborn, 'HemisFair Arena Memories', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 2017.

¹⁹⁵ Tim Griffin, 'Tickets Pro Basketball Courtside Spurs' Fans Will pay More in Dome', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 27, 1993; Kevin O'Keefe, 'Spurs Fans Continue to Pay the Freight', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 28, 1993; Kevin O'Keefe, 'Spurs Hit Some Fans Where It Hurts Most', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 4, 1993; Sean Dinces, 'The Attrition of the Common Fan', *Social Science History* 40, no. 2 (2016): 339-365; Sean Dinces, *Bulls Markets: Chicago's Basketball Business and the New Inequality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Nathan Kalman-Lamb, 'Imagined Communities of Fandom: Sport, Spectatorship, Meaning and Alienation in Late Capitalism', *Sport in Society* 10-12 (2020): 922-936; Nathan Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport* (Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2018), 164-165; Parts of this appeared in David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena', 1973-1993, *Journal of Sport History* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2022): 46.

¹⁹⁶ Ronda Templeton, 'Spurs Try to Dampen Furor Over Ticket Sales', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 23, 1994; San Antonio Spurs, 'Episode 3- "There's No Place Like Dome"| The Ring of the Rowel: San Antonio Spurs Docuseries', YouTube video, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vp-d7e-Ksb0> (accessed November 22, 2022).

instituting them.¹⁹⁷ Despite recording profits the previous two seasons, prices soared, and long-time season ticketholders refused to renew.¹⁹⁸ Unlike HemisFair, the Alamodome offered padded seats with armrests, thirty-four luxury suites, VIP lounges, restaurants, bars, and an executive club level with waitress service.¹⁹⁹ While not new, this stadium gentrification alienated many Spurs fans as the franchise promoted these amenities to produce corporate sponsorships and increase affluent patron appeal. At the same time, they also provided season ticketholders with some previously unavailable assurances, including same-seat annual renewals, playoff ticket priority, media guides, newsletters, photographs, merchandise discounts, videos, seat upgrades, and parking priority.²⁰⁰

On the eve of the 1993-94 season, executives upset some supporters when they released Avery Johnson and traded Elliott to the Detroit Pistons for Dennis Rodman, a two-time champion who possessed exceptional rebounding and defensive abilities, as well as a toughness the team lacked.²⁰¹ The acquisition came with risks, given Rodman's persona and mental health struggles; reviews of the deal were mixed.²⁰² Robinson, a Christian conservative military veteran with a flat-top haircut, contrasted with Rodman's numerous facial piercings, dyed hair, rebellious attitude and partygoing reputation, but their skills seemed complementary.²⁰³ Fans responded by breaking the NBA record for opening night attendance (36,523) and they provided mixed reviews of the new facility.²⁰⁴ That season 904,167 spectators

¹⁹⁷ Tim Griffin, 'Tickets Pro Basketball Courtside Spurs' Fans Will pay More in Dome', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 27, 1993; Kevin O'Keefe, 'Spurs Fans Continue to Pay the Freight', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 28, 1993; Kevin O'Keefe, 'Spurs Hit Some Fans Where It Hurts Most', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 4, 1993; Ronda Templeton, 'Spurs Try to Dampen Furor Over Ticket Sales', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 23, 1994.

¹⁹⁸ Tim Griffin, 'Tickets Pro Basketball Courtside Spurs' Fans Will pay More in Dome', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 27, 1993; Kevin O'Keefe, 'Spurs Fans Continue to Pay the Freight', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 28, 1993; Kevin O'Keefe, 'Spurs Hit Some Fans Where It Hurts Most', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 4, 1993.

¹⁹⁹ Alamodome, San Antonio Spurs Season Ticket Holder Brochure for 1993-94, San Antonio, Texas, 1-2.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 13.

²⁰¹ Alan L. Adler, 'Pistons Deal Rodman For Elliott', *Associated Press*, October 2, 1993; 'Rodman Headed to Spurs- San Antonio Deals Elliott to Detroit', *Houston Chronicle*, October 2, 1993; 'Texas Digest', *Austin American-Statesman*, October 6, 1993.

²⁰² John Lopez, 'Rodman Gives Spurs New Look, New 'Do and New Attitude', *Houston Chronicle*, October 31, 1993; 'Former Piston Could Help San Antonio If He Behaves', *New York Times*, October 21, 1993; Byron Cohen, 'Fanstand: O'Keefe Misses Point on Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, August 1, 1993.

²⁰³ David Moore, 'Profane Meets Profound: Fiery Rodman, Quiet Robinson: An Odd Coupling', *Dallas Morning News*, November 3, 1993.

²⁰⁴ Jim Hutton, 'Fans Set Record For Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 6, 1993; Kelley Shannon, 'Spurs Fans Give Alamodome Mixed Reviews', *Associated Press*, November 6, 1993.

attended games surpassing the franchise record by nearly 250,000; including the postseason, that number reached 1,009,755.²⁰⁵ Although the organisation increased the most costly tickets from \$100 to \$170, they occasionally offered \$5 promotional tickets in the dome's upper bowl.²⁰⁶ This promotion reduced the average ticket cost and bolstered the organisation's claim that they welcomed fans of all socioeconomic backgrounds, but many supporters blamed Bookbinder for the growing costs they were forced to bear.²⁰⁷ Conversely, Bookbinder and the public relations team continued their community outreach and instituted a partnership with Federal National Mortgage Association to foster neighbourhood revitalisation and home ownership for the urban residents around the Alamodome.²⁰⁸

The Spurs went 55-27, and Rodman earned the league's rebounding title. Robinson won the NBA scoring title, scored a franchise record seventy-one points in one game, and posted the league's fourth quadruple-double, repeating former Spur Alvin Robertson's 1986 accomplishment.²⁰⁹ Disappointingly, the Utah Jazz defeated the Spurs in the first round of the playoffs and, although fan support remained high, distractions and disagreements within the organisation caused concern.²¹⁰ At season's end, Coleman resigned as chairperson citing philosophical differences,

²⁰⁵ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 111; San Antonio Spurs, Official 1994-95 Team Yearbook, (San Antonio Spurs, 1994), 9; ESPN, 'NBA Attendance Report- 1994', http://www.espn.com/nba/attendance/_year/1994 (accessed November 23, 2022).

²⁰⁶ Ronda Templeton, 'Spurs Try to Dampen Furor Over Ticket Sales', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 23, 1994; San Antonio Spurs, 'Episode 3- "There's No Place Like Dome"| The Ring of the Rowel: San Antonio Spurs Docuseries', YouTube video, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vp-d7e-Ksb0> (accessed November 22, 2022).

²⁰⁷ Kevin O'Keefe, 'Spurs Fans Continue to Pay the Freight', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 28, 1993; Kevin O'Keefe, 'Spurs Hit Some Fans Where It Hurts Most', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 4, 1993; San Antonio Spurs, 'Episode 3- "There's No Place Like Dome"| The Ring of the Rowel: San Antonio Spurs Docuseries', YouTube video, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vp-d7e-Ksb0> (accessed November 22, 2022).

²⁰⁸ Gene Rodriguez, 'Fannie Mae and Coyote Announce Partnership to SPUR Homeownership', *La Presna*, October 22, 1993.

²⁰⁹ A player achieves a quadruple double when they reach ten or more of four of the five major statistical categories that include points scored, assists, rebounds, blocks or steals in a single game. Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 111; Glenn Rogers, 'Robinson Pushes Streak Four-Ward', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 17, 1994; Glenn Rogers, 'My Goodness, 71 Points', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 24, 1994; Yash Matange, 'Quadruple Double: List of NBA Players to Achieve the Rare Feat', *Sporting News*, August 25, 2021, <https://www.sportingnews.com/ca/nba/news/quadruple-double-list-of-nba-players-to-achieve-the-rare-feat/1wwsystm7lx7cb1g092ndq2883x> (accessed November 23, 2022); Basketball Reference, '1993-94 Awards Voting', https://www.basketball-reference.com/awards/awards_1994.html (accessed November 23, 2022).

²¹⁰ Jerry Briggs, 'Leaks Don't Rain on Fans' Parade', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 29, 1994; Glenn Rogers, 'Owners Vent Views at Meeting', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 18, 1994. Marty Sabota, 'Madonna's Visit is Just Idol Rumor', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 1, 1994.

and Robert McDermott replaced him, firing vice-president Bob Bass and appointing John Diller as president and Popovich as general manager. Following these changes, Lucas resigned.²¹¹ The 1993-94 campaign therefore represented a time of significant change as all parties attempted to adapt to new conditions.

Popovich's 1994 NBA draft selections disappointed many, but his re-acquisitions of fan favourites Elliott and Johnson were applauded.²¹² Popovich appointed Bob Hill as the new head coach for the 1994-95 season with mixed reviews, but expectations remained high.²¹³ The team won a franchise record sixty-two games and a Midwest Division title, Robinson was selected as the NBA's Most Valuable Player, and Rodman earned another rebounding crown.²¹⁴ A gate attendance of 920,423 broke another franchise record. The Spurs defeated the Denver Nuggets and Los Angeles Lakers in the first two rounds of the playoffs and entered the Western Conference Finals for the first time in twelve years but lost to the Houston Rockets.²¹⁵ Fans reacted with both disappointment and pride.²¹⁶ During the competitive series, a Houston-based journalist offended San Antonians when he suggested their city was irrelevant in sports and business, describing it as 'an over grown pueblo' that you can find 'marked on your map by a rusty '63 Ford with a cluster of jalapenos hanging from the rearview (sic) mirror'.²¹⁷ Despite the Spurs' sustained success, the city's growing population and the efforts of local philanthropists over decades, Fowler's contempt for San Antonio mirrored that of Ford Motor Company president Lee Iacocca who had called the city a 'little old dusty ass town' prior to the 1968 World's

²¹¹ Tom Orsborn, 'Spurs Chief Resigns; Fates of Lucas, Bass Left Hanging', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 13, 1994; Glenn Rogers, 'Bass Steps Down; Lucas Stays On', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 19, 1994; Glenn Rogers, '2 New Executives Names by Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 1, 1994; Tom Orsborn, 'Lucas: Time For a New Start', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 10, 1994; Staff, 'Luke Back At It, Flees to Philly', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 15, 1994.

²¹² Glenn Rogers, 'Spurs Pull a Shocker In Draft', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 30, 1994; Glenn Rogers, 'Elliott, Johnson Set To Become Spurs Again', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 19, 1994; Glenn Rogers, 'Steering Back to Alamo City- Elliott a Spurs Again- AJ Next?', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 20, 1994; San Antonio Spurs, *Official 1994-95 Team Yearbook*, (San Antonio Spurs, 1994), 53.

²¹³ Glenn Rogers, 'Spurs 94-95: Team and NBA Preview', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 3, 1994.

²¹⁴ 'Center of Attention: Robinson Wins MVP', *Ledger-Enquirer*, May 24, 1995; Buck Harvey, 'Life Imitates Art; Robinson Imitates an MVP', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 15, 1995.

²¹⁵ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 111; Tom Orsborn, 'The Fat Lady Has Sung', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 2, 1995.

²¹⁶ Spurs Fans, 'Fanstand', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 4, 1995.

²¹⁷ Ed Fowler, 'Our City Scoffed? Look Who's Talking', *Houston Chronicle*, May 28, 1995; 'San Antonio: Home of Margaritas, Minor Leagues', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 28, 1995.

Fair.²¹⁸ Fowler's comments and the Spurs' loss embittered fans. Whether outsiders wanted to admit it or not, the Spurs had invaded the national spotlight. Robinson and Elliott appeared in the Hollywood film *Forget Paris*, while Rodman's affair with singer Madonna and his interaction with fans in internet chatrooms drew widespread attention.²¹⁹

As the Spurs gained in popularity, new promotions urged supporters to share their commitment to the team for free tickets, and one fan's response illustrated the team's increasingly global impact.²²⁰ Noa Nakamura, from Japan, had uprooted his life in order to watch the Spurs play throughout the country over a period of twenty-six months.²²¹ As part of their continued rebranding effort, the organisation expanded its community outreach programs through the Spurs Foundation, which worked with the Alamo Children's Advocacy Centre, Spurs Drug-Free Youth Basketball League, Midnite (sic) Basketball, Project GOAL, Mister Robinson's Neighbourhood, Coyote Kids, a Teacher Recognition Program, college scholarships, Spurs Wheelchair Basketball, and Stay in School.²²² However, despite a multitude of successes under the new board of directors, the Spurs fell into debt until the team's playoff run remedied losses. Some blamed players' salaries for the unstable financial situation, whereas others suggested that invented executive positions had cost the organisation. Diller used the situation together with the Alamodome's limitations to press for a new deal with the city on concessions.²²³ The board of directors used the financial turmoil as proof of their altruistic motivations, and investors refused four proposals from prospective buyers because they could not guarantee the franchise would stay.²²⁴ Instability amongst the squad concerned executives, who consequently traded Rodman to the Chicago Bulls.²²⁵

²¹⁸ Tom Orsborn, "A Trip Down Spurs Memory Lane with Red McCombs," *San Antonio Express-News*, December 25, 2016.

²¹⁹ Buck Harvey, 'Life Imitates Art; Robinson Imitates an MVP', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 15, 1995; Jeanne Jakle, 'Rodman to Go On-Line For People Magazine', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 6, 1995; Ron Green, 'Spurs' Worm, By Any Name, Would Irritate', *Charlotte Observer*, January 19, 1995.

²²⁰ 'What Would You Do For Spurs Tickets? Contest', *San Antonio Express-News*, Reprinted throughout May 1995.

²²¹ Marty Sabota, 'The Fan From Japan', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 4, 1995.

²²² San Antonio Spurs, *Official 1994-95 Team Yearbook*, (San Antonio Spurs, 1994), 52-56.

²²³ 'Spurs Release Data in Bid to Redo Pact', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 21, 1995.

²²⁴ Lesli Hicks, 'Spurs Reportedly Have Spurned Suitors', *San Antonio Express-News*, 1995; 'Spurs Release Data in Bid to Redo Pact', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 21, 1995.

²²⁵ Buck Harvey, 'San Antonio Viewpoint- An Open Letter to Chicago: Enjoy the Show', *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 3, 1995; Rick Gano, 'Bulls Acquire Rodman From Spurs', *The Washington Post*, October 3, 1995.

Given the Spurs' modest profits over previous seasons, stakeholders worked hard to generate interest throughout the region outside of San Antonio's limited corporate headquarters.²²⁶ Locally, less than forty firms earned annual revenues of \$40 million, while Dallas headquartered 160 companies that each earned more than \$65 million. Executives aimed to expand corporate leases of luxury suites and premium seats and suggested constructing a new basketball-specific arena, which Mayor Bill Thornton insisted the city would not finance.²²⁷ Franchise operational costs increased throughout the nineties, management struggled with growing salary caps, and they anticipated that the organisation would fall into another deficit for 1995-96, although the team's postseason produced profits.²²⁸ The franchise's future appeared secure with the construction of another competitive roster, the city's opportunity to host its first NBA All-Star Weekend, and corporate investors like United Services Automobile Association (USAA) affirming their commitment to keeping the Spurs in San Antonio.²²⁹

Before Elliott's second All-Star appearance in 1996, a newspaper printed a revealing story on his troubled childhood, his father's struggles with addiction, the physical abuse he suffered, his parent's divorce, and the path he had forged to the NBA.²³⁰ The organisation's decision to trade Elliott away for Rodman two seasons previously, his re-acquisition the following season, his willingness to share his personal story, and his improved play, endeared him to the fans, and he received perhaps the loudest ovation of any player introduced during the All-Star game, which included teammate Robinson and Chicago Bull Michael Jordan.²³¹ Over 36,000 attended the showcase in the Alamodome, making it the third-largest crowd in All-

²²⁶ Charlotte-Anne Lucas, 'Smaller Corporate Community Blunts Spurs' Revenue Potential', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 9, 1995; Charlotte-Anne Lucas, 'Arena Won't Put Spurs on Easy Street', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 17, 1996.

²²⁷ Charlotte-Anne Lucas, 'Smaller Corporate Community Blunts Spurs' Revenue Potential', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 9, 1995; Buck Harvey, 'All-Star Bark: Could Anyone Be Better Off?', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 9, 1996.

²²⁸ Charlotte-Anne Lucas, 'Arena Won't Put Spurs on Easy Street', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 17, 1996; Charlotte-Anne Lucas and Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs Net a Profit of \$306,072', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 14, 1996.

²²⁹ Charlotte-Anne Lucas, 'USAA Holds On To Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 9, 1996.

²³⁰ Tom Orsborn, 'Against All Odds: Elliott Has Coped With Long Line of Family Troubles', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 21, 1996.

²³¹BF15, 'NBA All Star 1996 Full Game', YouTube video, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwaTJK41T3k> (accessed December 1, 2022).

Star game history.²³² Hundreds of thousands of people attended fan experiences over four days and fans mingled with the many actors, musicians, and players who were attending events, while the NBA and Black Entertainment Television engaged San Antonio youths through school appearances, promotional tickets and televised discussions on the plights of the community.²³³ Stern and NBA players had globalised the game of basketball in the nineties, and All-Star Weekend 1996 showcased what was then the world's third most televised sport. NBA executives capitalised on the momentum, reporting annual league revenues of \$2 billion, while the success of NBA All-Star Weekend '96 resulted in an increased international awareness of San Antonio and an estimated economic impact of approximately \$50 million.²³⁴

The team went 59-23 in 1995-96, claimed another Midwest Division title and won seventeen straight games, among the best winning streaks in NBA history.²³⁵ Gate attendance decreased to 811,422 but still ranked in the top six of NBA teams.²³⁶ Journalists highlighted this reduced attendance on one occasion, but that playoff game coincided with San Antonio's annual Fiesta, one of the country's largest cultural celebrations. A twelve per cent decrease in ticket sales concerned management. George Valle, a Baseline Bum, believed that this was a product of transient fans and bitterness hanging over from the end of the previous season.²³⁷ The Spurs defeated the Phoenix Suns in round one of the playoffs but lost to the Utah Jazz in the following series.²³⁸

²³² Eddie Sefko, 'Summary: Stern Deal Coming', *Houston Chronicle*, February 12, 1996; BF15, 'NBA All Star 1996 Full Game', YouTube video, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwaTJK41T3k> (accessed December 1, 2022).

²³³ Susan Yerks, 'Sunday's Stars Busy On and Off the Court', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 12, 1996; Marty Sabota, 'Stars To Salute Youth At NBA Extravaganza', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 6, 1996; Jeanne Jakle, 'Fox Tech Kids To Air Opinions For BET Show', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 8, 1996; James Coburn, 'Kids Get Chance to See Some Stars', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 9, 1996.

²³⁴ 'New NBA Coverage Live From Texas', *Irish Times*, February 9, 1996; Bill Hendricks and Adolfo Pesquera, 'Visitors Could Dunk \$6.5 Million In Hoop', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 9, 1996.

²³⁵ 'Spurs Win Midwest', *Miami Herald*, April 14, 1996; Glenn Rogers, 'Spurs Turn Attention to Playoffs', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 22, 1996; Mel Reisner, 'Spurs' Run Ends at 17 In Phoenix', *Austin American-Statesman*, April 3, 1996.

²³⁶ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 111; 'NBA Attendance Report- 1996', ESPN, http://www.espn.com/nba/attendance/_/year/1996 (accessed December 1, 2022).

²³⁷ Tim Griffin, 'Empty Seats Real Concern For the Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 27, 1996.

²³⁸ Glenn Rogers, 'Jazz Go To Seattle, Spurs Headed Home', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 17, 1996; 'Spurs Final Grade: Incomplete', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 19, 1996.

The franchise and the city continued to coalesce as players ventured into local businesses and philanthropic efforts.²³⁹ The organisation hired local talent and increased their community relations projects, headed by the now thirteen-year veteran Coyote.²⁴⁰ However, towards the season's end, rumours were again circulating that the organisation was for sale, and journalists were writing that McDermott was looking for a deal even if it was with non-local buyers. Other investors denied that a move was a probability reaffirming that their main prerogative when initially investing in the team had been to ensure that it stayed in the city. To ameliorate concerns, the organisation took out an advertisement in local papers stating 'NO SALE. NO WAY' and during that offseason McDermott stepped down as chairperson after fellow investors refused to sell to a New Mexico-based buyer.²⁴¹

Unlike most NBA organisations, the Spurs regularly released the franchise's finances to inform locals of their ongoing problems.²⁴² During the 1996-97 offseason, the Maloofs offered to buy the franchise for \$90 million and a conditional \$30 million relocation fee.²⁴³ Mayor William Thornton expressed concern when the organisation excluded him and other politicians from the process. McDermott unsuccessfully lobbied for the Maloof's deal and subsequently resigned. Remaining board members elected newcomer Peter Holt as chairman.²⁴⁴ A month before, Holt had purchased USAA's 13.37 per cent stake in the team and he had impressed fellow shareholders with his business acumen and energy.²⁴⁵ The South Texas native had made his fortune through his family's construction machinery

²³⁹ Lesli Hicks, 'Del Negro Plans May Point To Restaurant', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 1996.

²⁴⁰ Vicki Vaughan, 'Spurs Hire Hispanic Chamber President', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 3, 1996; Becky Whetstone Schmidt, 'Wiley Coyote: Spurs Mascot Prefers to Remain Mysterious', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 31, 1996.

²⁴¹ Charlotte-Anne Lucas, 'Looks Like Spurs Will Stay in S.A.', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 13, 1996; Charlotte-Anne Lucas, Lesli Hicks and Glenn Rogers, 'McDermott Orchestrating Spurs Sale', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 9, 1996; Glenn Rogers, 'Holt Submerging In Spurs' Business', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 18, 1996.

²⁴² Charlotte-Anne Lucas and Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs Net a Profit of \$306,072', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 14, 1996.

²⁴³ Kevin O'Keefe, 'Holt Makes McD, Maloofs Disappear', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 11, 1996; Charlotte-Anne Lucas, 'Spurs Deal Helped Refocus Owners', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 14, 1996.

²⁴⁴ Tom Bower and Carmina Danini, 'Thornton Rips Team For Not Consulting City', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 10, 1996; Charlotte-Anne Lucas and Glenn Rogers, 'McDermott: It's 'Largest Cash Offer' in NBA History', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 10, 1996; Bruce Davidson and Lesli Hicks, 'Failed Offer Shows Retired General No Longer Commands Power In City', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 11, 1996.

²⁴⁵ Kevin O'Keefe, 'McDermott Apparently Enjoyed His Last Hurrah', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 10, 1996; Charlotte-Anne Lucas, 'Holt Takes Spurs' Reins, Wants to Boost Stake', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 11, 1996.

dealerships, although his net worth was unknown. Holt pledged to ensure the franchise's financial viability and its place in San Antonio while also arguing that the Alamodome's deficiencies and burgeoning player salaries were diminishing revenues.²⁴⁶ The organisation entertained more corporate sponsors, initiated Fan Fiestas featuring interactive experiences and a HemisFair staple- Al Sturchio's band, The Sound of the Spurs, and lobbied city and county leaders for a new arena.²⁴⁷

Lofty expectations for the 1996-97 season disappeared within weeks following significant injuries to Robinson, Elliott, and Chuck Person.²⁴⁸ Popovich fired Hill after a 3-15 start and appointed himself as head coach, which shocked players and fans, but Holt supported him as the organisation struggled to deal with the public relations fallout.²⁴⁹ A 20-62 finish, a franchise worst, and decreased gate attendance resulted in an increase in the franchise debt.²⁵⁰ The *San Antonio Express-News* illustrated the most significant fall over one year in NBA history with a felicitous cartoon (See Figure 2.3).²⁵¹ Organisational struggles aside, fan favourites Johnson and Vinny Del Negro, helped the community through their respective charitable efforts, and the organisation also visited the Sisters Charity of the Incarnate Word, which initiated a relationship and created the supporter cohort affectionately named the 'Spurs Nuns'.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Lesli Hicks, 'Spurs Chairman Holt Worth Millions- But Don't Ask How Many', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 21, 1996; Glenn Rogers, 'Holt Submerging In Spurs' Business', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 18, 1996.

²⁴⁷ Charlotte-Anne Lucas, 'Spurs Plan FanFiestas At 20 Games', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 1, 1996; Charlotte-Anne Lucas and Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs Net a Profit of \$306,072', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 14, 1996.

²⁴⁸ Jerry Briggs, 'Absence of Robinson and Others Will Put Hill's Spurs To An Early Test', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 31, 1996; Glenn Rogers, 'The Sun'll Come Out Tomorrow', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 6, 1996.

²⁴⁹ Marty Sabota, 'S.A. Fans Question Wisdom Of Ouster', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 11, 1996; Glenn Rogers, 'Pop Fires Hill, Takes Spurs Helm', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 11, 1996; Glenn Rogers, 'Holt Says Weekend Losses Spurred Changes', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 11, 1996.

²⁵⁰ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 56, 112; Travis E. Poling, 'Franchise Says Spiraling Salaries May Force New Trip To Credit Line', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 4, 1997; Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 112.

²⁵¹ John T. Valles, 'A Legendary Fall By Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 6, 1997.

²⁵² Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs Teaming Up To Assist Charity', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 2, 1996; J. Michael Parker, 'Spurs Give An Assist To Faithful Nun', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 18, 1997.

Figure 2.3: The Spurs Fall²⁵³



As a result of the poor season, the Spurs entered the 1997 NBA Draft Lottery with a 21.6 per cent chance of winning the first selection, and they did. Holt attributed this to his lucky tie and thanked those fans who had never faltered in their support.²⁵⁴ The organisation selected Tim Duncan, the college player of the year and three-time All-American out of Wake Forest University.²⁵⁵ While unorthodox, Popovich had visited Duncan at his home in the Virgin Islands, establishing a trusting relationship.²⁵⁶ Despite signing Duncan, Robinson was concerned that the team was destined for relocation and about having to uproot his family. However, other commentators suggested that Duncan could secure the team's future in San Antonio by swaying voters into appeasing Holt and approving funding for a new arena.²⁵⁷ Holt relieved Spurs president Diller of his position, saving the organisation \$400,000 a year and purchased Gaylord Inc.'s stake in the team, bringing his share total to

²⁵³ John T. Valles, 'A Legendary Fall By Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 6, 1997.

²⁵⁴ Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs Hit the NBA's Jackpot- Again', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 18, 1997; San Antonio Spurs, 'Episode 6- Genesis of the Big 3: "Tim Duncan" | The Ring of the Rowel: San Antonio Spurs Docuseries', YouTube video, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ey5Pp0_SvMY (accessed December 6, 2022).

²⁵⁵ Glenn Rogers, 'Now It's Real- It Is Pretty Exciting' Popovich Set To Welcome Duncan to San Antonio', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 26, 1997; 'Spurs Sign Duncan- San Antonio Plans To Use Top Pick With Robinson', *Associated Press*, July 25, 1997.

²⁵⁶ San Antonio Spurs, 'Episode 6- "Genesis of the Big 3: 'Tim Duncan'- The Ring of the Rowel: San Antonio Spurs Docuseries', YouTube video, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ey5Pp0_SvMY (accessed December 6, 2022).

²⁵⁷ Jerry Briggs, 'No Arena, No Duncan Later- Spurs Say Lost Revenue Deters Re-Signing', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 29, 1997; Carlos Guerra, 'Spurs Day of Reckoning Is a Grim Reminder', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 31, 1997; Jerry Briggs, 'Admiral Worried That Spurs Won't Be Here Much Longer', *San Antonio Express-News*, August 21, 1997.

nearly thirty-two per cent.²⁵⁸ Optimism spread with Holt and Duncan as new figureheads for the organisation, and thousands of supporters greeted them in front of the Alamo during Duncan's official introduction.²⁵⁹

An Era of Duncan, Dominance, and Stability (1997-2023)

The Spurs celebrated their twenty-fifth season during the 1997-98 campaign with numerous public relations activities that included free player, coaches and Coyote appearances, awarding children 10,000 tickets for their community service, continuing Fan Fiestas, extending \$5 promotional tickets, renewing the 'I love my Spurs' ad campaign, and hosting various auctions and raffles.²⁶⁰ The *Express-News* featured stories on the history of the franchise and its greatest players.²⁶¹ These efforts and Duncan's arrival resulted in season ticket renewals of more than 90 per cent. The organisation reduced their \$44 million debt to \$26 million, but Holt anticipated future financial struggles due to increased player salaries and Alamodome limitations.²⁶²

The team achieved a 56-26 record, signifying the greatest single-season turnaround in NBA history, overtaking their accomplishment from the 1989-90 season, Robinson and Duncan earned All-NBA honours, and Duncan won the league's Rookie of the Year Award. Attendance increased to 783,455 for an average of 19,108 a game, and the team qualified for the Western Conference Semifinals but lost to the Utah Jazz.²⁶³ As Holt predicted, the team suffered \$3.98 million in losses, but the organisation netted \$2.12 million following the postseason. The organisation's financial situation seemed to be improving, but a labour dispute between owners and players across the league forced a lockout. Owners claimed most teams posted losses due to increased player salaries, while the NBPA countered that the league's history of hiding income through franchise self-audits

²⁵⁸ Glenn Rogers, 'Diller Departing To Save Spurs Money', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 25, 1997; Charlotte-Anne Lucas, 'Holt Carving Self Biggest Slice of Spurs Pie', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 19, 1996.

²⁵⁹ Kelly Shannon, 'Spurs Give Duncan Rousing Welcome', *Deseret News*, June 27, 1997.

²⁶⁰ Charlotte-Anne Lucas, 'Spurs Plan FanFiestas at 20 games', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 1, 1996; 'Thursday Is Spursday', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 12, 1998.

²⁶¹ Jerry Briggs, 'A City's Baptism Into Basketball', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 30, 1997; 'A Silver Stroll Through Spurs History', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 30, 1997.

²⁶² Travis E. Poling, 'Franchise Says Spiraling Salaries May Force New Trip To Credit Line', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 4, 1997.

²⁶³ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 112-113; Johnny Luden, 'Spurs Out Of Playoffs', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 13, 1998.

made these claims dubious.²⁶⁴ A labour dispute had never previously halted or cancelled an NBA season, but that soon changed with a lockout that alienated many observers who saw this as a battle between millionaires and mega-millionaires for more money.²⁶⁵ The lockout lasted seven months, with Stern and the owners proclaiming victory. Players lost hundreds of millions of dollars, and San Antonians also lost income.²⁶⁶ After settling, the league scheduled a fifty-game season for 1999. A shortened season and reduced team preparation made predictions difficult, although the Spurs acquired several players with championship experience and shooting prowess to complement Duncan and Robinson.²⁶⁷

The Spurs started the 1999 lockout season poorly, posting a 6-8 record but then went 31-5, earning a Midwest Division title and the number one seed in the playoffs.²⁶⁸ Duncan earned All-NBA honours, but, more importantly, he and Robinson had a complementary cast of shooting and tenacity that they lacked the year before.²⁶⁹ While many journalists claimed the lockout had alienated fans, it appears that did not stop supporters from attending games. Gate attendance for the twenty-five home games totalled 527,357 for an average of 21,094 a contest.²⁷⁰ The Spurs entered the postseason as one of the favourites, and their marketing team searched for a new playoff slogan. A local advertiser, Adolfo Aguilar, created 'Go Spurs Go', and the organisation placed banners with the new chant all over the Alamodome's grounds. The organisation also aired the phrase on television and printed it in newspapers. San Antonians bought in and created 'Go Spurs Go' displays in neighbourhoods across the city.²⁷¹

²⁶⁴ Ronald Tillery, 'NBA Revenue Difficult to Define- Auditor: Suite Sales, Fees Not Part of Pie', *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, December 2, 1998.

²⁶⁵ Tony Kornheiser, 'Money Talks...But Nobody's Listening', *The Washington Post*, October 28, 1998; Jefferson Morley, 'Fans May Be Locking Out Professional Basketball', *The Washington Post*, November 14, 1998; Staff, 'CBS Poll: NBA Fans Back Players', *CBS News*, October 30, 1998.

²⁶⁶ Glenn Rogers, 'Workers Hurt By NBA Fray', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 1, 1998.

²⁶⁷ Chris Sheridan, 'Stern Won This Poker Hand', *Associated Press*, January 8, 1999; Dave D'Alessandro, 'After The Whirlwind, Keeping Up No Breeze', *Star-Ledger*, January 24, 1999.

²⁶⁸ Staff, '99 Midwest Division Champions', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 16, 1999.

²⁶⁹ Mark Rosner, 'Help's On the Way- Spurs Near Deals with 3-Point Marksman Kerr, Former Rocket Elie and Australian Gaze', *Austin American-Statesman*, January 18, 1999.

²⁷⁰ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 112; Tony Kornheiser, 'Money Talks...But Nobody's Listening', *The Washington Post*, October 28, 1998; Jefferson Morley, 'Fans May Be Locking Out Professional Basketball', *The Washington Post*, November 14, 1998.

²⁷¹ Travis E. Poling, 'Go Spurs Go' a Triumph For Local Ad Agency', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 16, 1999.

The Spurs defeated the Minnesota Timberwolves in the first round of the playoffs and then the Los Angeles Lakers in the second.²⁷² They faced the Portland Trailblazers in the Western Conference Finals, and the Alamodome's seating capacity was expanded to 35,000.²⁷³ In game two of the series, Elliott hit a game-winning three-point field goal subsequently known as the 'Memorial Day Miracle' while falling out of bounds.²⁷⁴ One fan, Jesse Alejos, screamed so intensely that his left lung collapsed and still required oxygen to breathe two weeks later, and a possible surgery loomed. However, he was comforted by his Spurs paraphernalia in his hospital room, including a pair of Nikes autographed by Duncan.²⁷⁵ The Spurs defeated the Blazers and won their first Western Conference Championship, marking the first time an ABA franchise would enter the championship series. A regional frenzy followed as thousands of fans celebrated across the city, and hundreds rushed to the Alamodome to purchase the NBA Finals tickets that went on sale the following morning.²⁷⁶

Over two thousand fans greeted the team at the airport, and regional supporters competed for some of the over 76,000 tickets the Spurs offered for the series' first two games. Despite the highly inflated prices, demand was high, and the games sold out within hours.²⁷⁷ Days later, hundreds of fans laid out in lawn chairs and sleeping bags to buy tickets to games six and seven.²⁷⁸ Supporters overwhelmed local retailers for merchandise, and some fans produced counterfeit versions.²⁷⁹ Many residents claimed to be the Spurs' 'number one fan', sharing their fanhood

²⁷² Arnie Stapleton, 'Robinson, Spurs Finish Off Minnesota', *Associated Press*, May 15, 1999; Johnny Ludden, '4-Gone Conclusion', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 23, 1999.

²⁷³ Arthur Garcia, 'Spursmania Provides NBA Finals With Its Very Own Flavor', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 13, 1999.

²⁷⁴ Johnny Ludden, 'Mr. Big Shot: Spurs' Elliott Makes Miracle 3-Pointer to Best Blazers', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 31, 1999; Arthur Garcia, 'Heroic 3-Pointer By Elliott Steals Game 2 At Dome', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 1, 1999.

²⁷⁵ Karisa King, 'Spurs Fever Gives Fan Chills, Collapsed Lung', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 13, 1999.

²⁷⁶ Carmina Danini and Jerry Needham, 'City Cheers Win, Waits For Finals', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 7, 1999.

²⁷⁷ Staff, 'Fans Celebrate In Force As Spurs Head to First Finals', *New York Times*, June 8, 1999; Randy Riggs, 'Spurs Fans Apply Full-Court Pressure For Shot To See Finals', *Austin American-Statesman*, June 8, 1999; Suzanne Hoholik, 'What To Do First Keeps Faithful Busy', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 8, 1999.

²⁷⁸ Krysti Silbey, 'Tickets For Last 2 Games On Sale', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 14, 1999; Amy Dorsett and Krysti Silbey, 'Spurs Fans Line Up For Tickets', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 13, 1999.

²⁷⁹ Travis E. Poling and Tiara M. Ellis, 'Fans After Spurs Stuff Like It Was A Loose Ball', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 9, 1999.

history, distance travelled to watch the team, and merchandise collections.²⁸⁰ Firms across the city overwhelmed one flag production company that received over 600 requests for large Spurs banners, while Spurs marketers found their job made easier, as residents and businesses took the initiative to dress the city in silver and black.²⁸¹ According to one source, twenty-five per cent of vehicles across town featured a Spurs window flag, sticker, or custom paint jobs.²⁸² Aerial photographs captured approximately 1,000 people configuring 'Go Spurs Go' with their bodies, fans spray-painted 'New York Knicks' on scrapped automobiles and took sledgehammers to them, while hundreds of Virgin Islanders attended pep rallies dressed in U.S. Virgin Island flags and yellow outfits and sang songs about Duncan.²⁸³ One journalist claimed the emotional outpouring exceeded the level expressed during Operations Desert Shield and Storm, while another claimed that the NBA Finals were more 'momentous' than the Pope's visit to San Antonio in 1987.²⁸⁴ Game one attracted 39,514 spectators, and many of the concession stands sold out early, with the Alamodome and the Spurs dividing revenues approximating \$147,000.²⁸⁵ Supporters not in attendance at the stadium congregated at local restaurants, bars, and movie theatres, while others like Manuela Rodriguez and her fellow Sisters of the Incarnate Word, along with 38 million others nationwide and 67 per cent of those in the region, watched the Spurs win 89-77.²⁸⁶

Before the tipoff of game two, Governor George W. Bush embraced Knicks fan Spike Lee and called the game 'the hottest ticket in Texas'.²⁸⁷ Elsewhere, a maintenance worker for a southside high school won \$1 million in the lottery and

²⁸⁰ Scott Huddleston, 'S.A. Man Says He's Spurs No. 1 Fan', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 7, 1999; Ihosvani Rodriguez, 'Fans Are Sailing In Uncharted Emotional Waters', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 25, 1999; Roy Bragg, 'Ultimate Basketball Fan Has Tickets Everywhere', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 20, 1999.

²⁸¹ Arthur Garcia, 'Spursmania Provides NBA Finals With Its Very Own Flavor', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 13, 1999.

²⁸² Ohm Youngmisuk, 'Forget Alamo, Go Spurs! Frenzied Fans Seek First Title', *New York Daily News*, June 14, 1999.

²⁸³ 'Fans' Finals Frenzy', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 17, 1999; Jacque Crouse, 'Pep Is Plentiful At Finals Rallies', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 17, 1999.

²⁸⁴ Travis E. Poling and Tiara M. Ellis, 'Fans After Spurs Stuff Like It Was A Loose Ball', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 9, 1999; Antonio L. Sharp, 'Frenzied Firms Spending Big Bucks To Back Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 14, 1999; John Brennan, 'Fans Go Gaga Over Their Team- San Antonio Filled With Pride', *The Record*, June 16, 1999.

²⁸⁵ Tiara M. Ellis, 'Title Hungry Fans Spur Dome Sales', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 19, 1999.

²⁸⁶ Amy Dorsett and Carmina Danini, 'Theater Viewers Watch the NBA', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 24, 1999; Carmina Danini, 'Spurs Really Do Have A Prayer- Thanks To Nun', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 12, 1999; Jeanne Jakle, 'Game 1 Seen By 38 Million', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 18, 1999.

²⁸⁷ John Gutierrez-Mier, 'Bush Joins In Fun At Game', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 19, 1999.

purchased Spurs season tickets.²⁸⁸ Mayors Howard Peak and Rudolph Giuliani waged friendly bets, as did Texas and New York congress members in Washington D.C.²⁸⁹ The Spurs won game two and thousands of fans celebrated on Commerce Street and the Riverwalk.²⁹⁰ Given that the next three games would be played in Madison Square Garden, the organisation hosted watch parties at the Alamodome and partnered with H-E-B Grocery Company to offer free tickets.²⁹¹ The Spurs lost game three but won the following two to secure their first NBA championship. Duncan impressed and earned the Finals Most Valuable Player Award, while Robinson and other veterans revelled in victory after falling short for so many years. Tens of thousands of San Antonians flooded downtown streets with hundreds of banners and building light configurations in the backdrop honouring the Spurs.²⁹² Some parked their cars and danced on the roadways causing bumper-to-bumper traffic that spanned over a mile.²⁹³ Thousands rushed to their closest retailers to purchase championship merchandise. City leaders worked with local police precincts in crowd control efforts, and the police department reported that overall, the crowds were in control, happy, and non-destructive.²⁹⁴

During the series, city leaders planned a celebration and incorporated practices developed for the Fiesta Flambeau and Christmas River parades. A few days after the Spurs' win, twenty-five barges traversed the Riverwalk for two and a half hours with players and coaches aboard. City planners estimated an attendance of 250,000, but some claimed that number surpassed 350,000.²⁹⁵ Steve Kerr, a three-time champion with Jordan and the Bulls, commented on the parade that it 'was different. I've never seen anything like this before. This is spectacular.

²⁸⁸ Carmina Danini, 'Season Tickets On List For Lottery Winner', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 18, 1999.

²⁸⁹ Christopher Anderson, 'It's A bet: Rudy Versus Howard', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 13, 1999; Chris William, 'Mayor Dishes Out Basketball Goodies', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 10, 1999; Gary Martin, 'Spurs Fever Infects Congress, Leads To An Intraparty Bet', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 16, 1999.

²⁹⁰ Roy Bragg, 'N.Y. Must Remember the Alamodome', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 19, 1999.

²⁹¹ Staff, 'Celebrating Fans Invited To Special Game Showing', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 19, 1999.

²⁹² Edward Ornelas, 'Spurs, We Love You', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 26, 1999.

²⁹³ KSAT 12, 'VIDEO: Spurs Fan Celebration After 1999 NBA Championship', YouTube, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofzvT22LNmg> (accessed December 8, 2022).

²⁹⁴ Staff, 'City Parties Like It's Championship 1999', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 26, 1999.

²⁹⁵ Brad Reagan, 'Spurs Float On Sea of Cheers- 350,000 Line San Antonio River Walk to Watch Champions' Victory Parade', *Austin American-Statesman*, June 28, 1999.

Phenomenal'.²⁹⁶ The Spurs then celebrated with fans in the Alamodome.²⁹⁷ Mayor Peak proclaimed, 'This is a tremendous moment in San Antonio history. The Spurs have thrust a light on San Antonio and energised the pride of every San Antonian. This city will be smiling and celebrating for months to come'.²⁹⁸ Businesses purchased hundreds of advertisements, and a news station produced commercials congratulating the Spurs while promoting civic pride and unity.²⁹⁹ One journalist observed a comical moment of civic unity during downtown celebrations when a police officer confronted a driver for making an illegal manoeuvre but waived him on following his 'Spurs, baby! Spurs!' yell.³⁰⁰ During their meeting with President Bill Clinton, team spokesperson Johnson declared, 'We want the city to be proud of this championship. Nobody can take this away from you San Antonio'.³⁰¹ Following that, the team travelled overseas and was greeted by approximately one thousand fans outside the historic Duomo Cathedral.³⁰²

Despite the Spurs' success during the 1999 season, the thirty-two games lost to the lockout had cost the franchise \$12.88 million, but, because of the postseason, they eventually earned a revenue of \$840,000.³⁰³ While this concerned Spurs executives, Bexar County voters appeased them when they approved construction plans for a new 18,500-seat arena on the city's east side. Some suggested that fear of a franchise relocation swayed many voters to pass the resolution.³⁰⁴ Public funds largely accrued from increased hospitality taxes would contribute \$146.5 million, and the franchise would contribute \$28.5 million. Bexar County would own the arena, and its mixed-use specifications would allow for various events.³⁰⁵ Over their last

²⁹⁶ Johnny Ludden, 'Last Men Standing- San Antonio's Favorite Sons Bask in Glory of NBA Championship', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 28, 1999.

²⁹⁷ KSAT 12, 'VIDEO: Spurs Fan Celebration After 1999 NBA Championship', YouTube, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofzvT22LNmg> (accessed December 8, 2022).

²⁹⁸ Chris Anderson and Carmina Danini, 'City Is Set For Sunday's River Parade, Dome Party', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 26, 1999.

²⁹⁹ ZStomp, '1999 San Antonio Spurs Memos; Championship; Champions', YouTube, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Gp7hPURbog&t=45s> (accessed December 8, 2022).

³⁰⁰ Brad Reagan, 'Spurs Float On Sea of Cheers- 350,000 Line San Antonio River Walk to Watch Champions' Victory Parade', *Austin American-Statesman*, June 28, 1999.

³⁰¹ Johnny Ludden, 'Clinton applauds the Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 7, 1999.

³⁰² Johnny Ludden, 'Photo Shoot Hardly Typical Day's Work For Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 14, 1999.

³⁰³ Travis E. Poling, 'Lockout Leads to Losses: Spurs \$12M In Red', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 17, 1999.

³⁰⁴ Liz Clarke, 'Lawmakers Seek To End Lucrative Tax Breaks For Pro Stadium Construction', *The Washington Post*, February 22, 2022.

³⁰⁵ Jim Thomas, 'Voters Approve Arena For Spurs', *Daily Breeze*, November 4, 1999.

three seasons in the Alamodome, the Spurs ranked first in gate attendance averaging over 22,000 spectators a game.³⁰⁶

Following their 1999 championship, the Spurs amassed the best winning percentage in NBA history, a head-to-head winning record against every NBA team, and the most consecutive playoff appearances with twenty-two, which spanned from 1997 to 2019. With Duncan as the centrepiece and the development of drafted international talents Manu Ginobili and Tony Parker, the team won four NBA titles in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2014. The team's success on the court during Duncan, Parker, and Ginobili's careers solidified the Spurs as the class of the NBA and arguably the top operating franchise in all North American professional sports based on player talent, winning percentage, franchise valuation, television ratings, and managerial and coaching acumen.³⁰⁷ Gervin, Robinson, Duncan, Ginobili, Parker, and Popovich all went on to become first-ballot Hall of Famers, while Gervin, Robinson, and Duncan were selected to the NBA's All-75 team, which honoured the seventy-five greatest players in NBA history. Popovich also earned the most wins by an NBA coach, breaking Don Nelson's record of 1,335 during the 2021-22 season. However, while success on the court has contributed to sustained fan support, there have been recent fractures in Spurs fandom due to Popovich's outspoken political comments and the team's on-court struggles, resulting in diminishing attendance.³⁰⁸ Additionally, the organisation has faced unprecedented public relations challenges due to recent allegations of sexual misconduct and the front office's failure to deal with it appropriately.³⁰⁹

As the franchise approached its fiftieth year in San Antonio, the new chairman, Peter J. Holt, son of the aforementioned Holt, took over for his mother, Julianna, following his parents' divorce. The organisation searched for ways to maintain its viability, and it was estimated to be worth \$2 billion.³¹⁰ Executives decided to play two games in

³⁰⁶ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 112-113; 'NBA Attendance Report- 2001', ESPN, http://www.espn.com/nba/attendance/_/year/2001/order/false (accessed December 8, 2022).

³⁰⁷ Patrick Rische, 'San Antonio Spurs: North America's Best Run Professional Sports Franchise', *Forbes*, March 16, 2013.

³⁰⁸ 'NBA Attendance Report- 2023', ESPN, <http://www.espn.com/nba/attendance> (accessed December 10, 2022).

³⁰⁹ Daniela Perez, 'Former Spurs Psychologist Sues Team, Joshua Primo For Alleged Sexual Misconduct', *Sports Illustrated*, November 3, 2022.

³¹⁰ 'NBA Team Valuations: #20 San Antonio Spurs', *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/teams/san-antonio-spurs/?sh=5893028738a2> (accessed December 10, 2022).

Austin and one in Mexico City to grow their regional brand, which upset many fans, given that those events were deemed home games and were being taken away from San Antonio. Once again, rumours of a franchise relocation arose after decades of certainty and security.³¹¹ Protests from supporters forced Holt to write a public letter to ameliorate concerns in which he described fond childhood memories encompassing the team and his fellow San Antonians. He concluded, 'There are no Spurs without the city and the people of San Antonio...Spurs fans - we are here to stay. Por Vida'.³¹²

A Half Century of the Spurs in San Antonio

Gervin metaphorically described the greatest Spurs players in history as a tree. He was the roots, Robinson, the trunk and Duncan, the leaves, fruits, and flowers.³¹³ These players contributed to the franchise's foundation, survival and success, but this chapter illustrates that others did too. San Antonians provided the requisite fertile soil for the metaphorical Spurs tree to flourish. Investors risked their capital relocating the Dallas franchise, and through supporters' collective efforts, the team's popularity grew. Investors, businesses, politicians, staffers, journalists, fans, and residents represented the Spurs' community of supporters that prioritised keeping the team in San Antonio. McCombs' financial networking and influence on the press ensured locals learned of the Spurs, while Drossos' energy and adept negotiating acquired talented players and coaches that attracted fans. Team success and strong community support during their ABA tenure facilitated the franchise's admission into the NBA, and after the Spurs and their supporters became an NBA force. Mayor Ron Nirenberg emphasised the city-team bond when rallying residents for the Spurs' fiftieth anniversary celebration game at the Alamodome,

Breaking the NBA's attendance record is about so much more than simply claiming a vanity statistic. This game at the dome is an opportunity for us to show the world one of the deepest bonds that exists between a city and a team. The Spurs and our community are

³¹¹ Gabriel Romero, 'We Are Here To Stay': Spurs Respond to Fears the Team Is Leaving San Antonio', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 11, 2022.

³¹² Peter J. Holt, Twitter post, May 10, 2022, 10:35 AM, <https://twitter.com/spurs/status/1524050412973830144/photo/1> (accessed December 8, 2022).

³¹³ Michael C. Wright, 'Q&A: George Gervin Reacts to Making NBA 75, Life in San Antonio and Today's Fashion', *NBA 75*, December 2, 2021, <https://www.nba.com/news/q-a-george-gervin-nba-75> (accessed January 2, 2023).

beautifully and inextricably linked. I know that. You know that. And now we have an opportunity to remind the rest of the world that the best fans in the country gather here in San Antonio. Please join me as we make this day one to remember for all San Antonians.³¹⁴

This 'Back Home in the Dome' celebration game was attended by 68,323 spectators, breaking the NBA single-game attendance record by over 6,000.³¹⁵ Throughout the 2022-23 season, the franchise honoured past players and coaches during games and created a docuseries and podcast to narrate the team's history. Tellingly, dozens of players and coaches continued to reside in the city following their retirements, and a few became shareholders.

Operating on the understanding that all communities (imagined or authentic) are temporal and conditional, the Spurs and their supporters cultivated a community over time. Their relationship transcended mere economic exchange, as they collaborated to influence events in and outside the arena. The Spurs' use of the press to gain and sustain a following certainly reinforced Anderson's arguments and illustrated how integral the media were to the success of such projects.³¹⁶ Additionally, supporters' influence in and on the organisation exhibited their agency and ability to limit the franchise's hegemony. The Spurs and their supporters influenced each other's identities, and this chapter has illustrated an evolution in this relationship. Initially, the Spurs utilised regional history and identity to develop a brand, but locals subsequently used the franchise's prestige over time to represent themselves. More recently, the Spurs appealed to the city's military identity and Hispanic heritage, making these focal points of marketing campaigns. A fluidity was also observable in Spurs fandom as supporter demographics and interests changed. Consequently, the franchise searched for ways to appease followers with promotions and in-game entertainment.

³¹⁴ JeffGSpursKENS5, Twitter post, December 19, 2022, 4:55 PM, https://twitter.com/jeffgspurszone/status/1604973819206180866?s=42&t=sml1ZsqkSGyb_Chqz6JxuA (accessed December 30, 2022).

³¹⁵ Gabriel Romero, 'Spurs Shatter NBA's Single Game Attendance Record at the Alamodome', MySA, January 13, 2023, <https://www.mysanantonio.com/sports/article/san-antonio-spurs-nba-attendance-record-17707328.php> (accessed June 13, 2024).

³¹⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 2016), 36-37, 7.

Relationships between cities and sports franchises are undoubtedly conditional, and this chapter illuminated how relocation threats and stadium gentrification alienated supporters. It also touched on the civic pride and shared urban identity that the Spurs helped cultivate but believing that this relationship was essential, or eternal would be misguided. Burd's assertion that journalists, politicians, sports marketers, and architects use mediated messages to create false senses of belonging for fans was observable here, but the case of the Spurs was more complicated given their ownership. Burd operated under the assumption that owners strictly sought the highest profits, but Spurs shareholders invested in the team and region given that it was their home.³¹⁷ While owners valued profits, many refused to sell to prospective buyers who would not guarantee the team would stay, despite sometimes operating at a financial loss. It should be noted that some sports franchises had historically misled followers with limited financial transparency, which had created labour disputes and a league lockout. It was unclear whether the Spurs exercised this tactic, but they certainly took advantage of federal tax breaks during the construction and renovation of their stadia. These facilities cost residents over \$300 million, but voters approved of them, despite the possibility that such funds could have directly supported residents through other means. San Antonians and the franchise cultivated a relationship and an evolving brand with the organisation representing the city and its residents to outsiders, and San Antonians influencing the franchise's leadership and culture. Together, they have shared moments of meaning and forged an identity over the last fifty years.³¹⁸

The examination of physical and digital archives in this chapter facilitated the creation of a narrative detailing the franchise's history and relationship to the places and people to which it was located, supported, and owned. The chapter establishes a general understanding of the Spurs' founding and evolution and how the franchise impacted San Antonio socially, economically, politically, and culturally. The chapter also uncovers a community of Spurs supporters who valued the franchise and were committed to keeping it in the city. Additionally, the various sources utilised here showcased how integral people of influence, the press, and marketing techniques

³¹⁷ Gene Burd, 'Mediated Sports, Mayors, and the Marketed Metropolis', 2003, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Cultures*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 35-64.

³¹⁸ Amy Dorsett, 'International Media Broadcast S.A. Not What They Expected', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 19, 1999.

were to the development of a larger imagined community of Spurs fandom at the macrosocial level, which would progressively impact personal communities at the microsocial level as the team's popularity and ties to residents grew over time. While essential to the creation of a Spurs chronological narrative, these sources did have some limitations and biases. Spurs ownership's influence on the press during the franchise's infancy may have persuaded journalists to craft positive renderings of the team, while sportswriters' own fandom may have reduced their ability to remain objective throughout the team's history. Additionally, these sources did not allow for a rigorous analysis of supporters at a collective or individual level, which was one of the key objectives of this thesis. The following chapter builds on the foundation provided here to explore Spurs fandom more closely by analysing supporters' obituaries to uncover how the team became an identifying feature of a person's life, how commemorators valued the deceased's relationship to the team, and what were the characteristics of this fandom community often labelled, the 'Spurs Family'.

Chapter 3- Spurs Fandom in Cyber Obituaries: A Prosopographical Analysis

The qualifiers for what constitute a community is contested terrain. In the 1920s, Thomas highlighted the power of the mind in developing communities.¹ In the 1950s, Kaufman stressed that communities were interactional evolving beings.² In the 1980s, Anderson complicated notions of the community and suggested that religious and secular entities were actually 'imagined communities'.³ These studies have facilitated subsequent analyses from numerous sport historians and sociologists who have grappled with the role sport played in developing and destroying communities.⁴ This chapter explores the imagined community of Spurs fandom by focusing on fans as a way to complement the previous archival examination of the franchise and as a prelude to the next chapter's focus on the humanisation of supporters.

Historians have noted death's ability to propagate stories and build communities. Understandings of death and what to do after a loved one's passing have changed over time. In the 1960s and 1980s, Gorer and Aries explored how practices and views of death changed over the centuries,⁵ while, in the 2000s, Wood, Williamson, Faust, Smith, and Periyakoil discussed the competing notions of what was a Good

¹ William Thomas and Dorothy Thomas, *The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs*, (Boston: Pimpton Press, 1928), 594.

² Harold Kaufman, 'Toward and Interactional Conception of Community', *Social Forces* 38, no.1 (October 1959), 9.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 2016), 36-37, 7.

⁴ John Harris, 'Cool Cymru, Rugby Union and an Imagined Community', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 27, no. 3/4 (May 2007), 154, 157; David L. Andrews, Jacob Bustad, and Samuel Clevenger, 'National Sporting Pastimes, Spectacles of Sporting Otherness and American Imaginings, 1880-1920', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, no. 1-2 (2014): 225; Nathan Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport* (Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2018), 119-122; Jean-Marie Brohm, *Sport, a Prison of Measured Time: Essays*. (London: Ink Links Ltd., 1989), 19; Roger Penn and Damon Berridge, 'Football and the Military in Contemporary Britain: An Exploration of Invisible Nationalism', *Armed Forces & Society* 44, no. 1 (2016): 128, 129, 132, 134; Michael L. Butterworth and Stormi D. Moskal, 'American Football, Flags, and 'Fun': The Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl and the Rhetorical Production of Militarism', *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2, no. 4 (November 6, 2009): 19; Michael L. Butterworth, 'Militarism and Memorializing at the Pro Football Hall of Fame', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (2012): 241, 255; Alan G. Ingham and Mary G. McDonald, 'Sport and Communities/Communitas', 2003, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Culture*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox, et al. (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2003), 24, 27-28; Ralph C. Wilcox et al., eds., *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Cultures* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 8-11.

⁵ Geoffrey Gorer, *Death, Grief, and Mourning*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 192-199; Phillippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes Toward Death Over the Last One Thousand Years*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 603, 613.

Death.⁶ Laquer has deliberated the work the dead require of the living with regard to their mortal remains. He cited Diogenes the Cynic from the fourth century B.C.E. in which Diogenes requested that his corpse be thrown over the city walls to be 'devoured by beasts'. When his peers expressed concern about his well-being if this wish was granted, he replied, 'How am I then injured by being torn by those animals if I have no sensation?'⁷ Playing out this hypothetical solution regarding anyone's corpse seems to deprive it of a basic level of care or humanity and for many, tossing a loved one's remains into an unknown abyss seems illogical. Despite their remains being a shell of who they once were, survivors have committed to honour and commemorate the dead for generations through sacral practices that have developed into modern burials and funerals, traditions which have been supplemented with death notices and obituaries. Collectively, these practices have acted as a bulwark against the current that pulls many into the waters of oblivion. For all these reasons, this chapter analyses cyber obituaries of Spurs supporters to elucidate the characteristics, antecedents, and evolution of Spurs fandom in San Antonio along with their role in community building.

Prosopography

Although prosopography was not initially considered for this research, the process of retrieving primary sources revealed the need for a methodology adept at managing a large volume of data. After reviewing various methods in sport history, it became apparent that prosopography would be conducive to establish, explore, examine, and interpret the universe of Spurs fandom within a broader social and historical context. Employing this method helps reveal the shared characteristics, experiences, and values of a collection of ordinary people. Broadly defined, prosopography is the collective study of a group of actors with common characteristics and it has been used in research for over a century. It is different from other biographical methods and is limited in its ability to identify and explain

⁶ William R. Wood and John B. Williamson, 'Historical Changes in the Meaning of Death in Western Tradition' in the *Handbook of Death and Dying* 1 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 2; Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, (Vintage Books: New York, 2008), 6-9; Alexander K. Smith and Vjeyanthi S. Periyakoil, 'Should We Bury "The Good Death"?', *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 66, no. 5 (March 2018): 857-865.

⁷ Thomas W. Laquer, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2015), 1, 18.

ideas, passions, motivations, and personal experiences.⁸ However, Stone notes it can help discover a 'universe to be studied'.⁹ New applications have shown how it can be employed by sport historians.¹⁰ Some used the method to describe the characteristics of sporting communities in nineteenth and twentieth-century Britain to contextualise and interrogate traditional gender roles making future explorations possible.¹¹ Practitioners agree that it is not enough to simply explain the characteristics of a group, and that this method requires historical interpretation to contextualise and draw meaning from the collected sources.¹² While many historians have relied heavily on census data, this investigation into the Spurs uses cyber obituaries. Hume and Bressers suggest that paid obituaries, or cyber obituaries, not written by journalists, are useful narratives that give researchers a window into the lives of everyday sorts of people.¹³ The term obituary will be referenced on the understanding that each did more than just report a notice of death because commemorators included personalised biographies of the deceased. The utility of these sources has been demonstrated in previous research and were chosen because of their cultural significance.¹⁴

Obituaries serve as a death notice and biographical epilogue. Survivors write these narratives in attempts to represent the departed and express what they value about them.¹⁵ While sometimes hagiographic, Hume suggests that their historical

⁸ Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sport History Research', 1855-1882; Day, 'Swimming Natationists, Mistresses, and Matrons', 506; Matthew L. Jockers, *Microanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary Theory* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 26.

⁹ Lawrence Stone, 'Prosopography', *Historical Studies Today* 100, no. 1 (Winter 1971): 63, 66, 46.

¹⁰ Katharine Keats-Rohan, *Biography, Identity and Names: Understanding the Pursuit of the Individual in Prosopography* (Oxford, UK: UPR Linacre College, 2006), 140; Samantha-Jayne Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sport History Research: Biography, Collective Biography, and Prosopography', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1868.

¹¹ Dave Day, 'Swimming Natationists, Mistresses, and Matrons: Familial Influences on Female Careers in Victorian Britain', *The International Journal for the History of Sport* 35, no. 6 (2018): 494-510; Lisa Taylor, 'The Women's Amateur Rowing Association 1923-1963: A Prosopographical Approach', *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (June 25, 2018): 307-330.

¹² Dave Day, 'Swimming Natationists, Mistresses, and Matrons: Familial Influences on Female Careers in Victorian Britain', *The International Journal for the History of Sport* 35, no. 6 (2018): 494-510; Lisa Taylor, 'The Women's Amateur Rowing Association 1923-1963: A Prosopographical Approach', *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (June 25, 2018): 307-330; Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sport History Research', 1855-1882; Matthew L. Jockers, *Microanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary Theory* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 26.

¹³ Janice Hume and Bonnie Bressers, 'Obituaries Online: New Connections with the Living-and the Dead', *OMEGA- The Journal of Death and Dying* 60, no. 3 (May 2010): 261.

¹⁴ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Last Words", *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (June 2002): 30-36; Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb, 'The Portrayal of Librarians in Obituaries at the End of the Twentieth Century', *Library Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2004): 152-180; Charles T. Clotfelter, 'Die-Hard Fans and the Ivory Tower's Ties that Bind*', *Social Science Quarterly* 96, no. 2 (June 2015): 381-399.

¹⁵ Hall, 'Last Words', 30.

accuracy is not as significant as their cultural function in how they display the lived experiences of ordinary people and their values.¹⁶ These sources substantiate claims that the dead are always with us and illuminate how the end of a life does not necessarily equate to the end of a relationship.¹⁷ Historians have discussed the art of dying in the development and solidification of a person's memory; the obituary seems an appropriate denouement.¹⁸

Researchers have explored obituaries to analyse identity formation.¹⁹ For example, Clotfelter acknowledged the benefits of utilising such an unconventional source given that they elucidate the identifying features of an individual's life, such as being a fan.²⁰ Accepting these sources as a representation of a person forces one to recognise the similarities between obituaries and historical writing. As Gaddis noted, history is,

A representation of reality. It's not reality itself: indeed, if truth be told it's a pitiful approximation of reality that, even with the greatest skill on the part of the historian, would seem very strange to anyone who'd actually lived through it. And yet, with the passage of time, our representations become reality in the sense that they compete with, insinuate themselves into and eventually replace altogether the first-hand memories people have of events through which they lived.²¹

Obituaries possess the power of representation and liminality. Slowikowski discussed this notion through her work on urban sport statues, defining it as a 'realm' where observers possess 'freedom to juggle with the factors of existence' in a 'Third Space' of being. The sense of 'in-betweenness' generated by statues and obituaries

¹⁶ Janice Hume, "Portraits of Grief," *Reflectors of Values: The New York Times Remembers Victims of September 11*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (March 2003): 176; Janice Hume and Bonnie Bressers, 'Obituaries Online: New Connections with the Living-and the Dead', *OMEGA- The Journal of Death and Dying* 60, no. 3 (May 2010): 258.

¹⁷ DeVries and Rutherford, *Memorializing Loved Ones on the World Wide Web*, 6; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

¹⁸ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 6-9; Hall, 'Last Words', 32-33; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

¹⁹ Hall, 'Last Words'; Dilevko and Gottlieb; 'The Portrayal of Librarians'; Clotfelter, 'Die-Hard Fans'.

²⁰ Clotfelter, 'Die-Hard Fans', 389, 397.

²¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 136.

allows viewers and readers to ponder, imagine, and construct their respective reality of those they observe and aid in their development of a remembrance.²²

For this chapter, 1,823 obituaries published between 2001 and 2018 were accessed from the *San Antonio Express-News* through the Legacy Memorial archive.²³ Hume suggested that Legacy had supplanted the antiquated newsprint obituary section because of its accessibility and widespread popularity.²⁴ In 2020, the archive, which stated the platform was 'Where life stories live on', boasted an audience of forty million monthly visitors and partnered with more than 1,500 newspapers and 3,500 funeral homes globally.²⁵ This memorial website does have some limitations in terms of research since a paid subscription is required, so those living in poverty may have been excluded. Nevertheless, prosopography proved conducive to dealing with such a quantity of sources.

While this was only one element of the research towards producing a contextualised inquiry into Spurs fandom, this chapter serves as an essential foundation. Discoverable information included a person's birth and death date, age, gender, occupation, geographical location by zip code, race, ethnicity, education, religion, politics, and whether they were a season ticket holder or Baseline Bum. These identifying features will be covered holistically to gather a more comprehensive understanding of Spurs supporters as a group. While sometimes difficult to ascertain definitively, the race and ethnicity of fans became clearer through further analysis of associated photographs (one or more images were often included in the deceased's obituary), surnames, forenames, named relatives (this was particularly important regarding the identification of women's maiden names) and the obituary prose itself that often revealed ethnic language and customs. However, it must be acknowledged that this interpretation of racial or ethnic background was not

²² Synthia Sydnor Slowikowski, 'Urban(e) Statuary Times', 2003, in *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Cultures*, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 70, 72; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

²³ Legacy is a memorial website that provides public access to obituaries from all around the world.

²⁴ Janice Hume and Bonnie Bressers, 'Obituaries Online: New Connections with the Living-and the Dead', *OMEGA- The Journal of Death and Dying* 60, no. 3 (May 2010): 267.

²⁵ 'Legacy', <https://www.legacy.com/> (accessed November 22, 2021).

infallible, and even following this systematic interrogation, three per cent of individuals could not be classified due to the absence of relevant information.²⁶

Race and Ethnicity

The racial and ethnic composition of Spurs fans differed significantly from city census percentages from the last twenty years (Table 3.1). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, those who were white alone and not of Hispanic/Latinx ethnicity were twenty-five per cent, Hispanic/Latinx were sixty-four per cent, the black population was seven per cent, Asians represented less than three per cent, and American Indians were less than one per cent. No traceable data could be found concerning other races listed in the city census, which included Pacific Islander (0.1 per cent) and 'Two or More Races' (2.7 per cent). A comparison of research findings with the city census data showed that whites were overrepresented, whereas all other races and ethnicities were underrepresented. Fifty-one per cent of male Spurs fans were white, forty-six per cent were Latino, two per cent were black, and one per cent were Asian, Native, and unknown. As noted above, the demographics of male Spurs fans were not reflective of the city as a whole and showed how people of colour were underrepresented in this prosopography. While the number of females discovered from the prosopography was substantial, the racial and ethnic demographics exposed how Spurs fandom lacked some diversity, since 526 (64 per cent) of identified female fans were white, exhibiting even less racial and ethnic diversity than males. The 277 (34 per cent) Latina fans were a distant second, and nine fans were black females (1 per cent). The three Asian and two Native American fans comprised less than one per cent of females combined. Whites constituted the majority (57 per cent) of the discoverable Spurs fans despite San Antonio's majority Latinx population. Socioeconomic pressures may have limited survivors' ability to purchase a cyber obituary and Spurs ticket inflation likely played a part in limiting minority totals provided historiographic evidence.²⁷

²⁶ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (August 3, 2020): 670-691.

²⁷ Sean Dinces, *Bulls Markets: Chicago's Basketball Business and the New Inequality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 225; Sean Dinces, 'The Attrition of the Common Fan', *Social Science History* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 360.

Table 3.1 Spurs Fans' Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Total Fans	Percentage of Total
White	1,041	57.1
Hispanic/Latinx	740	40.6
Black	25	1.37
Asian	8	0.44
American Indian	3	0.16
Unknown	6	0.33

Ethnic identity and acculturation have historically influenced the consumption of sport, and the NBA's marketing machine has employed various tactics to exploit the ethnic identity of fans.²⁸ This was true for the Latinx population of Spurs supporters, who have been strategically targeted with numerous public relations and marketing campaigns over the years. For example, as a part of the NBA's Global Games initiative, the Spurs played in Mexico City on several occasions in both preseason and regular season games, and the NBA started 'Noche Latina' during the 2006-07 season due to what the league called increased fan interest from Latin America and the United States' Latinx populations.²⁹ Subsequently, manufacturers produced jerseys with 'Los Spurs' stitched over the chest.

More specifically, over time, the Spurs franchise has increased their targeting of Latinx fans by broadcasting games in Spanish on the radio, releasing the 'La Cultura' apparel line to 'celebrate Hispanic heritage', and hosting mariachi bands and Tejano singers for in-game entertainment.³⁰ In 2020, the organisation held its first 'Selena Night' honouring the local Tejano star Selena Quintanilla-Pérez, who was murdered in 1995, and created a cross-brand clothing line promotion featuring

²⁸ Jae-Pil Ha, Mary Humes, and T. Christopher Greenwell, 'Using Cultural Factors to Explore Sport Consumption Behaviors of Ethnic Minority Groups: The Case of Asians in the United States', *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* 17, no. 2 (2016): 130.

²⁹ Jeff McDonald, 'Spurs Remain Key to NBA's Latin American Goals', San Antonio Express-News, January 13, 2017, <https://www.expressnews.com/sports/spurs/article/Spurs-remain-key-to-Spurs-Latin-American-goals-10856693.php> (accessed June 13, 2024).

³⁰ King, 'Spurs Use Cultural Touch Points to Hit Mark'; National Basketball Association, 'Spurs Release La Cultura Apparel Collection in Celebration of Hispanic Heritage Night', San Antonio Spurs, <https://www.nba.com/spurs/spurs-release-la-cultura-apparel-collection-celebration-hispanic-heritage-night> (accessed January 11, 2020); Marc J. Spears, 'Saying Gracias and Adios to Manu Ginobili', *The Undeclared*, <https://theundeclared.com/features/the-magnitude-of-spurs-manu-ginobili-impact/> (accessed January 11, 2020); Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

the deceased singer called 'Selena X Spurs'.³¹ In addition, the organisation finally caved to local pressure and produced City Edition jerseys featuring the fiesta colours that fans had campaigned for over several years.³² For many supporters, the fiesta colours were more representative of their city than the camouflage patterns of previous years, which the franchise had selected to align with the city's moniker of Military City USA. San Antonio's annual Fiesta started in 1891 and was initially created as a parade to honour and celebrate Texas' independence from Mexico, but, over the last century, it was refashioned into a celebration of San Antonio's rich and diverse cultures, and it has blossomed into one of the largest festivals in the U.S.³³

In the years before these marketing campaigns, at least one journalist claimed that the team's signing of Latino players had contributed to forming a 'strong bond between community and squad' to accommodate the league's highest Latinx fan attendance numbers.³⁴ After he arrived in 2002, Manu Ginobili emerged as a local fan favourite. The innate desire to be represented by someone who looks, talks, and acts like you could have contributed to his popularity. Ginobili, an Argentinian turned 'honorary Mexican', often addressed fans and the media in Spanish during his sixteen seasons with the Spurs. Obituary writers regularly referenced Ginobili; he was one of Ricardo's heroes, Arturo cheered Manu on until the day he died, Dorothy adored him, Carmen supported his 'intense reckless play', Mary was 'Ginobili's girl', and several others mentioned he was the deceased's favourite Spur.³⁵ Despite the Spurs and NBA's ethnic promotions and the resulting popularity of Ginobili, however, the obituary totals showed Latinx fan numbers lagged in terms of representation. At least three reasons might explain this. First, obituaries were predominately in English as Legacy only serves English-speaking countries.

³¹ Madalyn Mendoza, 'Spurs Announce First-Ever Selena Night, Merchandise Line Featuring the Two San Antonio Favorites', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 29, 2020.

³² Cat Cardenas, 'The San Antonio Spurs Finally Unveil a Longtime Fan Favorites: The Fiesta Jersey', *Texas Monthly*, November 14, 2020.

³³ Fiesta San Antonio, 'About', <https://fiestasantonio.org/about-fiesta-san-antonio/> (accessed November 24, 2021).

³⁴ ESPN, 'Spurs, Led by Manu Ginobili, are NBA's Most Hispanic Team', *One Nación* https://www.espn.com/blog/onenacion/post/_id/6167/spurs-led-by-manu-ginobili-are-nbas-most-hispanic-team (accessed January 11, 2020); Jesse L. Schroffel and Christopher S.P. Magee, 'Own-Race Bias Among NBA Coaches', *Journal of Sports Economics* 13, no. 2 (2012): 147.

³⁵ Ricardo Zamarripa, Obituary, August 4, 2006; Arturo Rios, Obituary, August 9, 2015; Dorothy Gonzales, Obituary, April 19, 2017; Carmen Mata, Obituary, June 13, 2011; Mary Casias, Obituary, February 18, 2017; Nancy Bennett, Obituary, February 26, 2008; Marjorie Regelin, Obituary, February 28, 2010; Frances Gonzales, Obituary, March 26, 2013.

Although some obituaries included Spanish phrases and mottos, they were rarities. Another possibility that could account for these lower-than-expected totals could be that Legacy charged subscription fees, so traditionally poorer populations may have been priced out of this experience.³⁶ Additionally, some groups may not have been motivated to create an obituary due to their having different cultural commemorative practices.

While whites and Latinx individuals accounted for most identified fans, blacks emerged as the third-largest group. Like their Latinx counterparts, they were underrepresented in the data relative to their population in the city. Despite the popularity of basketball among African Americans and the continuous influx of black players onto the Spurs roster, fan totals for this group appeared limited.³⁷ For further contextualisation of the Spurs' relationship with the black San Antonio community, one must be made aware of the historical efforts made by the organisation to engage with this demographic. The franchise attempted to serve the needs of the black east side community through constructing the team's most recent arena, leading numerous philanthropic efforts, and establishing educational institutions there.³⁸ Despite these efforts, blacks had limited representation in the prosopography. Perhaps this is the result of the same rationale that was applied to Latinx representation, particularly concerns related to the cost of archiving an obituary, or cultural differences regarding an obituary's importance.

Within the results, other racial groups, such as Asian, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races were rarely mentioned. Echoing the call of others, an investigation into these races in the context of sports fandom warrants its own discussion.³⁹ Overall, the ethnic and racial composition of Spurs fandom illustrates how an imagined community in sport differs from that of the nation. Because

³⁶ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

³⁷ Derek Thompson, 'Which Sports Have the Whitest/Richest/Oldest Fans?', *The Atlantic*, February 10, 2014.

³⁸ Jeff Garcia, 'Spurs Great David Robinson Explains Hist Commitment to Education in San Antonio', October 20, 2020, News 4 San Antonio, <https://news4sanantonio.com/sports/spurs-zone/spurs-great-david-robinson-explains-his-commitment-to-education-in-san-antonio> (accessed November 24, 2021); Mike Finger, 'At Boys & Girls Club, Some Spurs Visits Endure', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 26, 2019.

³⁹ Stefan Lawrence and Christian Davis, 'Fans for Diversity? A Critical Race Theory Analysis of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Supporters' Experiences of Football Fandom', *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 11, no. 4 (November 14, 2018): 710.

prospective community members are not always born into a socialised allegiance as they are with their country, loyalty to the Spurs was sometimes developed through a time symmetry of shared experience vis-à-vis the media. However, for historically disadvantaged groups, their access to and time for leisure may have been lesser than those of affluence, thus accounting for their limited engagement.⁴⁰

Upon first examination, the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities contradicts the argument that these obituaries serve as a cultural and social mirror of San Antonio, but these facts are somewhat in tune with the historical essence of the city. For example, the U.S. admitted Texas as a state to the Union in 1845, but the city did not elect its first Hispanic mayor until Henry Cisneros in 1981. Additionally, the first African American city councilperson, Samuel James Jr., was not elected until 1965, and the city's first black mayor, Ivy Taylor, did not hold office until 2014. These groups' lack of visibility in the prosopography correlates to their underrepresentation and impoverishment in the city's annals.⁴¹

Historically, minority groups comprised the vast majority of those impoverished in the U.S. and that is still the case today, especially in San Antonio.⁴² One cannot understand the country's class dynamics without recognising its history of racial discrimination, which has led to the substantial educational, health, voting, and income gaps that permeate contemporary America. The impoverishment of so many San Antonians of colour affirmed the point of novelist and activist James Baldwin, who said,

History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.⁴³

⁴⁰ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

⁴¹ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

⁴² Jackie Wang, 'Census Data: San Antonio Region's Poverty Rate Rises, Tops Nation', *San Antonio Report*, September 26, 2019; Joshua Fetcher, 'Report: Poverty in San Antonio Disproportionately Hits Hispanic, Black Residents', *San Antonio Express-News*, July 31, 2019.

⁴³ James Grossman, 'James Baldwin on History', *AHA Today*, August 3, 2016.

Indeed, modern San Antonio is a product of its past, and the historical forces at play still influence the economic status of many residents despite efforts to redress civic disadvantage.

Scholars have suggested that the sports industry and supporters have yet to embrace diversity. The various ethnicities, nationalities, and cultures present on the playing pitch have invariably been absent in the stands, despite the several superficial commodified promotions of diversity and inclusion, which have generally resulted in minimal societal impact. Consequently, ticket inflation, stadium gentrification and a lack of trust have caused some minority fans to abandon the live-match experience while, in contrast, the attendance of members of the white community at games has been solidified through affluence and family histories.⁴⁴ Others have identified '*perceptions of racism*' and '*actual experiences*' as primary inhibitors of ethnic minority fan attendance at English football matches.⁴⁵ While some may dismiss possible connections with the historically racist and violent theatre of English football, evidence suggests that this may also be a reality in the NBA.⁴⁶ For example, some have argued that the actions of the league over decades have supported structural racism, citing the league's history of white paternalism, black athletes being deemed as deviants, lack of minority ownership, tokenistic promotions of progressivism, fabricated 'post-racial' appeal, and league regulations on the image of black athletes to fit the mould of corporate America.⁴⁷ Given the league's majority-black player demographics and majority-white ownership elements, a type of modern plantation dynamic has also been cited by some and provoked uncomfortable but necessary conversations.⁴⁸ As recently as 2014, the

⁴⁴ Stefan Lawrence and Christian Davis, 'Fans for Diversity? A Critical Race Theory Analysis of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Supporters' Experiences of Football Fandom', *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 11, no. 4 (November 14, 2018): 709-710.

⁴⁵ Daniel Burdsey and Kuljit Randhawa, 'How Can Professional Football Club Create Welcoming and Inclusive Stadia for British Asian Fans?', *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* 4, no. 1 (December 14, 2011): 106.

⁴⁶ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

⁴⁷ Katherine Lavelle, 'No Room for Racism: Restoration of Order in the NBA', *Communication & Sport* 4 no. 4 (2015): 424-441; Timothy Piper, 'Where "Post-Race" Happens', *Moving Image* 18 no. 1 (Spring 2018): 1-24; John Hoberman, *Darwin's Athletes: How Sport Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

⁴⁸ John Hoberman, *Darwin's Athletes: How Sport Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); Kurt Streater, 'Is Slavery's Legacy in the Power Dynamics of Sports?', *New York Times*, August 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/16/sports/basketball/slavery-anniversary-basketball-owners.html> (accessed June 13, 2024).

case of former Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling reinforced these arguments. For many, Sterling faced no substantial punishment and financially benefitted from his ousting from the league.⁴⁹

The history of structural racism in the NBA can be observed from the top-down concerning owners such as Sterling, but it can also be seen from below when reviewing the racist behaviour of fans. As recently as 2017, a Spurs season ticketholder, Simran Jeet Singh, was verbally attacked and inaccurately stereotyped by other fans who yelled racial epithets at him and his father.⁵⁰ Imagined communities naturally unite insiders (us) while simultaneously separating outsiders (them), and in the modern era, individuals may consider themselves a part of multiple entities (say, the nation and a given sporting supporters' group). Consequently, the influences of these communities can collide, causing stress in one's mind and amongst the group, which results in the fractures observed here and in other imagined communities.⁵¹

Antemortem Segregation and Posthumous Collectivity

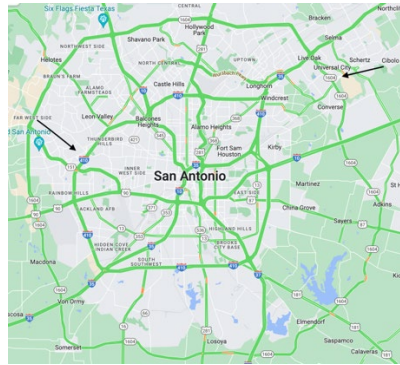
San Antonio's suburban demarcation zone has changed over time. When construction began on the city's nearly fifty-mile Interstate Highway Loop 410, what laid outside of 410 was considered a frontier. Loop 410 is approximately thirteen miles from the city's centre, at all 360 degrees. However, over the last half-century, the city has experienced tremendous residential and commercial growth, and another loop was developed thirteen miles outside of 410. Since its modest beginnings in 1977 as a Farm to Market Road, the now ninety-six-mile State Highway Loop 1604 serves as the city's outer concentric ring and marks the suburban sprawl observed over the last quarter-century (Figure 3.1).

⁴⁹ Katherine Lavelle, 'No Room for Racism: Restoration of Order in the NBA', *Communication & Sport* 4 no. 4 (2015): 426-427, 436; Timothy Piper, 'Where "Post-Race" Happens', *Moving Image* 18 no. 1 (Spring 2018): 20.

⁵⁰ Elaine Ayala, 'Racist Insult After Spurs Game a Sad Example of Hate in America', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 2, 2017.

⁵¹ Bradbury et al., 'The Under-Representation and Experiences of Elite Minority Coaches in professional football in England, France and the Netherlands', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 53 no. 3 (July 2016): 313-334; Daniel Kilvington, 'British Asians, Covert Racism and Exclusion in English Professional Football', *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, (December 2013): 603; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 50; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio "Spurs Family"', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

Figure 3.1: Map of San Antonio's Two Concentric Highways, 410 and 1604⁵²



The dataset made possible a geographical allocation of Spurs fan ‘hotspots’ around the city using different indicators, which were searched for in this order: home address or residential neighbourhood, social scenery (restaurants, bars, shops), workplace, high school, funeral home location, and lastly, burial site, although not all locales could be unambiguously identified.⁵³ Overall, 1,798 (98 per cent) of individuals were associated with a specific mailing zip code, with the most prominent being those of 78228 (7.4 per cent), 78212 (7.1 per cent), 78232 (6.4 per cent), 78214 (5.2 per cent), and 78209 (4.7 per cent), while seven others housed at least forty individuals.⁵⁴ A critical ancillary consideration was that from this geographical information, each area’s Median Household Income (MHI) was compared to the city census data to allow for further interrogation (see Table 3.2).⁵⁵

⁵² Captured through Google Maps.

⁵³ This includes frequented bars, restaurants, parks, businesses, and other named local gathering spots around the city.

⁵⁴ ZIP Codes that included more than 40 persons: 78228 (133), 78212 (128), 78232 (116), 78214 (94), 78209 (86), 78218 (76), 78230 (65), 78207 (64), 78216 (58), 78205 (56), 78201 (50), 78210 (46).

⁵⁵ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, ‘An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio ‘Spurs Family’’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

Table 3.2 Top Five Spurs Fan Hotspots

ZIP Code	Total Fans	Racial/Ethnic Majority	City Location	MHI
78228	133	Hispanic/Latinx (83%)	Inner westside	\$39,980*
78212	128	White (68%)	North central	\$43,428*
78232	116	White (85%)	Far northside	\$65,997
78214	94	Hispanic/Latinx (61%)	Southside	\$29,026*
78209	86	White (88%)	North central	\$63,104

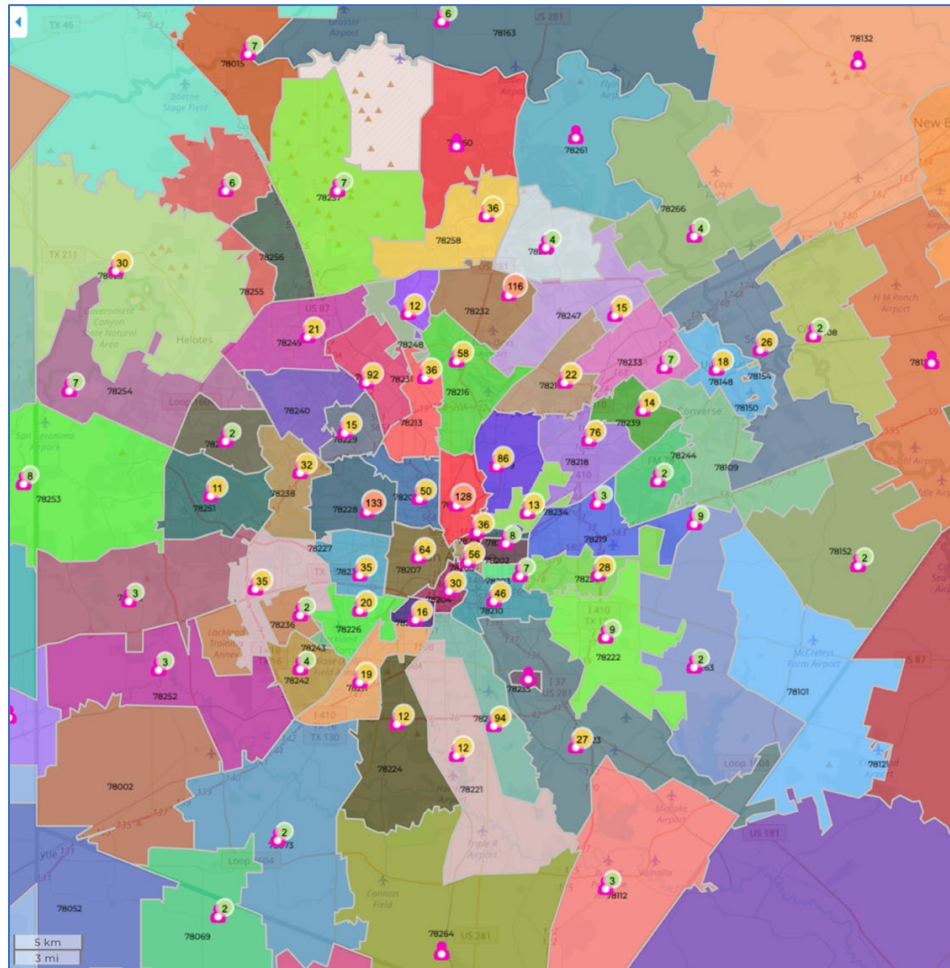
Source: United States Census Bureau; *Indicates (MHI) below city-wide average.

Of the thirteen zip codes with the highest fan populace, nine ranked below the city-wide MHI of \$53,420, suggesting that, while those fans may have lived in less affluence, they were not priced out of Spurs fandom. For example, African Americans Robert, Roger, and Mattie resided in San Antonio's historically black and poor east side 78202, where more than forty per cent of families lived below the poverty line.⁵⁶ In addition, the city's inner westside 78207 ranked last for MHI at \$22,894, yet sixty-four residents from this generationally Latinx (95 per cent) area embraced *their* Spurs. Conversely, Bexar County's wealthiest zip codes, all of which had a MHI of over \$100,000, were suburban (outside State Highway Loop 1604) and predominately white. These included 78266 (\$130,00), 78015 (\$119,077), 78257 (\$115,560), 78255 (\$114,315), 78260 (\$109,424), 78023 (\$108,881), and 78258 (\$106,036) observable in Figure 3.2 below.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Tyler White, 'San Antonio ZIP Codes and Poverty Levels', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 26, 2014.

⁵⁷ Ibid; Fechter, 'Map: Median Household Income in Bexar County'.

Figure 3.2: Greater San Antonio Area Location of Spurs Fans by Zip Code⁵⁸



Zip Code 78228

San Antonio’s inner westside 78228 zip code was the most populous fan hotspot and deserved a closer examination to explore the characteristics of Spurs fandom. In 2020, approximately 58,000 San Antonians resided there. Woodlawn Lake and Loop 410 provide partial demarcation zones for this area, covering nearly eleven square miles. 78228’s population density was higher than most San Antonio zip codes, and the housing units numbered around 21,000. Residents earned an annual MHI of \$36,113 in 2015, \$17,307 less than the city’s census average. Most residents were Latinx, had a median age of thirty-three, fifty-two per cent were female and most lived in homes built before 1970. In the 1950s, developers built over five thousand homes there, accounting for the zip code’s most significant housing boom. A product of the suburban sprawl following WWII, what once existed as an affluent pocket of suburbia, had been mired by crime over recent decades and ranked in the seventeenth percentile in terms of safety, meaning eighty-three per cent of other zip

⁵⁸ This map was created and captured through the application Maptive.

codes in the U.S. were considered safer. The high crime and poverty rates endemic to San Antonio's Hispanic westside neighbourhoods have impacted on the educational experience of those who lived there. Nearly thirty per cent did not complete high school, and less than ten per cent earned a college degree.⁵⁹ The data shows that 133 (7 per cent) Spurs fans have historically resided in 78228.

These fans lived to an average age of sixty-nine, ten years younger than the Bexar County life expectancy and eight years younger than the zip code average.⁶⁰ This was also four years shorter than the life expectancy for Spurs fans overall (73 years). Female Spurs fans in 78228 lived to an average age of seventy-six, outliving males by nine years. The range in the age of these fans was bookended by two males, with the oldest living to be 100 years old and the youngest dying at twelve. Nine fans were born in the 1910s, twenty-five in the 1920s, thirty-two in the 1930s, twenty-two in the 1940s, eighteen in the 1950s, thirteen in the 1960s, four in the 1970s, five in the 1980s, one in the 2000s, and four could not be determined. Ninety-eight (74 per cent) supporters died in the 2010s, and thirty-five (26 per cent) perished in the 2000s. Fans' age and generational makeup in 78228 illustrated how universal Spurs fandom was. In times of ever-growing generational divides, personal connections and bonding may have been made possible through Spurs fandom. Whether a larger universal community was forged through this fandom is debatable. However, at the very least, at the personal and familial level, it seemed many obituary writers utilised fandom to remain connected to someone of a different generation during and after their lifetime.

Ninety-one (68 per cent) of these supporters were male, forty-two (32 per cent) were female, and zero non-binary persons were identified in this zip code. Although women accounted for most of 78228's population (52 per cent), female Spurs fans were outnumbered. These numbers countered an encouraging finding regarding female Spurs fandom, which showed that, overall, females accounted for nearly half of all identified supporters (45 per cent). While it was difficult to ascertain why this discrepancy existed, it was nonetheless a little concerning. This could be a simple statistical abnormality, or it may implicate a systemic inequity amongst males and

⁵⁹ United States Zip Codes, 'ZIP Code 78228', 2022, <https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/78228> (accessed June 15, 2022).

⁶⁰ Sandi Pruitt, 'Life Expectancy by ZIP Code in Texas', 2019, <https://www.texashealthmaps.com/lfx> (accessed June 13, 2022).

females in locales of considerable crime, poverty, and low educational attainment. Sports fandom often wavers in the face of such socioeconomic factors, which may partially explain the reduced numbers of female fans here, although the fact that 78228 was the most populous Spurs fan hotspot suggests that financial considerations may not be a critical factor in this respect.⁶¹

Historically, San Antonio's westside has been home to a Hispanic majority population. Over eighty per cent of residents in 78228 are ethnically Hispanic/Latinx, while the next most prominent racial groups are whites (8 per cent) and blacks (2.5 per cent). American Indian, Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races constituted less than nine per cent combined.⁶² The racial and ethnic demographics of Spurs fans reflected these totals. Supporters of Hispanic descent totalled 110 (83 per cent). The other twenty-three (17 per cent) were white. Supporters of other races were not discovered here. These results were not surprising, and they mirrored the ethnic and economic segregation that has developed across the city over the last century.

The overall educational attainment of those living in 78228 was lower than in other zip codes. For example, the affluent white far northside 78258 had a twenty-eight per cent higher completed high school diploma rate compared to 78228 (98 per cent to 70 per cent).⁶³ In 78228, four per cent earned an associate's degree, seven per cent a bachelor's, three per cent a master's, and less than one per cent a professional or doctoral degree.⁶⁴ Of the forty-eight 78228 Spurs fans who had a documented record of educational attainment, two per cent failed to finish high school or its equivalent, fifty-four per cent completed high school or its equivalent, eight per cent attended at least some college, six per cent earned an associate's degree, seventeen per cent a bachelor's, eight per cent a master's, and four per cent a doctorate. The trends amongst 78228 Spurs fans and the overall totals in the

⁶¹ Sean Dinces, 'The Attrition of the Common Fan', *Social Science History* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 360.

⁶² Texas Demographics, '78228 Race & Ethnicity', 2022, [https://www.texas-demographics.com/78228-demographics#:~:text=Race%20%26%20Ethnicity,%25\)%20and%20Black%20\(2.3%25\)](https://www.texas-demographics.com/78228-demographics#:~:text=Race%20%26%20Ethnicity,%25)%20and%20Black%20(2.3%25)) (accessed June 15, 2022); United States Zip Codes, 'ZIP Code 78228', 2022, <https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/78228> (accessed June 15, 2022).

⁶³ Lucas Muson, 'What is Economic Segregation, and Why Does it Matter?', Folo Media <https://www.folomedia.org/economic-segregation-matter/> (accessed January 11, 2020).

⁶⁴ United States Zip Codes, 'ZIP Code 78228', 2022, <https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/78228> (accessed June 15, 2022).

78228 community shared similarities. For example, completion of a high school diploma and GED (56 per cent to 54 per cent) along with an associate degree (4 per cent to 6 per cent) were marginally distinguishable. Conversely, upon the first examination, it appeared there were significantly higher levels of college degree completion amongst Spurs fans compared with other 78228 residents. There were more Spurs fan bachelor's degree earners (7 per cent to 17 per cent), master's degree earners (3 per cent to 8 per cent), and doctoral degree earners (<1 per cent to 4 per cent). However, with further contextualisation, this educational attainment gap disappeared rather quickly. Indeed, arguing that the academic achievement level of Spurs fans here showed promise in an area ravaged by educational funding and access deficiencies would be unsound, not least because eighty-five (64 per cent) of fans' educations were undiscoverable. On the one hand, this may reveal that obituary writers did not value or think to provide such information. On the other, this could suggest that the educational achievements of those not listed were minimal or non-existent, which would align with the historical trends observed across the zip code.

Seventy-four fans were married (55 per cent), twenty-six (20 per cent) widowed, twenty-three (17 per cent) single, nine (7 per cent) unknown and one (<1 per cent) divorced. Spurs fans in 78228 worked in a variety of industries. Three worked in healthcare, two in finance, nine in retail, seven in education, forty-nine for the military, two in homemaking, four in the arts and design, two in the culinary arts, one in clerical, three in industrial and mechanical, one in transportation, two in insurance, one in radio and television, two in law and law enforcement, one had not reached working age, and thirty-nine were unknown; the extensive military network of 78228 and other areas will be discussed further later in the chapter. Most were Catholic (108), but there were three Protestants and twenty-four unknown. Not a single fan's political affiliation could be identified, as all 133 cyber obituaries omitted any reference regarding this.

The fact that zip code 78228 held the most fans warranted a deeper analysis to understand Spurs fandom at a local level and, in various ways, 78228 represents the Spurs' fan community in a holistic way, but, as the following sections demonstrate, trends relating to gender, age, and educational attainment contrasted with the overall picture. It seems that, possibly because of the high crime and

poverty rates in this part of the city, fans were more likely to be men, die sooner, and less likely to achieve academically, although it is worth noting the similarities regarding marital status and occupations. These tensions highlight the different lived experience of Spurs fans in various locations across San Antonio.

On the one hand, the obituaries demonstrated the fractured nature of this fandom. Through being physically segregated by historical and contemporary forces, these fans most likely did not cross paths and were strangers to one another despite their shared affinity for the Spurs. This relationship, or lack thereof, aligns with Anderson's concept of the imagined community and Kalman-Lamb's assertion that fandom communities in sport operate solely as imagined communities because fans are not directly acquainted and do not work collaboratively towards a common goal.⁶⁵ On the other hand, these commemorations exhibit some signs of Pahl's notion of a true community. For Pahl, the most significant factor in a community's development is positive social interaction, and these obituaries live online replete with positive storytelling and solace.⁶⁶ Given the nature of such intimate sources and their cultural function as aids towards healing in bereavement, they highlight how death cultivates the creation of stories and unites a group of people on one platform despite historical segregation. Indeed, stories form a building block of community, and humanity's shared mortality reinforces this study's assertion that all communities are interactional and impermanent. The antemortem geographical segregation and posthumous collectivity within this fandom community highlights the group's evolving nature.

The obituaries reinforced concerns about how the city has been historically and contemporarily segregated along racial, ethnic, economic, and geographic lines.⁶⁷ Scholars have traced this segregation back to San Antonio's inception as a result of the eighteenth-century Spanish caste system, which was then later perpetuated through the establishment of the railroad and streetcar system in the late nineteenth century, the federal government's placement of assisted living housing in east and westside neighbourhoods, and their subsequent redlining (labelled as high risk for

⁶⁵ Ibid; Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct*, 119-122.

⁶⁶ Slowikowski, 'Urban(e) Statuary Times', 70, 72.

⁶⁷ Drennon, 'Economic Segregation in San Antonio'; Walter et al., 'Historic Roots of Modern Residential Segregation in a Southwestern Metropolis'.

real estate investments) of these residential areas in the 1930s.⁶⁸ Drennon suggested that disinvestment in these areas transpired in the preceding decades and that privileges such as a high-quality education were isolated to specific areas due to the drawing up of “independent” school districts created in more discriminatory times.⁶⁹ For example, the Bexar County Health Collaborative recently noted that residents on the far northwest side lived twenty years longer than those from inner west and east side neighbourhoods. Additionally, ninety-eight per cent of residents from the northside 78258 earned a high school degree compared to fifty-three per cent on the inner westside 78207, exhibiting how historical trends have influenced the modern city.⁷⁰

Overall, the obituaries served as a social mirror of San Antonio, exhibiting segregation along racial, ethnic, economic, and geographic bounds that have historically endured. While Spurs fandom may not have been a historical antecedent of the city’s segregation, the geographical distribution of fans highlights its presence and exhibits the pluralism and inequality present within communities.⁷¹ In a traditionally divided metropolis, residents often had limited commonalities, but these commemorations reflected a cultural value shared within the local community of survivors through their labelling of the deceased as Spurs fans. Ultimately, these fans came from various backgrounds and locations around the city, but they were memorialised and united by obituary writers into a fandom community. The deceased did not self-proclaim their membership into this ‘Spurs Family’, but the living, writing on their behalf, felt the deceased’s actions in life mandated such a mention. The interplay of all these factors complicated understandings of this fandom community.

Gender

Of the 1,823 fans identified, 1,006 were males (55 per cent), and 817 were females (45 per cent), children included. Recently scholars analysed how Twitter responded to the Spurs hiring Becky Hammon as the first salaried full-time female assistant

⁶⁸ Walter, et al., ‘Historic Roots of Modern Residential Segregation in a Southwestern Metropolis’, 16-17.

⁶⁹ Christine M. Drennon, ‘Social Relations Spatially Fixed: Construction and Maintenance of School Districts in San Antonio, Texas’, *Geographical Review* 96, no. 4 (October 2006): 590-91.

⁷⁰ Lucas Muson, ‘What is Economic Segregation, and Why Does it Matter?’, Folio Media <https://www.folomedia.org/economic-segregation-matter/> (accessed January 11, 2020).

⁷¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

coach in professional North American sports. They suggested that social media reactions challenged male dominance in sports fandom through their advocacy for Hammon and the Spurs.⁷² Nevertheless, sports and sports fandoms have historically existed as male hegemonic power structures largely exclusionary to 'others' such as girls and women, although contemporary research has emphasised that these 'others' go well beyond the male-female binary to include additional ostracised members of society.⁷³ Esmonde, Cooky, and Andrews complicated traditional interpretations by highlighting the complexity of these historically gendered entities, women as sports fans, and, most importantly, women's understandings of themselves as sports fans. These scholars utilised third-wave feminism and Foucauldian theory on repressive (outright masculine dominance and rejection) and normalised (societally accepted and unquestioned norms) power as a way to suggest recommendations to create an environment in which sports fan communities could transform themselves into groups of inclusivity, with membership open to those who have been historically shunned.⁷⁴ It appears this may have been the case with the Spurs fan community as it changed over time.

The obituaries considered here actually failed to significantly reinforce any notion of fan exclusion along the lines of gender, given that females constituted forty-five per cent of identified Spurs fans. Tarver's research reached similar conclusions in that, when she situated where females resided in sports fan communities, she discovered, that over recent years, females joined these groups or developed their own despite their historically exclusionary nature.⁷⁵ While the cyber obits did not overtly replicate Tarver's findings, they hinted at the changing demographics of Spurs fandom. The obituaries indicated minimal participation from women throughout the 1970s but increases of female fans over the following four decades, peaking after the new millennium. The obituaries of women season ticket holders

⁷² Jimmy Sanderson and Kelly Gramlich, "You Go Girl!": Twitter and Conversations About Sport Culture and Gender', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 33, no. 2 (January 2022): 113, 119-120.

⁷³ Cheryl Cooky and Katelyn Esmonde, 'It's Supposed to be About the Love of the Game, not the Love of Aaron Rodgers' Eyes: Challenging the Exclusions of Women Sports Fans', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 32, no.1 (2015): 23, 40-41; Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct*, 119-122; Michael Borer, 'Negotiating the Symbols of Gendered Sports Fandom', *Social Psychology Quarterly* 72, no.1 (2009): 1-4.

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, NY: Random House US, 1978), 242, 295; Esmonde et al. 'It's Supposed to be About', 22, 42; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

⁷⁵ Erin Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 203.

showed growth in the eighties and nineties, with later fans often mentioning current and recently retired players, thereby giving an indication of when they came into fandom. On the one hand, this may be a function of a significant social change, but on the other hand, it may illustrate biases present in obituary writers who perhaps were male and felt compelled to demonstrate a commonality with the deceased.⁷⁶ Another consideration to make was familial linkages to sports fandoms. Sport psychologists have asserted that fandom often originated from a father and was passed down to the next generation. While this interpretation may hold in most situations, it appeared this was not the case with most women in Spurs fandom since the franchise did not arrive in the city until 1973 and given the age of females, most did not begin to support the team until adulthood.⁷⁷

Along with the encouraging data gathered from the cyber obits that exhibited an increase in female Spurs fandom over the years, some of the team's most renowned supporters have been women. Selena Gomez, affectionately named after Quintanilla, who was briefly discussed above, displayed her Spurs fandom while attending games and during interviews over several years.⁷⁸ Michelle Beadle also expressed her Spurs fandom while commentating for ESPN, NBC, and Bally Sports. Her overt displays of affection earned her a tribute from Popovich and the Coyote on live television.⁷⁹ Gomez and Beadle represented the woman celebrity fan, had tremendous reach and influence, and were arguably two of the most recognisable Spurs supporters. However, other, less well-known women have attracted significant attention through their support of the team at a local level. For example,

⁷⁶ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

⁷⁷ Robert Krulwich, 'How We Become Sports Fans: The Tyranny of Fathers', October 24, 2011, *National Public Radio*, <https://www.npr.org/sections/krulwich/2011/10/24/141649929/how-we-become-sports-fans-the-tyranny-of-fathers> (accessed June 15, 2022).

⁷⁸ Jeanne Jackle, 'Selena Gomez Caught Showing Love for Spurs on Facebook at Lakers Game', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 8, 2016; Jeff Garcia, 'Watch: Actress Selena Gomez Talks Road Trips to Watch Spurs, Chimes in on Kawhi Leonard', *News4 San Antonio*, July 9, 2018, <https://news4sanantonio.com/sports/spurs-zone/watch-actress-selena-gomez-talks-road-trips-to-watch-spurs-chimes-in-on-kawhi-leonard> (accessed November 26, 2021).

⁷⁹ Eric Moreno, 'Michelle Beadle from SA to ESPN', *San Antonio Magazine*, October 2014; Jeanne Jackle, 'UTSA Grad and Spurs Loyalist Michelle Beadle Embracing New TV Gig', *AP News*, January 17, 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/sports-nba-basketball-san-antonio-spurs-san-antonio-01ed708acb7c44df9d6b7400ae60a430> (accessed November 26, 2021); 'Gregg Popovich Featured in Birthday Surprise for ESPN's Michelle Beadle', Sam Richmond, *FanSided*, October 2014, <https://apnews.com/article/sports-nba-basketball-san-antonio-spurs-san-antonio-01ed708acb7c44df9d6b7400ae60a430> (accessed November 26, 2021).

the prosopography revealed several obituaries of Spurs Nuns who have become some of the most recognisable fans in Spurs' history.⁸⁰

The prosopography demonstrated that female Spurs fandom grew over the decades, with many developing an affinity for the team after the 1990s (see Table 3.3). Some female fans' support of the Spurs could be traced back to the seventies and eighties, but these were rare, and often their fandom was influenced by the involvement of their spouse. However, just before the turn of the millennium, many women independently supported the Spurs, trends that were mainly observed after closely examining season ticket holders and Baseline Bums. Also, it seems that many women did not support the team until middle or later adulthood. There were encouraging signs, then, of growing female participation over the decades, but this participation was not all-inclusive, equal, or equitable when considering fans' racial and ethnic backgrounds.

⁸⁰ Madalyn Mendoza, 'Meet the San Antonio Spurs-Loving Nuns Who Pray While the Team Plays', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 18, 2016; Eric Gay, '23 Nuns, Avid Spurs Fans', *Chron*, June 6, 2007, <https://www.chron.com/news/slideshow/23-nuns-avid-spurs-fans-29312.php> (accessed November 26, 2021).

Table 3.3 Women Fan Origin Timelines

Name	Death	Birth	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Marital Status	Season tickets or Baseline Bum	Duration
Barbara Zunker	2012	1939	73	White	Married	1973	Unknown
Mary E. "Boots" Shaw	1917	2018	100	White	Widowed	After 1977	Unknown
Dora Leung	2013	1924	89	Asian	Widowed	1981	32 years
Edna Mary Tatsch (Etta Mae) Theis	2016	1925	91	White	Widowed	Before 1986	30+ years
Mary Alice Paniagua Huizar	1938	2016	78	Hispanic/Latina	Married	1988	Unknown
Rosemary Clopton Quirk	2016	1918	97	White	Widowed	Before 1991	25 years
Joe Green	2013	1926	87	White	Widowed	After 1993	20+ years
Shirley P. McCoy	2014	1935	79	White	Married	Before 1994	20+ years
Gloria Cantu Arriaga	2018	1950	67	Hispanic/Latina	Married	Before 1998	20+ years
Barbara Van Poppelen	2015	1933	81	Hispanic/Latina	Widowed	After 2000	13 years
Sylvia Zepeda	2014	1938	76	White	Married	After 2000	Unknown
Paulena Mitchell	2013	1941	71	White	Divorced	After 2000	Unknown

The Spurs were a valuable part of life’s final chapter for many women such as Agnes who struggled with health issues in the last years of her life, as her obituary writers explained,

Agnes loved watching her favourite team on television the San Antonio Spurs. Agnes fell very ill in March of 2007, but was brought back to life with the help of the Spurs and their determination to win the 2007 Championship. With her three favorite players Tim Duncan, Tony Parker, and Manu Ginobili all playing at the top of their game - they helped to bring Agnes the extra jolt of joy and enthusiasm she needed to get her through the hard times of recovery. Thank you San Antonio Spurs!⁸¹

⁸¹ Viola Reinhard, Obituary, November 6, 2009.

Similarly, Aileen's commemorators said she was an avid Spurs fan and noted that the Coyote was a final visitor before her passing.⁸² The Coyote also helped create a joyful memory for another fan, Thelma, by celebrating her ninety-fifth birthday at her home. Thelma deemed it 'the best birthday I ever had'; she died a few months later.⁸³ Another fan, Helen, organised the Spurs Old Ladies Organization and her obituary writers stated, 'She enjoyed the game on the day before her death cheering the team to victory in double overtime', while Lessey's commemorators wrote about her passion for the Spurs and expressed gratitude to her caregivers who turned on Spurs games so she could listen during her last weeks of life.⁸⁴ The fact that these and several other women supported the Spurs later in life highlighted contrasting fan origin stories when compared to many of the men, who often supported the team from their younger years. Consequently, perhaps as these women grew older and outlived many of their friends and family, the Spurs became a vehicle for them to find meaning and belonging. Their fandom could have also been a way to connect with younger family members, sons and grandsons, or fellow residents and staff members of their assisted living facilities. Searching for commonality amongst strangers is difficult, but sports sometimes provide a space to connect. These findings contribute to the divided interpretations amongst scholars who have attempted to identify changes in affinity levels for sport teams across a fan's lifespan. Generally, fandom levels have been shown to decrease over time as one aged; however, there have been some exceptions, particularly amongst women whose fandom connected them to existing family and friends or generated a much-needed relationship after previous ones had been lost.⁸⁵

Overall, the obituaries of female fans produced something more significant than mere enumerability because the publication of their commemorations served as an essential element in the sustainment of this community. Future observers of the dead's cyber obituaries will be informed of their fandom and may be drawn towards the team due to the deceased's affinity for the Spurs. Rooted in the sense of nostalgia, the intergenerational support of the Spurs was observable and helps to

⁸² Aileen Potter, Obituary, December 27, 2005.

⁸³ Thelma Gray, Obituary, February 18, 2002.

⁸⁴ Helen McLeod, Obituary, April 22, 2008; Lessey Johnson, Obituary, April 30, 2013.

⁸⁵ Walter Gantz and Nicky Lewis, 'Sports Fanship Changes Across the Lifespan', *Communication & Sport* (February 2021): 1, 16-17.

explain how fan communities and traditions can endure over time, reinforcing in some respect Anderson's observations regarding the vital role of print-capitalism in ensuring longevity in an imagined community.⁸⁶ While the cyber obits may not be printed, they were housed in an easily accessible online platform with an even greater reach than their print predecessors. Female participation in Spurs fandom also affirmed the work of other sport historians who have argued that the role of women in sports fandom has proliferated over recent decades and that they have become a staple in supporters' groups around the world, even if they have been less visible and often underappreciated.⁸⁷

Age

Over the last sixty years, the life expectancy of Americans has increased from just under seventy to seventy-nine years, although the average age at the time of death for Spurs fans was seventy-three.⁸⁸ Male Spurs fans averaged a lifespan of sixty-eight years, with Avian, Jacob, and Christopher dying by the age of eight while Don, the oldest, was 101 years old.⁸⁹ Male fans died eight years earlier compared to the male Bexar County average (76). Females averaged a lifespan of seventy-nine years, eleven years longer than their male counterparts and three years less than the county-level estimates of eighty-two.⁹⁰ The youngest, Jalene, died at four years old and was visited by the Spurs organisation after being hospitalised for care.⁹¹ The eldest, Lucy, the oldest female WWII veteran from the U.S. until she died in 2015, lived to be 108 and thirteen other women also lived to see their hundredth birthday.⁹² The 104-year gap discovered between the youngest and oldest fans

⁸⁶ Ernest Muñoz, Obituary, June 26, 2014; Hector Saldaña, "For Comic, Game No Time for Laughs," *San Antonio Express-News*, June 17, 2013; Madalyn Mendoza, 'Grieving Spurs Fan Asks for Company During Game, Silver & Black Family Comes Through', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 14, 2018; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 67.

⁸⁷ Svenja-Maria Mintert and Gertrud Pfister, 'The Female Vikings, a Women's Fan Group in Denmark: Formation and Development in the Context of Football and Fan Histories', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 31, no. 13 (July 2014): 1651-1652; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (August 3, 2020): 670-691.

⁸⁸ Lauren Medina, Shannon Sabo, and Jonathan Vespa, 'Living Longer: Historical and Projected Life Expectancy in the United States 1960 to 2060', February 2020, *United States Census Bureau*; Sandi Pruitt, 'Life Expectancy by ZIP Code in Texas', 2019, <https://www.texashealthmaps.com/lfex> (accessed June 13, 2022).

⁸⁹ Avian Gomez, Obituary, January 23, 2011; Jacob Jordan, Obituary, March 18, 2010; Christopher Rodriguez, Obituary, October 6, 2013; Don Provenzano, Obituary, May 6, 2018.

⁹⁰ Sandi Pruitt, 'Life Expectancy by ZIP Code in Texas', 2019, <https://www.texashealthmaps.com/lfex> (accessed June 13, 2022).

⁹¹ Jalene Salinas, Obituary, March 19, 2015.

⁹² Lucy Coffey, Obituary, March 24, 2015.

stressed the importance of examining age more closely, given market trends in sport viewership and the limited discussion concerning supporter ages in the historiography.⁹³

The data provided the death age (Table 3.4) and decade of birth for fans (Table 3.5). Most supporters were born before 1939 (1,044 or 57 per cent), and the two most prominent decades they were born in were the 1920s and 1930s. Most fans died at seventy years old or older (1,151 or 63 per cent), 515 (28 per cent) died in the 2000s and 1,308 (72 per cent) in the 2010s.

Table 3.4 Fan Ages at Death

Age	Total	Percent
100s	17	1%
90s	259	14%
80s	483	27%
70s	391	21%
60s	266	15%
50s	189	10%
40s	82	4%
30s	41	2%
20s	31	2%
11 to 19	11	<1%
<10	4	<1%
Unknown	49	3%
Total	1823	100%

Table 3.5 Fan Birth Decades

Decade	Total	Percent
1900s	6	<1%
1910s	157	9%
1920s	446	24%
1930s	435	24%
1940s	312	17%
1950s	209	11%
1960s	112	6%
1970s	44	2%
1980s	36	2%
1990s	12	<1%
2000s	5	<1%
Unknown	49	3%
Total	1823	100%

Knowing the lifespan of supporters and the decade they were born in provided an approximate age at which they joined the community of Spurs fans. Given that the team did not relocate to San Antonio from Dallas until 1973, all of those born from

⁹³ Svenja-Maria Mintert and Gertrud Pfister, 'The Female Vikings, a Women's Fan Group in Denmark: Formation and Development in the Context of Football and Fan Histories', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 31, no. 13 (July 2014): 1639-1655; Kevin Dixon, *Consuming Football in Late Modern Life* (London: Routledge, 2016); Jason Notte, 'The Sports with the Oldest- and Youngest TV Audiences', June 30, 2017, *Market Watch*, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/the-sports-with-the-oldest-and-youngest-tv-audiences-2017-06-30> (accessed June 13, 2022); Jason Foster, 'As Lockout Drags On, Poll Indicates MLB Could Be Charting Path to Irrelevance' January 6, 2022, *The Sporting News*, <https://www.sportingnews.com/us/mlb/news/as-lockout-drags-on-poll-indicates-mlb-could-be-charting-path-to-irrelevance/1qbmfwrcjfdsr16izao285afnw#:~:text=Compare%20that%20with%20the%20average,younger%20and%20more%20diverse%20audience> (accessed June 13, 2022); Michael Ricciardelli, 'A Warning to MLB', December 15, 2021, *The Seton Hall Sports Poll* <http://blogs.shu.edu/sportspoll/2021/12/15/a-warning-to-mlb-30-of-fans-and-44-of-avid-fans-say-less-interest-when-games-resume-fans-divided-on-baseball-rule-changes-but-by-6-to-1-avid-fans-say-both-leagues-should-have-d/>.

1900-1909 were at least sixty-four years old before becoming a supporter of the Spurs; however, an analysis of the cyber obituaries suggests they came into fandom at an even older age as several of these women moved to San Antonio later in life, although there is a possibility that their ties to the city cultivated their fandom before arriving. The 157 fans born between 1910-1919 would have been at least fifty-four years old, the 446 born between 1920-1929 at least forty-four, the 435 in the 1930s a minimum of thirty-four, the 312 in the 1940s at least twenty-four, the 209 in the 1950s a minimum of fourteen, and the 112 in the 1960s at least four. Only seventy-five (4 per cent) of supporters were born after the Spurs arrived. Given that the majority were born in the 1930s or earlier (1,044 or 57 per cent), the obituaries suggest most fans started following the Spurs at thirty-four years old or older. However, they could have been older given that some individuals moved to San Antonio later in life and the popularity of the team amongst the city's residents was not immediate. Therefore, those who became fans during their childhood would be confined to a minority of 281 (15 per cent) born in or after 1956, which suggests that these supporters were late comers to Spurs fandom and not because of intergenerational history.

Marital Status

In the half-century between 1960 and 2010, marriage rates in the U.S. declined significantly from seventy-two to fifty-one per cent, Americans increasingly married at older ages, from their early twenties to late twenties, divorce rates grew from nine to twenty per cent, and public attitudes about marriage becoming obsolete rose (28 to 39 per cent).⁹⁴ According to the most recent Census, approximately forty-three per cent of San Antonians were married, forty per cent were never married, twelve per cent were divorced, and five per cent were widowed.⁹⁵ The historiography on the interplay between sports fans and marital status ranges from its role in social

⁹⁴ D'Vera Cohn, Jeffrey Passel, Wendy Wand and Gretchen Livingston, Pew Research Center- 'Barely half of U.S. Adults are Married- a Record Low', December 14, 2011, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2011/12/14/barely-half-of-u-s-adults-are-married-a-record-low/#:~:text=Only%209%25%20of%20adults%20ages,compared%20with%2082%25%20in%201960> (accessed June 9, 2022).

⁹⁵ United States Census Bureau, 'Marital Status in the United States', February 2, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/marital-status-in-united-states.html> (accessed June 9, 2022); U.S. Census Bureau, 'San Antonio, TX', 2020, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US4865000-san-antonio-tx/> (accessed June 9, 2022); Wendy Wang, 'The U.S. Divorce Rate', November 10, 2020, *Institute for Family Studies*, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-us-divorce-rate-has-hit-a-50-year-low> (accessed June 9, 2022).

bonding to issues surrounding domestic violence, but little is known regarding the statuses of specific fan groups, including those who follow the Spurs.⁹⁶

A significant majority of cyber obituaries (1,689 or 93 per cent) included the marital status of fans upon their death. These totals dwarfed those that included religious denominations, political affiliation, and educational attainment. The historical anatomy of death notices, obituaries, and cyber obits and their importance to genealogical research, along with the fact that journalists and funeral homes often provided commemorators with a shortlist of items to mention in an obituary could account for this trend. The deceased's marital status or a list of those who predeceased and survived the individual was often prioritised.⁹⁷ Overall, 849 fans (47 per cent) were married, 514 (28 per cent) were widowed, 265 (15 per cent) were single, sixty-one (3 per cent) were divorced, and 134 (7 per cent) were unknown. For males, 613 (61 per cent) were married, 176 (17 per cent) were single, 119 (12 per cent) were widowers, twenty-eight (3 per cent) were divorced, and seventy (7 per cent) were unknown. For females, 395 (48 per cent) were widowed, 236 (29 per cent) were married, eighty-nine (11 per cent) were single, thirty-three (4 per cent) were divorced, and sixty-four (8 per cent) were unknown. Analysing the marital statuses of Spurs fans compared to those of the Greater San Antonio Area revealed no significant difference for those who were married (47 to 43 per cent), but there were substantial differences among those who were single (15 to 40 per cent), divorced (3 to 12 per cent), and widowed (28 to 5 per cent). Women in the general population were also more likely to be divorced or widowed than female fans. The fact that the average fan was older than the median age of those in the general population (seventy-three to thirty-four) could partially account for these differences.

Upon further examination, the marital status of men and women at the time of their death correlated to the overall life expectancy of fans. Women lived until seventy-nine compared to men, who died at an average age of sixty-eight. The contrast between widows (395) and widowers (119) was substantial, especially given that

⁹⁶ Walter Gaetz, 'Reflections on Communication and Sport: On Fanship and Social Relationships', *Communication & Sport* (December 2012); Beth Aduato, 'The Promise of Violence: Televised, Professional Football Games and Domestic Violence', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* (July 2015): 22-37.

⁹⁷ Nicole Spector, 'How to Write the Perfect Obituary', September 21, 2019. <https://www.nbcnews.com/better/lifestyle/how-write-perfect-obituary-according-professional-writers-nca1055996> (accessed June 9, 2022); Craig Witzke, 'Writing an Obituary', <https://www.candlelightfuneralhome.com/how-to-write-an-obituary> (accessed June 9, 2022).

males outnumbered women by 189 individuals. Life expectancy also correlated to the number of men (613) who died married compared to the 236 women. Other research concerning death notices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the U.S. has also found that men were less likely to be widowed, and if they were, they spent less time in widowhood.⁹⁸ In this case, women fans were likelier to be widowed and endured widowhood for longer than men. The city's census data reflected these historical trends as eight per cent of women were widowed compared with two per cent of men in 2020.⁹⁹

While most obituaries, 1,689 (93 per cent), mentioned marital status, other obituary writers did not feel it was an appropriate or necessary inclusion. Of the 134 (7 per cent) unknowns, many had children, but there was no mention of a spouse, former spouse, or the children's other parent. Perhaps given the complicated or toxic nature of the deceased's relationship(s), obituary writers felt compelled not to mention them. On the one hand, this interpretation demonstrates the limitations of using cyber obits, which sometimes lack historical accuracy, breadth, and depth. On the other hand, purposeful exclusions made by commemorators illustrate the cyber obit's cultural function: to serve as a tool to cope with loss and create a record of the deceased for posterity.

Religious Affiliation

Church membership among Americans has steadily declined since the 1950s from seventy-three to forty-seven per cent. However, according to the Pew Research Centre, most Americans of the last decade considered themselves Christian (70.6 per cent). Non-Christians were less than six per cent, and unaffiliated or non-believers were just under twenty-three per cent. Over this span, the largest denominations of Christians were Protestant, Catholic, and Mormon.¹⁰⁰ Religious affiliation was a necessary inclusion here to better understand sports fandom due to the historically adversarial, but sometimes complementary, interplay between the

⁹⁸ Duane Matcha, 'Obituary Analysis of Early 20th Century Marriage and Family Patterns in Northwest Ohio', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 30, no 2 (March 1995): 125-127.

⁹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 'San Antonio, TX', 2020, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US4865000-san-antonio-tx/> (accessed June 9, 2022).

¹⁰⁰ Pew Research Center, 'Religious Landscape Study', <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/> (accessed June 13, 2022).

two.¹⁰¹ Given the historical characteristics of obituaries, it was unsurprising that religious affiliation was a standard inclusion, and 1,269 (70 per cent) cyber obits mentioned the deceased's faith. Catholics were the largest religious group, with 838 (46 per cent) and there were 407 (22 per cent) Protestants, twenty Jews, and four other.¹⁰²

Following the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century and the Second Great Awakening of the nineteenth century, Americans cemented Christianity as the most popular form of worship in the U.S. The obituaries reveal this belief system was fractured as numerous denominations appeared and this diversity reflected the American democratisation of Christianity.¹⁰³ The fact that Jewish, Muslim, and Eastern religions and traditions were either minimal or non-existent in the totals showed the dominance of Christianity in this part of the world and is entirely in tune with this group's racial and ethnic makeup. The large total of Catholics may be related to the region's history. Throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries the Spanish monarchy promoted Catholicism. Thereafter, the early Mexican Republic established colonisation laws which required settlers to convert to Catholicism to acquire land.¹⁰⁴ Although Protestantism emerged following Texas' independence from Mexico and the emigration of Anglos to the state, San Antonio's Catholic population remained high and nearly thirty per cent of residents identified as Catholic in 2016.¹⁰⁵ The city's Hispanic heritage, substantial Latinx population, and small yet observable German and Irish populations can at least partially account for these totals. Although Germans are generally associated with Protestantism, tens of thousands of Catholic Germans sought religious and

¹⁰¹ Marius Rotar and Vasile Emil Ursu, 'Romanian Religious Environments and the Development of Sports in Romania in the 1930s', *Sport in History* 41, no. 3 (December 2020): 409-434; Rebecca Salinas, 'Cemetery Bans Spurs Decorations', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 16, 2014, Michael Mazurkiewicz, 'If God Be for Us, Who Can Be Against Us?': Religion and Religiousness in Polish Football, 2008–2017' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 35, no. 1 (February 2018): 108-121.

<https://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local/article/Cemeteries-ban-Spurs-decorations-5555949.php#photo-6458793> (accessed November 28, 2021).

¹⁰² Protestant denominations included Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Evangelical, and non-denominational. 'Other' religious groups included Mormon, Greek Orthodox, and Church of Christ Scientist.

¹⁰³ Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 6-10.

¹⁰⁴ Eugene Barker, 'Mexican Colonization Laws', *The Handbook of Texas*, 1952, Updated July 30, 2020, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/mexican-colonization-laws> (accessed June 13, 2024).

¹⁰⁵ Elaine Ayala, 'S.A. Religious History Begins Even Before Spanish Arrival', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 23, 2016.

economic refuge in Texas from 1830 to 1900.¹⁰⁶ For further contextualisation of Catholicism's hold on the city, it should be noted that the only UNESCO-protected sites in Bexar County are the five Spanish missions built in the eighteenth century to spread the Catholic faith. Additionally, as a part of his world tour in 1987, Pope John Paul II chose to visit San Antonio, reasserting Catholicism's influence in the region.

In the light of these trends, most of the totals were not surprising. In addition to the historical religious forces, traditional gender roles seemed to play a part here. Historically, American women of the South were expected to provide moral purity to a society corrupted by male greed and animosity.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps because of this, many obituary writers of women chose to include the deceased's faith. Slightly more female obituaries (72 per cent) had a religious affiliation than males (68 per cent), seventy per cent of whom were Catholic- a key part of the Latinx identity. Compared with other demographic information commemorators included in the cyber obituaries, religion ranked higher than educational attainment and political affiliation combined. As already noted, a partial explanation for this could be due to the nature of the sources. Historically, religion has been used to cope with death. Unlike politics and education, faith historically operated as a tool to deal with the unknown and grief. Another possible explanation could be the eras in which most fans were raised. While religious devotion has declined over recent decades, most of these Spurs supporters had been born before 1939 in an era of much higher religiosity.¹⁰⁸

Educational Attainment

Over the last eight decades, educational attainment in the U.S. has increased, and in 1940, less than a quarter of Americans twenty-five years or older had finished high school compared to ninety per cent in 2017.¹⁰⁹ Generally and historically, sports fans of all types have often been portrayed as uneducated, but some scholars

¹⁰⁶ Terry G. Jordan, 'Germans', *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 01, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/germans>.

¹⁰⁷ Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1880*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 53-71.

¹⁰⁸ Eric Ferreri, 'American Religion Not as Exceptional as We Think', March 9, 2016, *Duke Today*, <https://today.duke.edu/2016/03/religionstudy> (accessed June 13, 2022).

¹⁰⁹ Erik Schmidt, 'For the First Time, 90 Percent Completed High School or More', July 31, 2018, *United States Census Bureau*, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/07/educational-attainment.html> (accessed June 13, 2022).

have pushed back against this overgeneralisation.¹¹⁰ Of the 1,823 Spurs fans, 939 (52 per cent) did not have their educational attainment recorded. In total, fourteen individuals (1 per cent) did not complete high school, 317 (17 per cent) had earned a high school diploma or its equivalent, eighty-eight (5 per cent) had attended college, fifty (3 per cent) had achieved an associate's degree, 245 (14 per cent) a bachelor's degree, one-hundred (5 per cent) a master's degree, and sixty-one (3 per cent) a doctorate, which seems quite a high percentage. Of the male supporters, 522 (52 per cent) of obituary writers included the deceased's educational attainment, and 173 (33 per cent) had obtained a bachelor's degree, fifty-one (10 per cent) achieved a master's, and fifty-six (11 per cent) had completed their doctorate even though most male occupations did not necessitate a college degree.

Overall, these men's educational attainments were higher than their female counterparts, but, despite numerous obstacles, female academic achievement was similar to men proportionally. Of the 817 female obits, 455 (56 per cent) did not mention educational attainment but there were explanations of women abandoning high school due to familial obligations, although only four individuals (<1 per cent) failed to complete high school and 140 (39 per cent) had earned a high school diploma or equivalent. One woman earned the valedictorian of her high school graduating class and was awarded a scholarship to a San Antonio-based university, although she turned down this opportunity to get married. Quite a perplexing turn of events given twenty-first-century societal expectations, but she made this decision within the social constraints of the conservative 1950s. Forty-six (13 per cent) women had attended college but did not complete the degree or the obituary left ambiguity about their completion. Meanwhile thirty-seven (10 per cent) women earned associate degrees, which outperformed men proportionately in this category. This reflected societal norms of the past century, given that nearly all women who earned an associate degree would go on to become nurses, a traditionally accepted career route for women that was rarely seen as a threat to men concerned with maintaining traditional gender roles. Eighty-one (22 per cent) women earned a bachelor's degree, forty-nine (14 per cent) a master's, and five (1

¹¹⁰ Lisa Lewis, *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1992), 21-24; Megan O'Neill, *Policing Football: Social Interaction and Negotiated Disorder* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 24.

per cent) a doctorate. Overall, female educational attainment was comparable to men's regardless of the era in which they were undertaking their education.

Excluding the unknowns, 870 (98.5 per cent) Spurs fans earned a high school diploma or equivalent compared to San Antonio's overall mark of 82.4 per cent, while 415 (47 per cent) of fans completed a bachelor's degree compared to the city's less than eight per cent mark.¹¹¹ Despite these statistics, any presumption that Spurs fans were more educated than fellow residents would be a mistake, given the substantial amount (939 or 52 per cent) of cyber obits that excluded any mention of the educational attainment of the deceased. On the one hand, this may reveal that obituary writers did not value this as a parameter of a life. On the other hand, this could suggest that the educational achievements of those not listed were minimal, indicating that Spurs fans might be less educated than the general San Antonio populace, although this would be somewhat speculative. What is interesting is that as many as forty-eight per cent of obituaries included educational attainment, suggesting that this community valued it as part of a person's life course. Many obituaries mentioned the deceased's alma mater, and in this respect, it appears there was a sense of pride and a simultaneous reconnection to a particular community beyond the Spurs.

Occupations

Military and civil service workers accounted for the largest occupational groups of male fans totalling forty-six per cent. This significant cohort of supporters will be discussed more in-depth in the following pages, but it should be noted now that these statistics aligned with the economic history of San Antonio. With Randolph Air Force Base to the northeast, Fort Sam Houston near downtown, Lackland Air Force Base on the westside, and Camp Bullis in the northwest, the city's economy has revolved around these military installations. While Census data showed veterans only accounted for eight per cent of the city's population in 2010, the substantial number of veterans in this prosopography may reveal how this group gravitated towards imagined communities or may be reflective of something simpler such as veterans, given their service, sometimes having their costs covered for the posting

¹¹¹ Palo Alto College, '2020-2021 Environmental Scan', <https://www.alamo.edu/siteassets/pac/about-pac/knowledge-management/pac-environmental-scan-2021.pdf>, 8-14, (accessed June 13, 2022).

of their cyber obituary.

Another prominent occupation for men was the seven per cent who were business owners. The significant number of entrepreneurs amongst male Spurs fans reflects the fact that small businesses have always been an essential social, cultural, economic and political part of American life. In the 1830s, the French writer, Alexis de Tocqueville, reflected on his experience travelling throughout the U.S., saying, 'what astonishes me...is not so much the marvellous grandeur of some undertakings as the innumerable multitude of small ones.'¹¹² The notions of being your own boss and living life on your own terms have been elemental to the American experience and 'dream', arguably having its roots among the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Quakers in the British colony of Pennsylvania. Since the 1970s, small businesses have accounted for nearly half of the United States' Gross Domestic Product, providing innovation and competitiveness within an ever-changing global economy, so the fact that so many Spurs fans took on this entrepreneurial spirit should be no surprise.¹¹³ Female participation in business and entrepreneurship was minimal compared to men, but their involvement in teaching and healthcare was significantly higher, trends that reflect the gendered nature of occupations in the U.S. over the last half-century. Beyond business, other male occupations included but were not limited to doctors, dentists, firefighters, police officers, educators, real estate agents and brokers, mechanics, insurance agents, accountants, attorneys, truck drivers, electricians, coaches, retail workers, and musicians.

Educational attainment played a part in the varied female occupations. Nearly seventeen per cent of women were connected to the Armed Forces in some way, in military service and civil service, or as military spouses/homemakers. Eleven per cent of women worked in education as teachers, principals, professors, librarians, or teaching assistants, while nearly nine per cent worked in healthcare as nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacy technicians, doctors, therapists, and medical assistants. Other occupations included insurance, banking, volunteering, church

¹¹² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1835), 684.

¹¹³ Office of Advocacy, 'Small Businesses Generate 44 Percent of U.S. Economic Activity', U.S. Small Business Administration, January 30, 2019, <https://advocacy.sba.gov/2019/01/30/small-businesses-generate-44-percent-of-u-s-economic-activity/> (accessed January 4, 2022); J.D. Harrison, 'The Decline of American Entrepreneurship- in Five Charts', *The Washington Post*, February 12, 2015.

work, retail, business, culinary arts, homemaking, cosmetology, secretarial work, and journalism. Almost twenty-eight per cent of women's cyber obits did not mention any occupation or occupational status, and this could indicate that perhaps obituary writers did not find the inclusion of work necessary or appropriate given the limited space, or that they valued other things about the person more. This could also represent a generation in which attitudes towards women's roles in the public sphere became more accepted. During WWII, the U.S., like many other countries, faced labour shortages due to the conscription of more than sixteen-million American men. Subsequently, women and other minority groups gained employment for the first time. Throughout the 1950s, there was a conservative backlash to this as many American men feared changing traditional gender roles. However, through the women's liberation movement of the 1960s, the country's female workforce began to expand and has continued to grow over subsequent decades. Not only were women fans working, but most commemorators, more than seventy-two per cent of them, felt their occupations were noteworthy, showing that they valued the work done by the deceased during their lifetime.

Military Connections

Military veterans and civil service employees emerged as the most prominent male occupations numbering 461 (46 per cent).¹¹⁴ In one example, an Armed Forces veteran's affection for 'his' Spurs was made clear by storytellers after he died at the age of seventy.¹¹⁵ Similarly, obituary writers discussed an airmen's admiration for the team and a Vietnam veteran's influence on Coyote and Silver Dancers' choreography.¹¹⁶ For women, military veterans, on-base civil servants and military wives were the most dominant occupations (twenty-two per cent). Lessey had married a soldier who served in WWII and her commemorators reflected on her life's passions which included 'family, gardening, travel, exercise, and the San Antonio Spurs'.¹¹⁷ Storytellers for veteran nurses Beverly (Korean War) and Manda (WWII) shared their affinity for the Spurs with Manda's explaining that she delighted that the team won the 2014 NBA championship.¹¹⁸ All those involved with the Armed Forces and civil service networks tallied 623 (31 per cent). Excluding military wives and civil

¹¹⁴ Most Civil Service employees worked on a military base in the city serving in a civilian capacity.

¹¹⁵ Domingo Granado Jr., Obituary, July 6, 2014.

¹¹⁶ Frank Rodriguez, Obituary, June 20, 2014; Dudley Roquemore, Obituary, May 7, 2014.

¹¹⁷ Lessey Johnson, Obituary, April 30, 2013.

¹¹⁸ Beverly Bochman, Obituary, June 10, 2010; Manda Gates, Obituary, September 3, 2014.

service personnel, military veterans numbered 463 (25 per cent), which was a substantial overrepresentation compared to Census data.¹¹⁹ However, a 2022 study suggested that active and former military members combined accounted for almost seventeen per cent of the city's population.¹²⁰

Militarism was nothing new to American sports and its culture. In the late nineteenth century, the likes of Walter Camp, the 'Father of American Football' along with other revolutionaries of the sport, began to blur the lines between battle and game, using terms like 'attack' for offensive and defensive tactics and 'in the trenches' to refer to the battle amongst the offensive and defensive lines. This came in the same era as Theodore Roosevelt's *The Strenuous Life* and the rise of American imperialism in Southeast Asia, with one historian claiming that the Spanish-American War and the subsequent Philippine-American War resulted from American men fearing a loss of manhood.¹²¹ Politicians such as Roosevelt and Albert Beveridge emphasised war's importance in developing young American men's character and this was replicated on the football field, which acted as another vehicle for character building and a mechanism to protect traditional gender roles. The rhetoric and militaristic language used in that era has since been entrenched into the language of sport and reinforces how sport, war, and manhood have been historically linked.¹²² Researchers of British football have suggested that militaristic agendas have been present in stadium rituals, on jerseys, and other types of sports memorabilia in covert forms of 'invisible nationalism' and concluded that these actions were far more subtle than sporting examples from the U.S.¹²³ Other scholars have researched American college football, analysing the Armed Forces Bowl, a game sponsored by Lockheed Martin (a military manufacturer), and concluded that outright and excessive forms of militaristic propaganda reduced troops to 'commodities or dehumanised symbols of heroism', sanctioned the 'promotion of war', and placed 'the democratic health' of the American public at risk through the bowl's legitimisation of a 'culture of militarism'

¹¹⁹ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

¹²⁰ Carson Frame, 'Rising Rent, Moves, Childcare: "Got Your 6" Summit In San Antonio Faces Challenges of Military Life', Texas Public Radio, February 16, 2023, <https://www.tpr.org/military-veterans-issues/2023-02-16/rising-rent-moves-childcare-got-your-6-summit-in-san-antonio-faces-challenges-of-military-life>.

¹²¹ Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹²² Julie Des Jandins, *Walter Camp: Football and the Modern Man*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹²³ Penn and Berridge, 'Football and the Military in Contemporary Britain', 128, 129, 132, 134.

that normalised war.¹²⁴ Butterworth subsequently interrogated how the NFL, similar to college football, 'contributed to the expansion of a militarised society' using the Pro Football Hall of Fame as an example.¹²⁵ In a regional example of these deep links to militarism, Texas A&M University in College Station has prided itself on training the future of America's defence through their Corps of Cadets which were established when the school was founded in 1876. In 1887 a drill team was formed and eventually named the Ross Volunteers after Lawrence Sullivan Ross. Ross was a former Texas Governor and Confederate General during the American Civil War who became president of the university. To this day, the Ross Volunteers serve as the governor's Honour Guard.¹²⁶

These practices have not been lost on the NBA, particularly with the Spurs. The franchise has recognised San Antonio's title as 'Military City USA' and consequently created several promotions to attract active and former military members and their families. At least once a season, the Spurs host Military Appreciation Night, recognising those who have served, through standing ovations, discount prices on merchandise, free memorabilia, and sometimes family reunions of servicemembers at centre court. Previous Spurs City Edition jerseys, which included a base camouflage pattern printed in silver and black that was modelled after U.S. Army combat uniforms, were also indicators of the organisation's desire to attract this demographic. However, many fans resisted this design, believing that the jerseys were not representative of the city or its people's culture, illustrating the presence of tensions and fractures within this imagined community.¹²⁷ In another example of targeting military personnel, the Spurs teamed up with the United Services Automobile Association (USAA), a San Antonio insurance giant whose promotional campaigns included 'We Know What it Means to Serve' and offered discounted tickets at 'USAA Salute Nights'. Like many other sports teams in the U.S., militaristic language has been used to describe the team over the years. From the 'high-

¹²⁴ Butterworth and Moskal, 'Football, Flags, and Fun: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Armed Forces Bowl, 19.

¹²⁵ Butterworth, 'Militarism and Memorializing at the Pro Football Hall of Fame, 241, 255; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

¹²⁶ Texas A&M University Corps of Cadets, Texas A&M University, <https://corps.tamu.edu/> (accessed June 13, 2024); Ross Volunteers, Texas Aggie Corps of Cadets Association, <https://www.corpsofcadets.org/the-corps/rv.aspx> (accessed June 13, 2024).

¹²⁷ Ibid; Mendoza, 'Spurs Unveil "City Edition" Jersey, and Some Fans are Pissed', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 30, 2017; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 203.

powered', 'run and gun' offence of the seventies and eighties led by the 'unstoppable offensive force', Gervin, to fans 'saluting' the team after they won their first championship in the nineties, and then 'defending' it subsequently.¹²⁸ Military connections could also partially explain the significant fan support for David Robinson, a product of the Naval Academy, who was nicknamed 'The Admiral', Avery Johnson monikered the 'Little General', and Gregg Popovich who attended the Air Force Academy. The disproportionately large number of military-linked Spurs fans highlights the influence of militarism in American sport, and particularly Texas, and how franchise promotions tailored to the military have been frequent and effective.¹²⁹

In summary, these military veterans' cyber obits mirrored the social and cultural characteristics of San Antonio and highlighted how the living valued military service. Survivors portrayed loved ones as protectors of *their* country and supporters of *their* Spurs illustrating how military service was perhaps more valued than other occupations. The impact of this sizeable veteran population showed how communities are interactional and multifaceted in nature, which was reflected in the way that the Spurs organisation specifically targeted residents through various marketing campaigns promoting and supporting the armed forces.

Political Attitudes

The intersection of sports and politics has a rich history. Studies have found that Republicans and Democrats were equally represented throughout American sports fandom, and their devotion to teams was indistinguishable. Republicans were more likely to be upset with sports' politicisation than Democrats and the NBA and its viewers were viewed as more diverse and liberal than others.¹³⁰ Considering the ever-growing partisan divide in the U.S., the political allegiances of Spurs fans were

¹²⁸ Laurie Jasinski and Martin Kohout, 'San Antonio Spurs', Texas State Historical Association Handbook of Texas, August 11, 2021, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/san-antonio-spurs> (accessed January 4, 2022); 'San Antonio Captures Team's First NBA Championship; Fans Salute Spurs In City Parade', *Jet*, July 12, 1999, 51; Travis Hale, 'Remember The Alamo! – And Remember Tim Duncan', *The Cauldron*, May 13, 2016.

¹²⁹ Butterworth and Moskal, 'Football, Flags, and Fun', 19; Butterworth, 'Militarism and Memorializing', 241, 255; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

¹³⁰ Emily Thorson and Michael Serazio, 'Sports Fandom and Political Attitudes', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 391-403; Alex Silverman, 'Demographic Data Shows Which Major Sports Fan Bases Are Most Likely to Support or Reject Social Justice Advocacy', *Morning Consult*, September 10, 2020.

of interest but mentions of this in obituaries were rare (22 or 1 per cent). The small numbers here cannot lead to any concrete conclusions about fan's political leanings or resistance to traditional political gender roles. However, the apolitical nature of obituaries does perhaps speak to a hierarchy of imagined communities amongst Spurs fans, as the team appeared more valued than any political party.

The cyber obituaries indicate what the deceased valued and where they devoted their time and energy. The obituary writers in this sample clearly valued the Spurs, religion, and education far more than politics. The low number of cyber obits that included political affiliation could indicate that obituary writers felt the inclusion of the dead's political leanings would be too polarising or could be an indication of a less politicised environment. However, this interpretation seems less than convincing given that other obituaries created in the same era were explicitly political, vilified presidential nominees and urged readers to support specific candidates.¹³¹ Some did take a more irreverent tone, like Mary's, which said, 'Faced with the prospect of voting for either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton, Mary Anne Noland...chose, instead, to pass into the eternal love of God...'.¹³² Anecdotal humour aside, the political leanings of Spurs supporters and the importance of politics to those who wrote on their behalf appeared minimal despite being crafted in an increasingly partisan era.

Season Ticket Holders

Sports franchises in North America have always understood that season ticket holders, and their buying behaviours are directly linked to net profits.¹³³ Since the Spurs arrived in San Antonio, the front office has offered season ticket programs. Amongst male Spurs fans, a small cohort of fifty-three (5 per cent) were identified as season ticket holders. Their commitments ranged from a few years to over forty with seven holding tickets for forty-plus years, eleven for thirty-plus, six for twenty-plus, and one for fifteen, while the rest of the commemorators did not specify a duration. The average age of male season ticket holders was seventy-seven, nine

¹³¹ Daniela Altimari, 'Connecticut Obituaries Get Political in Hyperpartisan Era', *Hartford Courant*, October 27, 2020.

¹³² Mary Anne Alfriend Noland, Obituary, *Legacy*, May 2016.

¹³³ Adam Karg, Jeremy Nguyen, and Heather McDonald, 'Understand Season Ticket Holder Attendance Decisions', *Journal of Sport Management* 35, no. 3 (April 2021): 239-253; Stephen Castro, 'Understanding Season Ticket Holders' Buying Behaviors', *St. John Fisher College Digital Publications*, May 1, 2014.

years longer than the male fan's lifespan of sixty-eight, which was quite significant. Thirty were white (70 per cent), fourteen were Latino (26 per cent), and two were black (4 per cent). Thirty (57 per cent) lived in zip codes with a MHI higher than the San Antonio average. Twenty-seven were military veterans (51 per cent), and the majority pursued second or multiple careers. Nearly half of these men worked in business, but other occupations included doctors, surgeons, dentists, attorneys, civil service, finance, and the postal service. Thirty-nine (74 per cent) were married, eight were widowed (15 per cent), three (6 per cent) were single, two (4 per cent) were divorced, and one (2 per cent) was unknown. Sixteen had earned bachelor's degrees, nine had a doctorate, two had at least attended college, and four had earned a high school diploma.

Quite revealingly, obituary writers highlighted the numerous professional accomplishments of these men. While this list was not exhaustive, these included: a twenty-five-year stint as director for the San Antonio Merchants Association, a Harvard Medical School fellow, a Medical Chief of Surgical Research, a President of the Rocky Mountain Neurosurgical Society, a fellow of MD Anderson's surgical oncology unit, and a President of the San Antonio Better Business Bureau. Twenty-one were Catholic, seventeen were Protestant and there was one Jew. Only one season ticket holder's political affiliation was noted, and he was a Republican. Overall, this group of season ticket holders, for the most part, were seemingly affluent individuals, allowing them to live longer and dedicate more time and money to the Spurs. The majority (92 per cent) had been married at one time and they had achieved more academically than most Spurs fans. While their Spurs fandom may have been integral to their identity, their lives, like all others discovered in this research, were multifaceted and comprised numerous elements such as their professions, hobbies, beliefs, and families.

The cyber obituary of long-time season ticketholder Richard Attkisson provided an individualised example of several elements at play throughout the prosopography. Attkisson served in the Air Force for twelve years. After leaving the military, he started his own finance company, which he later sold. Attkisson held season tickets to Spurs games dating back to 1977 and when he and his wife could not attend games, they donated their tickets to the Wounded Warriors Project. Attkisson's cyber obituary fondly recalled how he and his wife flew to New York City in 1999

and Cleveland in 2007 to watch the Spurs win those championships.¹³⁴ In many ways, Attkisson's story synthesised several characteristics of this group. As a white male military veteran, business owner, and season ticket holder, his profile represented many of the demographic trends discovered in the prosopography, specifically amongst men season ticket holders.

Only eighteen (2 per cent) women had held Spurs season tickets and ten (56 per cent) of those who did were white, seven (39 per cent) were Latina, and one (5 per cent) was Asian. Some had held tickets for a few years, whereas others were season ticket holders for over three decades. Two women had season tickets for over thirty years, three for more than twenty, one for thirteen, and the other twelve did not specify any timescales. Eight had been married (44 per cent), eight (44 per cent) had been widowed, one (6 per cent) had been divorced, and one (6 per cent) was single. Surprisingly, on average, these women lived slightly shorter lives than male season ticket holders (76 to 77). Another difference between men and women was their location and eight (44 per cent) women lived in areas where the MHI was lower than the city-wide average. Three (17 per cent) had earned a high school diploma, two (11 per cent) had attended college, one (6 per cent) had completed an associate's, two (11 per cent) a bachelor's, two (11 per cent) a master's, and eight (44 per cent) were unknown. These women's occupations varied widely. Five (28 per cent) were homemakers or military wives but others were independent business owners, executives, and teachers who came into Spurs fandom without a husband's influence. For example, Norma had earned a degree in finance from Texas A&M University and worked for a telecommunications company for thirty years. She partnered with a friend to purchase season tickets that would have otherwise been unattainable.¹³⁵ Gloria's obituary told the story of a Mexican immigrant who earned a bachelor's and master's degree and worked her way up from secretary to executive director. Along with several other hobbies, Gloria held Spurs season tickets for twenty years and fervently supported the team.¹³⁶ Nine (50 per cent) of these women were Catholic, one (6 per cent) was Protestant, and the other eight (44 per cent) could not be determined. Like men, only one obituary included the deceased's political affiliation, and that one woman was a Republican. Overall,

¹³⁴ Richard Attkisson, Obituary, November, 27, 2017.

¹³⁵ Norma Gonzalez, Obituary, June 11, 2016.

¹³⁶ Gloria Arriaga, Obituary, August 5, 2018.

women who were season ticket holders were a diverse array of professionals and homemakers who were married at one time, connected to the military, lived in less affluence than their male counterparts, and mostly followed the Catholic faith.

Baseline Bums

According to obituary writers, Barbara, Joseph V., Richard, and Adriel were founding members of the Baseline Bums, the official supporters' group of the Spurs, and the focus of chapter five.¹³⁷ Joseph M. joined the Bums in 1978, Alfred in 1990, Dudley in 2007, and Thomas in 2008.¹³⁸ A few others were described as 'long time' and former members of the organisation. While some obituary writers did not specify for how long the deceased were linked with the Bums, they all mentioned their affinity for the team and the fan group, with one obit reiterating their self-touted title as 'The World-Famous Baseline Bums'. The 'notorious' band of rambunctious supporters was among the rarest groups in the prosopography, but, considering the limited number of Bums in team history, the small number of fans retrieved from the prosopography was not surprising and neither was the inclusion of their membership into the Bums provided their commitment to the team.

Of the 1,823 Spurs fans, eighteen (1 per cent) had been for a time a Bum. Fourteen were men, and four were women. Eleven men were white, five were Latino, and two were black. Three women were white, and one was Latina. Overall, the Bums died at an average age of sixty-seven with the oldest living to eighty-six and the youngest to forty-seven. All of them were born before 1970 and died between 2007 and 2018. Five were born in the 1950s, four in the 1930s, three in the 1940s, three in the 1960s, two in the 1920s, and one in the 1910s. Nine were married, four were single, two were widowed, two were unknown, and one was divorced. Six were military veterans (all men), and, in contrast to the trends among season ticket holders, the location and occupational and educational statuses of the Bums showed they were mainly of the lower and working class. Three of those who were military veterans pursued careers in finance, business, and nursing, while others worked in restaurants, teaching, hospitality, human resources, and the auto industry. One of these men

¹³⁷ Barbara Zunker, Obituary, March 2, 2012; Joseph Valdespino, Obituary, May 15, 2016; Richard White, Obituary, October 30, 2013; Adriel Cantu, Obituary, March 31, 2013.

¹³⁸ Joseph Moran, Obituary, September 26, 2007; Alfred Trafford, Obituary, February 19, 2010; Dudley Roquemore, Obituary, May 7, 2014.

had Down Syndrome but, according to his commemorators, lived a fulfilling life.¹³⁹ Two women held long-time employment in education and telecommunications, and the other two women's occupations were not listed. Five men earned high school diplomas, and three earned a bachelor's degree. The other six had no mention of educational attainment. Two women finished high school, one going on to earn a master's degree, and the other two women's academic achievements were not mentioned. Ten of the Baseline Bums lived in zip codes with a MHI below San Antonio's average. Religious totals were limited, but four Bums were Catholic and four were Protestant. Not a single obituary mentioned a political allegiance, although they often mentioned family- specifically fatherhood and motherhood. In summary, this group of men and women, in many ways, represented the working class of San Antonio through their modest living, occupational status, and education levels. The multifaceted nature of these people's lives portrayed a group of complicated human beings who were also fans. While their dedication to the team was significant, especially given their involvement with this select group, their life stories revealed more complexity. These Bums had numerous responsibilities, desires, challenges, and passions beyond the team. As with every individual in this prosopography of 1,823 fans, each was a human being who lived out a life of which the Spurs were but a part.

Reflections on Prosopography and the Cyber Obituary in Spurs Fandom

In reflecting on the research approach adopted here, prosopography proved a helpful tool for contextualising and investigating the characteristics of a sports fandom. Prosopography allowed for establishing a 'universe to be studied' and demonstrated the existence of Spurs fandom.¹⁴⁰ The collection of personal information- such as names, life dates, age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, religion, education, occupation, and geographic location- was instrumental in identifying, examining and interpreting the demographics of Spurs fans within a broader social and historical context, as well as situating them within the historiography. Additionally, the analysis of varying levels of affinity among Spurs supporters revealed the spectrum of fandom experiences. This, in turn, informs the explorations of the following chapter, which will present a nuanced humanisation of supporters, illuminate fan agency, and uncover the diverse personal communities

¹³⁹ Steven Higby, Obituary, March 5, 2016.

¹⁴⁰ Stone, 'Prosopography', 63, 66, 46; Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sport History Research', 1868.

within Spurs fandom.

Spurs fan cyber obituaries reflected the cultural and societal values of San Antonians and offered a window into how fandom communities in sport were sustained over time. Its composition challenged some previous assumptions about the historically male-dominated realm of sports fandom by exhibiting how female supporters comprised a significant proportion of membership and influence.¹⁴¹ Prosopography allowed for the geographical allocation of supporters around San Antonio, highlighting symptoms of the historically segregated city, issues of economic inequality, the appeal of sports fandom to military veterans, and the problem of racial and ethnic minority underrepresentation ever-present in sporting fan communities.¹⁴² It made identifying fans' ages, marital statuses, religious affiliations, educational attainments, and political attitudes possible. It facilitated a closer examination of the extremes of Spurs fandom through the cyber obituaries of season ticket holders and Baseline Bums. Overall, prosopography affirmed that Spurs fandom existed and had for some time and revealed critical demographic information that allowed for exploration and a presentation of this group's makeup.

The evidence presented in this chapter reveals the larger imagined community, the 'Spurs Family', and how it is comprised of a multitude of authentic personal communities. Scholars need to accept the temporality and conditional arrangements of all communities and recognise the paucity of historical investigations into sporting fandom communities. Although these have been explored sociologically, a thorough investigation into their historical antecedents and evolution has remained elusive until now. To present a more accurate rendering of team supporters within a community, one must recognise their agency, autonomy, and individuality. In essence, afford them their fully complicated humanity on the understanding that being a Spurs fan played but one role in their lives, even though that might have been a major factor in how they saw themselves.

¹⁴¹ Esmonde et al., 'It's Supposed to be About the Love of the Game', 23; Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct*, 119-122.

¹⁴² Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

Prosopography made all of this possible, but a limitation was that it sometimes minimised the individual's role or importance.¹⁴³ The quantitative approach taken in this chapter has obscured some of the intimacy, liminality, and symbolic significance inherent in the sources. Nevertheless, the obituaries effectively countered overly impersonal renderings of fans, which is notable considering the breadth of individuals researched. The immediate and prolonged gravity that an obituary carries cannot be understated, and should encourage historians to appreciate such sources. As those who have publicly commemorated loved ones understand, such an undertaking profoundly affects survivors for the remainder of their lives, demonstrating how the dead, despite their physical absence, continue to exert a liminal and enduring presence that influences those they leave behind. Furthermore, Spurs fan obituaries support the suggestion that these sources can uncover the experiences and values of ordinary people.¹⁴⁴ When historians approach obituaries with care, striving to avoid misrepresentation, and affirm and amplify the personal narratives of those they study fairly to ensure ethicality, the potential for generating new and insightful interpretations of the human experience and communities far outweighs the limitations.

Although useful, it needs to be remembered that these narratives were constructed by others and not by the departed themselves, recording what writers *thought* as opposed to what the departed did, reinforcing the point made by Day that 'many sources are biased or distort and filter the "truth"'.¹⁴⁵ Shortcomings aside, this chapter reinforced the value of cyber obits in historical inquiries and challenges other practitioners of prosopography to utilise more diverse materials in developing and strengthening historical understanding. This chapter also challenges the sport historian to carefully humanise the fan while interrogating their place in the sports industry. The obituaries, accompanied by photographs, emotive prose, and guestbook entries, naturally humanised members of this community but unquestionably had the potential to put the researcher on the road towards writing hagiographies.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sport History Research', 1868; Day, 'Swimming Natationists, Mistresses, and Matrons', 506; Jockers, *Microanalysis: Digital Methods*, 26.

¹⁴⁴ Clotfelter, 'Die-Hard Fans and the Ivy Tower's', 389, 397.

¹⁴⁵ Day, 'Swimming Natationists, Mistresses, and Matrons', 506.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (2020): 670-691.

Prosopography only served as one tool in the exploration and explanation of the history of Spurs fandom and understanding this entity requires additional, more qualitative, methodologies.¹⁴⁷ Given the size of the prosopography, fans in this chapter were often portrayed as a statistic. Therefore, the following chapter prioritises humanising them. Funnelling down from the prosopography of cyber obituaries and using them in conjunction with the web cemeteries in which they are housed to examine these supporters more deeply, reveals the various personal communities within the 'Spurs Family', and how ordinary, flawed, and complicated people used fandom to foster community and cope with bereavement.

¹⁴⁷ Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (August 3, 2020): 670-691.

Chapter 4- Fighting Against Oblivion: The Web Cemeteries of Spurs Fans

In previous chapters, archival research and prosopography contextualised the Spurs franchise in San Antonio and facilitated the exploration of who supported the team over time. These methods also suggested how and why San Antonians supported the team but did not fully connect with individual experiences and personal relationships, which is why this chapter utilises a novel source, previously unexplored by sport historians, in the form of the web cemetery and presents them in a type of collective biography. These web cemeteries counteract the impersonal deficiencies of the quantitative analysis in chapter three, by presenting Spurs fans as complicated human beings using sites of meaningful personal expression and community building that combat modern society's institutionalisation of death. These public sources fight against the currents of oblivion by broadcasting the memory of the deceased and allow historians to observe rituals and acts of remembrances. Previous sport historians have not investigated them to explore the historical antecedents and evolution of sports fandom so, in that respect, this chapter adopts an entirely novel approach by analysing the web cemeteries of San Antonio Spurs fans. The author argues that these web cemeteries promoted, produced, and prolonged social relationships, and aided survivors of the dead during their bereavement. The chapter humanises fans as fully complicated persons using these intimate sources, and challenges other historians to do the same when developing historical interpretations of sporting communities.

Web Cemeteries

Cyber obituaries are one component of a larger entity known as the web cemetery, which is an interactive platform that exists in the public domain and includes, but is not limited to, a cyber obituary, a memorial service and visitation information, posted memories from the family in the form of syntax, photographs, videos, and guestbooks. They reveal the personal histories of Spurs fans that often predated the introduction of the team and display the Spurs' importance to the deceased's identity and memory. Although these sources are often hagiographic, their historical accuracy is less important than their cultural function. Like other sentimental historical sources, they often blur reality. More importantly, they shape memories, aid the bereaved, and counter the currents of oblivion by documenting a lived experience. Since its cultural turn, historians have attempted to uncover the lives of everyday sorts of people and, more recently, how they coped with their

bereavement, one of the foci for this chapter.¹ These sources illustrated the democratisation of the obituary over time and how in recent history, ordinary people have attempted to commemorate those previously deemed unworthy of such attention. As noted in chapter three, death notices can be traced back to before the common era, but the obituary as a medium became more popular in the nineteenth century, although it was often reserved for the social elites of society. The fact that these web cemeteries were largely created by common people for common people illustrates how the obituary as a medium has changed over time.

Crafting an obituary is a selective process, and it is likely that many will neither write or contribute to one. However, it is more common that people will visit or post a guestbook entry in the web cemetery of loved ones. Engaging with a web cemetery can evoke profound emotions and contemplations, which historians must navigate when researching such intimate and sentimental sources. For survivors, contributing to a web cemetery guestbook is a deeply introspective and challenging endeavour, as they sift through their memories and impressions of the deceased to represent them in meaningful ways. This intricate process is further complicated by the need for contributors to remain sensitive to the emotional states of fellow survivors, particularly immediate family members, to whom they often extend their condolences. These considerations are crucial for historians. Researching in this domain is undoubtedly complex and can be isolating, but the intimacy, sentimentality, and dialogic nature of web cemeteries provide historians with a compelling vantage point to explore the lives of ordinary people. Provided that those studied are granted their fully complicated humanity and represented with respect, historians can ensure ethicality and support one of the web cemetery's primary purposes- establishing a written record of the deceased for posterity.

To reiterate, this chapter shows how web cemeteries reduced social isolation and were sites of meaningful personal expression and community building. Unlike previous generations, modern society has made death a hidden enterprise leaving many who are dying and mourning unprepared for such a momentous experience.

¹ Amanda Herbert, 'Queer Intimacy: Speaking with the Dead in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Gender & History* 31, no. 1 (March 2019): 25-40; Pamela Roberts, 'The Living and the Dead: Community in the Virtual Cemetery', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (2004): 57-76; Brian de Vries and Judy Rutherford, 'Memorializing Loved Ones on the World Wide Web', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (2004): 23-24.

However, web cemeteries combatted these trends by giving mourners a public space for ritual and remembrance. While chapter three's prosopography provided demographic information on individuals, which facilitated the exploration into the group's shared characteristics, this quantitative approach minimised the significance of a person and the life they lived. Web cemeteries, on the other hand, allowed for qualitative research that captured the personality and humanity of the deceased. The chapter is arranged thematically and presents groups of Spurs fans that shared commonalities in a type of collective biography. First, 'Intrafamilial Spurs Fandom' discusses how family history played a crucial role in developing an affinity for the team over the generations. Next, 'The Untimely Deaths of Spurs Fans' explores fan agency by examining how web cemeteries of those who died at a young age assisted survivors during their bereavement. The remainder of the chapter discusses historically marginalised groups, such as those with disabilities and older adults, while continuing other themes of this thesis, including military connections, season ticketholders, and organisational perspectives. It concludes with a reflection on the value of web cemeteries in historical research.

Intrafamilial Spurs Fandom

The Armstrong Family

Originally from the state of Maine, Brian Armstrong was born in 1963, moved to San Antonio as a child and graduated from a high school on the city's northeast side, before attending the University of Texas at Austin. He worked as a shoemaker at the San Antonio Shoe Company, married, and raised two children. He died in his home in Fair Oaks Ranch, an affluent western suburb of San Antonio, in 2003. Armstrong's father co-founded San Antonio Shoe Company in 1976, which manufactured handcrafted shoes, and after enduring a turbulent beginning, the company solidified its place in the American market and was managed by Armstrong's sister.² The original factory sat on the southside of San Antonio, and their main customers, who valued comfort over glamour, were mostly over forty years of age.³ Armstrong preceded both of his parents in death, and his family experienced several losses in short order following his passing. His father, brother-

² Shari Biediger, 'SAS Shoemakers Tale One of Perseverance, Craftsmanship and Sole', *San Antonio Report*, November 26, 2018.

³ San Antonio Shoe Company, 'History & Heritage', <https://www.sasshoes.com/history/history-heritage.html> (accessed January 25, 2023); Elaine Ayala, 'Armstrong's Work, Sacrifice Helped Build SAS Shoes', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 13, 2010.

in-law, and mother died in 2005, 2007 and 2010, and their web cemeteries revealed a community in mourning.⁴

Perhaps more than any other Spurs season ticket holder discovered, Armstrong's web cemetery exhibited the value of this digital space. In an era before the proliferation of Facebook and the memorialising of social media profiles, the web cemetery provided a place to share memories, send condolences, express gratitude, and grieve publicly. Survivors of Armstrong did this in an exceptional way, posting eighty-three guestbook entries. They mentioned Armstrong's connections to the franchise and recalled the fun experiences they shared with him and his wife over the decades that he held season tickets. Obituary writers claimed Armstrong was the best Spurs fan 'ever', highlighting the team's importance to his personal identity, while friends explained in his guestbook that they could not watch Spurs games without thinking of him because the two (Brian and the Spurs) were inseparable. Other friends recalled their experiences with Armstrong over several years, said they would never forget him, offered their contact information as a form of support to his widow, labelled him their favourite Spurs fan due to his friendliness, and claimed Spurs games would never be the same in his absence. Spurs staffers also commented in Armstrong's guestbook, saying, 'I will miss seeing him at games and his wonderful smile' and that 'Brian was a very dear person and a wonderful season ticket holder...We loved him dearly. May God Bless Him and all his family'. Another Spurs employee said this about Armstrong,

Brian always had such a contagious energy about him. The staff at SBC center has lost a dear friend. He was always so willing to express his generosity (*sic*) and kindness to all. He gave love and life to everyone around him. Our hearts and prayers go out to his family and friends. I am proud to have called him my friend. With my deepest sympathy...⁵

Armstrong's web cemetery illustrated the relationships that could be developed between Spurs staffers, and the fan community, together with a deep connection to

⁴ Brian Armstrong, Obituary, November 24, 2003; Terrance Douglas Armstrong, Obituary, November 2005; Regina Rose Armstrong, Obituary, December 2010; Travy Hillman Remmert, Obituary, February 2010.

⁵ Brian Armstrong, Obituary, November 24, 2003.

his mother, who often accompanied him to games. Following her death in 2010, Spurs staffers also commented and shared memories of her at games.⁶ This familial and multigenerational fandom extended beyond Armstrong's immediate family. An entry from his twelve-year-old niece highlighted how his Spurs fandom influenced her memories of bonding with her uncle,

Uncle Brian,

You were an amazing uncle and were always had a brilliant (*sic*) big smile and your face when i (*sic*) saw you. You were full of life and energy all the time and espically (*sic*) at the Spurs games. You always had a great time and shared it with others. You were always so welcoming to my friends when they came . . . I am sorry you are gone but my love is not it will be everlasting.⁷

Moreover, web cemeteries remain *alive*. For example, Armstrong's sister commented twelve years after his passing, and an old friend posted an entry a few days before the fifth anniversary of his death in a melancholic and regretful tone.⁸ He reflected on their joyful experiences together as youngsters but was anguished at how they had lost touch over time. He concluded by expressing gratitude to Armstrong for making him a 'better person'. Several others expressed similar sentiments, noting Armstrong's enthusiasm, energy, and character. Although these entries only skimmed the surface of what the bereaved experienced, they revealed how important this medium was in establishing a record of a person for posterity.⁹ Armstrong's web cemetery displayed how the end of a life did not equate to the end of a relationship, given that conversations continued between survivors and the dead, even if they were parasocial (imagined).¹⁰ Shared and unshared memories endured as Armstrong continued to comfort, haunt, and instruct those who survived him. Collectively, the living commemorated someone who was part of the imagined community of Spurs fandom, as well as multiple smaller community networks related to professional and personal endeavours.

⁶ Regina Rose Armstrong, Obituary, December 2010.

⁷ Brian Armstrong, Obituary, November 24, 2003.

⁸ Brian Armstrong, Obituary, November 24, 2003.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Shane M. Semmler, 'The Existential Function of Parasocial Relationship Interaction', in Lindsey A. Harvell and Gwendelyn S. Nisbett, *Denying Death: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Terror Management Theory*, (New York, Routledge, 2016): 90-91.

The Lott Family

Randall Lott, a native of Illinois, was born in 1960, and lived in San Antonio during and after his military service. He married and began a twenty-two-year career in the Air Force, after which he worked at the University of Texas at San Antonio as an assistant director in the testing services department until he died at fifty-eight. One of his two sons, Logan, persuaded him to become a Spurs supporter in 1989 after a friendly interaction with David Robinson at San Antonio's Sea World amusement park. After that meeting, the father and son attended games and agreed to make the Spurs their team.¹¹

As with Armstrong, Randall Lott's web cemetery exhibited how Spurs fandom bonded family members. Following Lott's death, Logan travelled to San Antonio from Alaska to attend his father's services.¹² The grieving son posted on a Spurs sub-Reddit page, 'Lost my dad yesterday. I'm looking to watch Thursday's game with somebody'.¹³ In the following hours, hundreds of Reddit users 'upvoted' Lott's post, and one fan offered him a ticket, which Lott accepted. Dozens sent their condolences, and one person offered to buy the pair a round of beers at the game. Fellow fans felt moved by Lott's post, with one explaining that stories like these reminded him of why he loved San Antonio and the Spurs. Another fan shared his lived experience with his own father's death and recounted a dream which depicted his dad leaving him Spurs tickets before his passing.¹⁴ A local journalist claimed these responses showed that the 'Spurs Family' was 'real' as fans rallied around one of their own. Lott and the stranger turned 'friend for life', John Huff, watched the Spurs defeat the Los Angeles Clippers by thirty-eight points. Logan credited the Spurs victory to his father and was comforted by the sea of Spurs fans in the arena that felt like 'one big family'. Lott later shared a photograph of the two posing with a poster of his dad on Reddit and thanked Huff for 'one of the most amazing'

¹¹ Randall Lott, Obituary, December 14, 201; Madalyn Mendoza, 'Grieving Spurs Fan Asks for Company During Game, Silver & Black Family Comes Through', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 14, 2018.

¹² Randall Lott, Obituary, December 14, 2018.

¹³ Reddit is a social media platform where users promote content posted by other members through voting in a type of popularity forum. The website has countless topics and subtopics for forums that were created by users based on their interests.

¹⁴ Logan Lott, 'Lost My Dad Yesterday and I'm Looking to Watch Thursday's Game with Somebody', 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/NBASpurs/comments/a4z0aa/lost_my_dad_yesterday_im_looking_to_watch/ (accessed March 22, 2023).

experiences of his life (Figure 4.1). Reddit users responded to the post, 'Thank you both for sharing this moment with our little family here...As Pop would say, it's bigger than basketball'.¹⁵ Indeed, this experience offered another example of fan agency, as Lott used his fandom as a tool to cope with his bereavement, and his story moved other fans to support him. Although Lott's narrative escaped the bounds of the web cemetery and invaded other social media platforms (in this case, Reddit), both digital spaces promoted, produced, and prolonged social relationships, highlighting how the internet has historically been used to counter social isolation and build communities. This example also showed how valuable these sources could be to historians attempting to discover fan culture and networks.

Figure 4.1: John Huff (left) and Logan Lott (right) Randall Lott¹⁶



The Quintanilla Family

Born in 1922, Eleanor Quintanilla lived in San Antonio for all ninety-six years of her life. She married a Mexican immigrant, and together they raised five children who pursued careers in law and law enforcement. One of her sons, Gabriel, experienced

¹⁵ Madalyn Mendoza, 'Grieving Spurs Fan Asks for Company During Game, Silver & Black Family Comes Through', *San Antonio Express-News* December 14, 2018; 'Pop' is the nickname of the Spurs' head coach Gregg Popovich.

¹⁶ Madalyn Mendoza, 'Grieving Spurs Fan Asks for Company During Game, Silver & Black Family Comes Through', *San Antonio Express-News* December 14, 2018; Logan Lott, 'Thank You', 2019, https://www.reddit.com/r/NBASpurs/comments/a61rgf/thank_you_ujellyrollsportin_and_thank_you/ (accessed March 22, 2023).

learning challenges during childhood and the faculty and administration at his school informed her that he would never perform to the level of his peers. Gabriel credited his mother for helping him overcome this adversity explaining in her web cemetery, 'Mom saved my life as a child. Mom taught me more than how to read and write. She taught me in her own quiet subtle way to never give up. Don't be afraid to fail. Question expert opinions. And don't be afraid to dream'.¹⁷ In adulthood, Gabriel earned a law degree from the University of Texas at Austin and worked as a litigator at various levels. While rearing her children, Quintanilla worked in retail in downtown San Antonio, although her family lived on the city's westside. After surviving a stroke in 2013, one doctor recommended Gabriel place his mother into hospice care, but he firmly dismissed this recommendation.¹⁸ Eleanor lived five more years following her stroke, with Gabriel as her full-time caregiver, and the two bonded over many things, including the Spurs.¹⁹

Quintanilla recited the names of Spurs players as part of her speech therapy after the stroke. She had started following the Spurs after they signed Robinson in 1987 but became a 'fanatic' following Duncan's arrival in 1997. Quintanilla was one example of the many older adults who supported the team later in life. In her case, she was around seventy-five years old when she became an ardent fan. A devout Catholic, Quintanilla recited two daily rosaries, but she increased that to three when the Spurs were in the playoffs. In her web cemetery, her son explained the rules she established in her home, which revolved around her favourite team,

There were certain rules to observe at Mom's house. First do NOT call mom when the Spurs were playing. Second: The Spurs never fouled. Never. End of story. Third: when Tim Duncan missed a free throw mom became enraged and insisted his problem was his stance. To mom Tim stood at the free throw line like a mummy. Fourth: Never never never under any circumstances mention the name Joey Crawford in her presence. Trust me to mom he was really Joey The Rat Crawford and his name was forbidden. Mom loved Manu

¹⁷ Eleanor Quintanilla, Obituary, August 12, 2018.

¹⁸ Center for Medicare Advocacy Inc., 'Gabe Quintanilla- National Voices of Medicare Summit 2016', June 30, 2016, <https://youtu.be/8Wsr-nG3JYU>.

¹⁹ Eleanor Quintanilla, Obituary, August 12, 2018.

Ginobili and for years had Manu's photo among our family photos on the wall. But later she fell in love with Matt Bonner who she called The Red Headed Angel.

Gabriel also recalled his mother searching for the phone book following a Spurs loss, so she could call coach Popovich and explain that he needed to play Bonner more if he wanted the team to win. Eleanor's affection for Bonner grew after he recorded a get well soon video for her in 2014, when he crossed paths with congressman Joaquin Castro of San Antonio in Washington D.C. during the team's visit with President Barack Obama. Bonner's words inspired the mother and son, and Gabriel remarked, 'I hope the video gives some solace to stroke victims, to never give up. Just like the Spurs'.²⁰

Guestbook contributors in Quintanilla's web cemetery expressed their condolences and fondly remembered watching her cheer for the Spurs. They also found inspiration in such a profound mother-and-son bond and explained how their story motivated them to continue as advocates for their loved ones suffering from various afflictions. Quintanilla's web cemetery revealed multigenerational fandom and how a parent and child bonded over the team. Like other women uncovered in this research, Quintanilla supported the Spurs much later in life, so while being a fan was one of her identifying features, she was more than simply that.²¹ As a person, she impacted dozens of lives through her son's activism and her story illustrates clearly how digital spaces positively influenced the bereaved and enhanced a fan community's relationships.

The Arriaga Family

Gloria Arriaga was originally from Mexico, but her family relocated to Los Angeles, CA, in 1955, when she was five. While in Los Angeles, she graduated high school and earned a full scholarship to the University of California at Los Angeles, but a family move to San Antonio in 1969 halted her studies. She eventually attended the University of Texas at San Antonio, where she met her future husband. They raised two daughters, while Arriaga concurrently earned a bachelor's and master's degree

²⁰ Gilbert Garcia, 'Red Rocket Is An 'Angel' For One Special Spurs Fan', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 17, 2015.

²¹ Eleanor Quintanilla, Obituary, August 12, 2018.

and worked for the Alamo Area Council of Governments, whose mission was to enhance the quality of life for San Antonio area residents through coordinating human services. Arriaga earned numerous promotions and awards over her thirty-six-year career. She also supported the Spurs and held season tickets for over two decades. Arriaga's obituary writers noted that she rarely missed a game and developed a reputation as a loud and familiar personality inside the arena. A fellow Spurs supporter commented in her guestbook that she enjoyed Arriaga's company and would 'never forget their Spurs games together!' Gloria's survivors posted at least a dozen photographs of her dressed in Spurs gear with her family and her web cemetery demonstrated how she had bonded with others, specifically family, and created meaningful experiences through her fandom. They also indicated familial and multigenerational support for the Spurs.²² Using the Spurs, she and her survivors shared experiences and enhanced relationships (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Gloria Arriaga Web Cemetery Photograph Collage²³



The Martinez Family

Born in Laredo, TX, in 1952, Richard Martinez moved to San Antonio, where he worked as a truck driver and foreman. Martinez and his wife raised three children

²² Gloria Arriaga, Obituary, August 5, 2018.

²³ Gloria Arriaga, Web Cemetery, August 5, 2018.

and enjoyed thirty-nine years of marriage. Martinez's obituary writers emphasised that he loved basketball and coached his children when they played in the local Catholic Youth Organisation league. They shared that he was an avid Spurs fan, and in his featured obituary photograph, he wore a Spurs championship t-shirt. Martinez's web cemetery revealed familial and multigenerational connections to the Spurs. His sister-in-law thanked him for being the 'best' husband and father for her sister's family, hoped he would greet her deceased mother in the afterlife, and help guide the Spurs to another championship. His nephew thanked Martinez for his mentorship and explained that his uncle could now 'watch the Spurs win the championship from the mighty gates of heaven'.²⁴ Martinez's father-in-law, Silvestre Mendoza, was also a fan of the Spurs, and in his web cemetery, he was seen wearing a matching Ginobili shirt and cap.²⁵ More importantly, Martinez's web cemetery revealed how, similar to a physical cemetery, this digital space provided loved ones with opportunities to grieve, remember, and commemorate the dead. One of Martinez's survivors was his mother, and she posted twice and referenced the song 'You Are My Sunshine' seven years apart. Martinez's wife also posted in the days following his passing and again one year later.²⁶ Web cemeteries such as that of Martinez illustrates how survivors often used Spurs fandom to cope with a significant loss.

The Oberg Family

Robert Oberg was born in Salina, KS, in 1925 and lived through the Great Depression as a child. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps during WWII in the Pacific Theatre and moved to San Antonio in 1961, where he worked in retail management for thirty years. He and his wife raised four sons, who eventually made him a grandfather. In retirement, Oberg supported the Spurs and became a Baseline Bum. A friend and fellow Bum posted in his guestbook that she cherished the fun they had together at games, which often included a caring hug and smile 'even when we were being our unruly selves'. Oberg's web cemetery's photographs featured him wearing Spurs gear, posing with the Silver Dancers, and cheering on the team in the Bums' section of the crowd. One photograph revealed how the Spurs impacted three generations of Obergs when he posed at a game with his sons and grandsons

²⁴ Richard Martinez, Obituary, May 15. 2014.

²⁵ Silvestre Mendoza, Obituary, September 2021.

²⁶ Richard Martinez, Obituary, May 15. 2014.

(Figure 4.3), one of whom, Michael, became a statistician for, and supporter of, the team.²⁷ In summary, Oberg's web cemetery illustrated the importance of the Spurs to him and his family but, like many other web cemeteries, it also revealed a man who lived a long life full of other interests, experiences, and accomplishments.²⁸

Figure 4.3: Three Generations of Obergs Attend a Spurs Game²⁹



The Mika Family

Born in 1922, Aloys Mika grew up in the small town of Panna Maria, which sits eighty-five kilometres southeast of San Antonio and is the oldest Polish settlement in the U.S. After graduating high school, Aloys helped his family on their farm before he joined the U.S. Army during WWII and served for twenty years. His military career took him across the globe, and he retired at the rank of sergeant, having already married Gertrude and started a family. Upon returning to civilian life, he worked for the U.S. Postal Service as a mail carrier for twenty-two years. Aloys and his family attended St. Benedict's Church on the east side of San Antonio for fifty years and were committed to their faith and to the Spurs.³⁰ His sibling, Sister Susan Mika, joined the Benedictine Sisters and advocated for workers' rights, educational access and immigration reform, while Gertrude worked as a lector, minister, and festival

²⁷ Robert Oberg, Obituary, April 15, 2011.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Robert Oberg, Web Cemetery, April 15, 2011.

³⁰ Aloys Mika, Obituary, January 2015.

volunteer with their church.³¹ The couple enjoyed marriage for sixty-seven years until Aloys died in 2015. Steven, one of the couple's sons, preceded Gertrude in death when he passed in February 2018. Mirroring his father's obituary, his stated how he supported the Spurs.³² A few months after Steven's death, Gertrude died, and like her husband and son, her obituary stated she was also an avid Spurs fan. The web cemeteries of the Mika's depicted a family in a small Texas town of Polish descent who valued a multiplicity of things, including the Spurs, an affection for the team that crossed lines of gender, and spanned multiple generations.

The Tamez and Martinez Families

Born in Mexico in 1914, Daniel Tamez's family moved to San Antonio during the Spanish flu outbreak. He began his career in retail in 1936, selling pianos, and he opened his shop in 1960. Working alongside his wife, the two operated the family business and volunteered at, and supported, the Club Sembradores de Amistad de San Antonio, which provided educational opportunities to disadvantaged youth. His brother-in-law, Henry B. Gonzales, served as a congressman throughout the sixties and seventies and lobbied for civil rights and equal protection for minorities nationwide. Tamez and his wife supported their brother's campaigns and helped him forge perhaps the most impactful political career of any San Antonian in history. The couple enjoyed supporting the Spurs and held season tickets for over twenty years. Friends posted in Tamez's guestbook that they developed friendships with him, his wife, and his father over the years. Those who sat near them at Spurs games recounted fond memories and commented that the Tamez family 'never missed a game'.³³ Another fan, Mary Martinez, was born and raised in San Antonio and lived there until she passed away in 2006. One of her siblings posted an entry in 2014 to inform her of what they considered a significant event stating, 'Mary, our Spurs won their fifth championship-you and I would have screamed, "How 'bout them Spurs!" God bless you, Miro, Johnny, Mom, Dad, and Uncle Chorre'.³⁴ The web cemeteries of Tamez and Martinez illustrate how these spaces and memories of Spurs fandom helped the living cope with death, as they found pleasure in the victories of the team and were able to connect that success emotionally to deceased

³¹ Texas Legacy Project, 'Sister Susan Mika', January 31, 2023, <https://www.texaslegacy.org/narrator/sister-susan-mika/>; Gertrude Mika, Obituary, June 2018.

³² Steven Mika, Obituary, February 18, 2018.

³³ Daniel Tamez, Obituary, December 2006.

³⁴ Mary Martinez, Obituary, July 20, 2014.

members of the historical fan community.

Altogether these web cemeteries revealed an intrafamilial Spurs fandom that spanned multiple generations with obituary prose, guestbook entries, and posted photographs affirming the existence of a community identity. They also reinforced the demographical information uncovered by the prosopography, highlighting religious affiliation, immigrant backgrounds, and military connections. The community engagement activities initiated by the franchise discussed in chapter two played a role for some of these supporters, but these sources suggested another way Spurs fandom was generated and sustained over time, and they contextualise personal experiences. In many cases, there was a familial impulse to support the Spurs, which at least partially explained some fan origins, and taken overall, the web cemeteries of the fans considered here record fully complicated persons, whose digital spaces promoted social relationships and aided survivors during their bereavement.

Untimely Deaths

Born in 1991, Jade Herrick died from complications related to heart surgery at the age of fifteen. Doctors had diagnosed her with dextrocardia and anomalous pulmonary venous return at birth, but, despite her health issues, Herrick lived a relatively normal life until her sophomore year in high school. She played sports in middle school, volunteered at the animal shelter, and donated locks of her hair to children in need. Herrick participated in the pep squad and Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps in high school. Her cyber obituary noted that she enjoyed following the Spurs and that guard Bruce Bowen was her favourite player, leading her mother to bury her in Bowen's jersey.³⁵ Herrick predeceased her parents, grandparents, and three of her four great-grandparents so, unsurprisingly, her 120 web cemetery guestbook entries outnumbered all the other fans discussed in this chapter.³⁶

Although very few of these entries referenced the Spurs specifically, they are a good illustration of how significant web cemeteries were for those in the bereavement process and why they can be meaningful historical sources in identifying the

³⁵ David Saleh Rauf, 'Herrick, 15 Went the Extra Step to Serve', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 19, 2008: 04B.

³⁶ Jade Herrick, Obituary, June 18, 2008.

communities that surround the individual. On close examination, those who posted initially repeatedly visited over years. One such survivor, a friend named Nykole, commented that she looked forward to the start of the new NBA season and would be disappointed if the Spurs did not win the 2008 championship, while others recalled Herrick's 'love of the SPURS'.³⁷ Of the frequent contributors, her best friend, Kylie, and mother, Valerie, posted most often. Her father also crafted a nearly 3,000-word biography of Jade. Her mother contributed eleven times from 2008 to 2010, often on anniversaries and birthdays. Sometimes she shared memories, and in others she conversed with Jade pleading for her guidance and strength as she searched for ways to endure. Over time, Jade's web cemetery revealed changes in her mother's bereavement process. In comparing her first significant post to her last, there was a clear distinction regarding her attitudes on her daughter's untimely death. Jade's best friend, Kylie, posted more than any other person, nineteen total, from 2008 to 2011. Commentators appreciated the stories she shared and seemed comforted by them.³⁸ Herrick's web cemetery displayed how survivors collectively cultivated stories to cope with bereavement.

Angelina Arriaga died in 2009 at the age of thirty-four, leaving behind a mother, husband, and four children. Her mother's outpouring of emotion permeates throughout Angelina's web cemetery, where obituary writers noted she was a Spurs fan, and that her favourite player was Tony Parker. Some of Arriaga's survivors referenced the team in their posts. For example, her uncle commented that watching Spurs games would never be the same and wondered if the squad knew 'they now have a sixth player on the court', highlighting how the two had bonded over the team and how he would miss his niece's companionship when watching upcoming games. However, this kind of post with its reference to the Spurs only skimmed the surface of the totality of Arriaga's web cemetery. Forty-two other posts accompanied her uncle's contribution and provided information regarding Arriaga's professional and personal life. The most prominent commemorator was her mother, who posted seven times and used the platform to recollect and grieve, writing poems to her daughter and hoping she would be reunited with other lost loved ones in heaven.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Angelina Arriaga, Web Cemetery, May 25, 2009.

Born in Indiana in 1980, Tyler Green moved to San Antonio with his family during his formative years. He graduated from Madison High School on the city's northeast side and was voted the basketball team's most valuable player in 1999. He attended college and held various jobs before he married and had a son. His web cemetery was one of the most popular identified in the dataset with eighty-three guestbook entries, which was not surprising because he died suddenly at twenty-four.⁴⁰ The comments from his wife and best friend recalled Green's affection for the Spurs and how they bonded over the team, with his wife reflecting on how she cherished memories of seeing her husband and son watch Spurs games and playing basketball together. Green's best friend submitted an entry following Tyler's death, but posted again on June 19, 2005, after the Spurs defeated the Detroit Pistons in game five of the NBA Finals, writing as if having a live conversation with his deceased friend,

Hey Ty!!!! WE DID IT!!!!!! We won in Detroit!!! That was the single greatest game I've ever seen in my life and I know you're grinning ear to ear right now!!! Thank God for Robert Horry!!! I've been shaking for 30 minutes already and I actually feel like crying right now because I'm SO happy! and we haven't even won the championship yet! I LOVE YOU PLAYER!! GO SPURS GO!!!!!!!!!!!!⁴¹

This post highlights how the two men had bonded over the Spurs and that, even after his death, his friend continued to link the Spurs with Green and use them to aid in his bereavement. He expressed relief, love, and joy through his post and probably exuded even more emotion a few days later when the Spurs won game seven and the NBA championship.

While many of the web cemeteries of Spurs fans revealed heart-warming narratives and commemorations, they also revealed tragedy, as in the case of Michael Valdez who was born in 1972, grew up in San Antonio and went on to serve in the U.S. Navy. He then worked for the Bexar County Sherriff's Office and the Fort Worth Police Department.⁴² His wife Mary was born in 1977 in San Antonio and enjoyed

⁴⁰ Tyler Green, Web Cemetery, May 16, 2005.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Michael Valdez, Obituary, March 2017.

running but valued her family more than anything. Despite the couple's move to Fort Worth, TX, in the early 2000s, they stayed loyal to their hometown Spurs and attended games when they visited San Antonio. Another hobby the couple enjoyed was riding Michael's Harley-Davidson motorcycle, so much so that they named their youngest daughter Harley.⁴³ Unfortunately, in the early morning of March 31, 2017, the two died in a motorcycle accident, leaving behind four children. Their families had their bodies transported to San Antonio for a joint service, and the incident made local and regional news.⁴⁴ Mary's older brother, Isidro Ramos, struggled to articulate what the loss of his sister and brother-in-law meant in an interview that displayed a Spurs poster in the background, with the segment reiterating their commitment to their favourite sports team.⁴⁵ Many grieved for and honoured the couple in their web cemeteries, illustrating how they were more than just sports fans and that their joint communities extended beyond the team. Unfortunately, the Valdez couple were not the only motorcycle accident victims. Colleen Greer died after crashing her motorcycle while riding through the Texas Hill Country, which presents a winding series of roads with peaks and valleys that sometimes limit a rider's line of sight. Greer's commemorators claimed she was the Spurs' greatest fan and enjoyed supporting the team alongside her husband. In Greer's guestbook, friends reflected on the times they had shared at Spurs games and how they always looked forward to rendezvousing with her at the arena's central bar.⁴⁶

With an average age of thirty-four years old, the narratives of these six people showed how fleeting life can be. Given their untimely deaths, their web cemeteries often provided more substance than others observed, as survivors shared more stories and expressed emotions over an extended period. Perhaps more than any other segment of fans, the web cemeteries of these people highlighted how these digital spaces promoted, produced, and prolonged relationships while also showing how the living and dead bonded over the Spurs and how their shared fandom, at least to some degree, helped survivors cope with a significant loss. They also reinforced how the cultural function of these sources makes them critical historical

⁴³ Mary Ann Valdez, Obituary, March 2017.

⁴⁴ Azia Branson, 'Off-Duty Texas Officer, Wife Killed In Motorcycle Crash', *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, April 2, 2017.

⁴⁵ Zack Hedrick, 'Fort Worth Officer, Wife Killed In Motorcycle Crash Have San Antonio Ties', News4 San Antonio, March 31, 2017, <https://news4sanantonio.com/news/local/fort-worth-officer-wife-killed-in-motorcycle-crash-have-san-antonio-ties> (accessed January 31, 2023).

⁴⁶ Colleen Greer, Web Cemetery, October 6, 2010.

documents and essential elements in the creation and sustaining of a fan community.

Disability

Steven Cox was born in northern California in 1957 and was diagnosed with an intellectual disability at age three. Cox's father served in the Air Force, and the family moved to numerous places, including Germany, Maryland, Alabama, Thailand, and San Antonio. While his father served in the Vietnam War and beyond, his mother tended to Steven and his four siblings. In an era before the proliferation of special education in public school systems, doctors recommended that Steven's parents institutionalise him, but they refused, and with the counsel of some friends, they enrolled Steven into a program that helped him develop various cognitive skills.⁴⁷ Steven enjoyed watching Godzilla, playing sports, especially bowling, and listening to Elvis Presley's music. He competed numerous times in the Special Olympics and was particularly skilled in basketball. Cox was a member of San Antonio's Association for Retarded Citizens, the Special Adults of St. David's Episcopal Church, and he made friends there and at the Goodwill.⁴⁸ After his father died in 1990, Steven lived at the Heart House Group home but, after being diagnosed with cancer, he was moved to a hospice.⁴⁹ Following his death at forty-nine, his survivors interred him beside his father at Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio and sixteen years later, his mother's remains joined them.⁵⁰ Throughout his life, Steven supported the Spurs and obituary writers explained how an interaction he had with George Gervin became a staple of family lore,

He also loved the Spurs and always remembered the time he met George Gervin. One of the family's favourite stories revolves around Steven's insistence that he knew Mr. Gervin. As he and his brother Jeff walked by the court before a Spurs game, Steven called out, 'Hey George!' Jeff was stunned to hear George reply, 'Hey, Steven!'⁵¹

⁴⁷ Noma Cox, Obituary, July 6, 2022.

⁴⁸ Steven Cox, Obituary, January 11, 2006.

⁴⁹ Noma Cox, Obituary, July 6, 2022.

⁵⁰ Veterans Legacy Memorial, 'Glenn T Cox', <https://www.vlm.cem.va.gov/GLENNTCOX/C90CDD4> (accessed February 14, 2023).

⁵¹ Steven Cox, Obituary, January 11, 2006.

Cox's family shared how grateful they were to the Spurs organisation for providing people with disabilities the opportunity to enjoy such experiences, and the Higby family also benefitted from the Spurs' partnership with local community outreach groups, specifically the Baseline Bums.⁵²

Figure 4.4: Higby and the Bums Pose with the Spurs Silver Dancers⁵³



As part of a military family, Steven Higby was born in Türkiye in 1968 and was diagnosed with an intellectual disability. His father served in the Air Force after earning a graduate degree, and the family spent time abroad but eventually moved to San Antonio. Steven graduated from Alamo Heights High School, served as an Eagle Scout, and earned performance awards at the 1994 Special Olympics in the state's aquatic competitions.⁵⁴ His parents divorced, but he worked in a part-time capacity for twenty-five years and supported the Spurs before he died at the age of forty-six. As an honorary member of the Baseline Bums, thanks to his father's twenty-plus year season tickets and Bum membership, he attended games and participated in two of the team's championship river parades.⁵⁵ Steven often accompanied his father and stepmother to games, and they bonded over those experiences. Higby and fellow Bums posed with the Spurs Silver Dancers at centre court during a game in April 2007 (Figure 4.4).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Chris Quinn, 'A Look Back at the Silver Dancers, A Spurs Staple for More Than Three Decades', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 24, 2018, Photographer: Alicia Wagner Caldas, April 18, 2007.

⁵⁴ Steven Higby, Obituary, March 5, 2016.

⁵⁵ Richard Higby, Obituary, February 6-7, 2020; Steven Higby, Obituary, March 5, 2016.

Karen Dorsey was born into a devout Christian and military family in 1958 at Ft. Sam Houston.⁵⁶ Her father served in the Army during WWII and the Korean War and earned the rank of Chief Warrant Officer 4.⁵⁷ Early in life, doctors diagnosed Karen with an intellectual disability, and her mother and father searched for an optimal educational experience for her. Eventually, she attended the Northeast Independent School District's Special Education program and graduated high school in 1981.⁵⁸ During her youth, Karen participated in the Army's Cares for Exceptionals program, later renamed the Exceptional Family Member Program, which provided 'comprehensive and coordinated community support, housing, educational, medical, and personnel services to families with special needs'.⁵⁹ Dorsey competed as a swimmer in the Special Olympics several times and, in 1972, qualified to represent the state of Texas at the National Special Olympics in Los Angeles. She also competed as a Special Olympian at numerous state-level competitions in bowling. Like Cox, Dorsey joined the St. David's Episcopal Church Special Adult Program, the local Association for Retarded Citizens, and the Goodwill. She travelled to nearly a dozen different states and enjoyed her trips to Disneyworld and Disneyland. Karen lived in an assisted living facility that her father helped establish, following her mother's death and she stayed there for twenty-three years. After her health diminished due to Alzheimer's disease, her family moved her to a hospice facility and expressed gratitude to the health professionals who cared for her. Obituary writers recalled that Karen supported the Spurs and that her favourite player was Tim Duncan before exclaiming, 'Go Spurs Go!'.⁶⁰ Following her death, Karen's family interred her with her parents at Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery.⁶¹

Anthony Barron's parents adopted him and his two siblings as infants. His mother, a devout Catholic, served her church and was on the local board for the Association of Retarded Citizens over several years while his father operated a risk

⁵⁶ Karen Dorsey, Obituary, May 30, 2007.

⁵⁷ Veterans Legacy Memorial, 'John R Dorsey', <https://www.vlm.cem.va.gov/JOHNRDORSEY/84D34E3> (accessed February 14, 2023).

⁵⁸ Karen Dorsey, Obituary, May 30, 2007.

⁵⁹ My Army Benefits, 'Exceptional Family Member Program', [https://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Exceptional-Family-Member-Program-\(EFMP\)-?serv=122](https://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/Federal-Benefits/Exceptional-Family-Member-Program-(EFMP)-?serv=122) (accessed February 14, 2023).

⁶⁰ Karen Dorsey, Obituary, May 30, 2007.

⁶¹ Veterans Legacy Memorial, 'John R Dorsey', <https://www.vlm.cem.va.gov/JOHNRDORSEY/84D34E3> (accessed February 14, 2023).

management business, and the two enjoyed fifty-seven years of marriage together.⁶² Anthony's family nicknamed him Tony and recalled how he graduated high school and enjoyed bowling, movies, Mexican cuisine, shopping, peanut M&Ms, stand-up comedy, music, working on electronics, watching the Spurs, and socialising with his cousin. Survivors noted that despite his numerous ailments, he never complained and 'loved his life'.⁶³ Barron died 368 days after his mother at the age of fifty-three, and both of their obituaries requested that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to the Association for Retarded Citizens of San Antonio.⁶⁴

Keith Bostow's parents met while studying at International Bible College in San Antonio, welcoming him into the world in 1952. They raised him and his four siblings in the enclave of Castle Hills, which is approximately eleven miles north of downtown, and they attended Revival Temple Church.⁶⁵ When Keith was twelve, his father, a commercial painting contractor, died. After graduating high school, Bostow enlisted into the Army and trained with the branch's special forces unit, the Green Berets, but, during a training exercise, he severely injured his left leg and doctors recommended amputation. Bostow refused, and after several surgeries, he was able to salvage his limb.⁶⁶ In 1978, his older brother died at the age of twenty-eight, and after a few months, Bostow retired from the Army and returned to San Antonio where, a short time later, he suffered a motorcycle accident that required surgeons to amputate his right leg.⁶⁷ Despite his numerous challenges, Bostow found purpose through competition.⁶⁸ For years he participated in the Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, and the San Antonio Parasport Spurs, which competed in the National Wheelchair Basketball Association. The Spurs franchise sponsored the wheelchair team and made continuous community outreach efforts to connect with disabled military

⁶² Jeannette Barron, Obituary, July 9, 2013.

⁶³ Anthony Barron, Obituary, July 12, 2014.

⁶⁴ Anthony Barron, Obituary, July 12, 2014; Jeannette Barron, Obituary, July 9, 2013.

⁶⁵ Florence Bostow, Obituary, May 4, 2014.

⁶⁶ Elaine Ayala, 'Bostow was James Garner's Double in 'Streets of Laredo'', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 27, 2011.

⁶⁷ My Heritage, 'David W. Bostow, 1950-1978', https://www.myheritage.com/research/record-10147-25180380/david-w-bostow-in-billiongraves?tr_id=m_2k7s51p9ev_op4pcfufjl (accessed February 15, 2023).

⁶⁸ Elaine Ayala, 'Bostow was James Garner's Double in 'Streets of Laredo'', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 27, 2011.

veterans like Bostow (Figure 4.5).⁶⁹ The Spurs provided Bostow with the opportunity to compete and represent San Antonio to those beyond its borders, and his story illuminates how the organisation impacted on physically disabled citizens. Bostow won several awards and recognitions as a para-athlete, enjoyed a brief acting career, had a son, and married, before tragedy struck again when his son died in a car accident, and doctors diagnosed Bostow with bladder cancer.⁷⁰ Following his death at fifty-nine, he was interred near his father, brother, and son on the family's plot at a local cemetery, and his mother joined them in 2014.⁷¹

Figure 4.5: Spurs Visit the Wounded Warriors Family Support Centre⁷²



Like Bostow, Benjamin Bailey grew up in the enclave of Castle Hills amongst a family of devout Christians who were members of the Castle Hills First Baptist Church. Bailey's parents raised him and his two sisters, and his father worked as a firefighter for thirty-two years. As an adult, Bailey owned a locksmith business, but due to an undisclosed disability, he was forced to retire. Obituary writers noted he enjoyed drawing, playing the guitar, cooking, and posting on social media. They

⁶⁹ Roy Bragg, 'Spurs-Sponsored Wheelchair Team Rolls On', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 23, 2017; Madalyn Mendoza, 'Spurs Played Wheelchair Basketball, Served Lunch for San Antonio Wounded Warriors', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 29, 2015; RJ Marquez, 'Learning 'Spurs Way': Rookies, Kids Play Wheelchair Hoops at Morgan's Wonderland', *KSAT News*, June 29, 2017, <https://www.ksat.com/sports/2017/06/29/learning-spurs-way-rookies-kids-play-wheelchair-hoops-at-morgans-wonderland/> (accessed February 15, 2023); Lori Newman, 'Spurs Take On Injured Warriors In Wheelchair Basketball at Center for the Intrepid', *Joint Base of San Antonio News*, October 3, 2018, <https://www.jbsa.mil/News/News/Article/1653120/spurs-take-on-injured-warriors-in-wheelchair-basketball-at-center-for-the-intre/> (accessed February 15, 2023).

⁷⁰ Keith Bostow, Obituary, May 26-27, 2011; Keith Bostow Jr., Obituary, November 23, 2003.

⁷¹ Florence Bostow, Obituary, May 4, 2014; Find a Grave, 'Paul Louie Bostow', <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/112603887/paul-louie-bostow> (accessed February 15, 2023).

⁷² Madalyn Mendoza, 'Spurs Played Wheelchair Basketball, Served Lunch for San Antonio Wounded Warriors', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 29, 2015.

mentioned Bailey was a proud National Rifle Association member and a Spurs fan when he died at the age of fifty-five.⁷³ Edward Garcia was also left physically disabled later in life. Born in San Antonio in 1950, he graduated from Edison High School just north of downtown. Garcia enjoyed thirty-six years of marriage and raised four children, working in facility maintenance before his undisclosed physical disability left him unable to continue working in his late thirties. He lived until age fifty-seven and moved to Elmendorf, just southeast of San Antonio's city limits, and commemorators claimed that he was a 'huge fan' of the Spurs.⁷⁴

Dawn Galindo was born on Long Island, NY and lived there with her three sisters and parents until a divorce and job opportunity transplanted the family to south Florida. After graduating high school, Galindo joined the Air Force and served out her four-year commitment in Texas, Mississippi, and California. Following her discharge, she moved to San Antonio, married, and raised two children. After graduating college and working as a registered nurse for over two decades, doctors diagnosed her with a rare disease called neurosarcoidosis, which affects less than one per cent of Americans. Eventually, her condition left her unable to work, and for over a decade, she sought treatments to improve her quality of life. Dawn prided herself on caring for others and for animals, and despite her disability, she volunteered at local hospice facilities and animal shelters. Another prevalent force in her life was her Spurs fandom, which she shared with family and friends. Galindo and her husband purchased Spurs season tickets and witnessed the team win the 2014 NBA championship. Following the game, she and her son drove and honked down San Antonio's commerce street, parading with the tens of thousands of other Spurs fans along their route. Before and after that, the mother and son attended dozens of games together, including the jersey retirement celebrations of Duncan, Ginobili, and Parker. Unfortunately, Galindo died from a rare form of t-cell leukaemia in 2021 at the age of sixty-two, and some of her remains were interred at Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery. Several photographs in her web cemetery revealed a familial bond with the Spurs, and one can be observed below (Figure 4.6).⁷⁵

⁷³ Benjamin Bailey, Obituary, December 22, 2016.

⁷⁴ Edward Garcia, Obituary, February 8, 2008.

⁷⁵ Much of the information provided here was observable in Dawn Galindo's web cemetery, however, some information was not, and was provided by the thesis author given his personal connection to her as her son.

Figure 4.6: The Galindo Family in Spurs Jerseys⁷⁶



The web cemeteries of Higby, Cox, Dorsey, Barron, Bostow, Bailey, Garcia and Galindo revealed how individuals with disabilities developed an affinity for the Spurs and how the organisation interacted with this group of fans. The history of sports fandom amongst those with physical and intellectual disabilities has generated minimal scholarly attention and deserves greater recognition and coverage. The narratives presented here at least partially provide readers of this thesis with a reminder of their existence and an indication of how they interacted with the Spurs community. These eight individuals lived lives full of challenges, and, despite the significant legislation that has been passed during their lifetimes with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, which collectively put in place legal protections for their community, the historical discrimination that members of their community have faced have been described by one historian as the most prevalent and grotesque maker of inequality in American history.⁷⁷ These fans' brief narratives illustrate how family members and community organisations rallied around these individuals to provide them with opportunities to play and participate in the wider Spurs community, both informally and formally.

The various renditions of the Spurs' community outreach non-profit organisation have claimed to provide those with physical and intellectual disabilities the opportunity to participate as athletes and fans over the past three decades. From the Spurs Foundation, to Silver and Black Give Back, to the current Spurs Give

⁷⁶ Dawn Galindo, Web Cemetery, June 20, 2021.

⁷⁷ Douglas Baynton, *Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016): 1-4; Douglas Baynton, 'Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History', in Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky, eds., *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, NY Univ. Press, 2001, 33-57.

organisation, the franchise has touted how they have served this marginalised community with initiatives such as the Spurs Inclusive Sports League, Spurs player visits with Special Olympians, and the Parasports Spurs Wheelchair Basketball team.⁷⁸ It remains unclear how much these franchise initiatives contributed towards earning the support of fans like Cox, Higby, Dorsey, Barron, Bostow, Bailey, Garcia and Galindo, but what was clear from the web cemeteries was the unconditional love and support that these people received from their survivors, who recognised the importance of the Spurs in their lives. Collectively, their web cemeteries revealed familial and multigenerational Spurs fandom, which facilitated bonding; this was most vivid within the narratives of Higby, Cox, Dorsey, and Galindo. In addition, these sources highlight San Antonio's rich military history and the importance of locally operated organisations that sought to improve the lives of disabled citizens, in the context of a national movement in the late twentieth century to produce protective legislation for those with disabilities. Many of these individuals and their families devoted themselves to their respective religion, a historically powerful imagined community and it is likely that their religious convictions dwarfed their commitment to the Spurs, which reinforces the hierarchy of communities that people experience in their lifetime. This was also the case for some older women fans discussed below and highlights how imagined communities and the personal communities of which they are composed can influence people's lives. Importantly, and in line with the previous biographies presented here, these web cemeteries recorded fully complicated human beings, in this case people who were more than just Spurs fans with disabilities.

Older Women

As discussed in previous chapters, women's support of the franchise expanded over time, and they established themselves as critical stakeholders in the organisation's success. Many of these women became Spurs fans late in life when their attachment

⁷⁸ Spurs Give, 'Spurs Sports & Entertainment 2021-22 Impact Report', https://cdn.nba.com/teams/uploads/sites/1610612759/2022/11/2223_SG_ImpactReport_VIEW-1.pdf (accessed February 14, 2023); Roy Bragg, 'Spurs-Sponsored Wheelchair Team Rolls On', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 23, 2017; Madalyn Mendoza, 'Spurs Played Wheelchair Basketball, Served Lunch for San Antonio Wounded Warriors', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 29, 2015; RJ Marquez, 'Learning 'Spurs Way': Rookies, Kids Play Wheelchair Hoops at Morgan's Wonderland', *KSAT News*, June 29, 2017; Lori Newman, 'Spurs Take On Injured Warriors In Wheelchair Basketball at Center for the Intrepid', *Joint Base of San Antonio News*, October 3, 2018, <https://www.jbsa.mil/News/News/Article/1653120/spurs-take-on-injured-warriors-in-wheelchair-basketball-at-center-for-the-intre/> (accessed February 15, 2023).

to the team gave them, at minimum, a perceived sense of belonging with others. Irma Lewis was born in 1934 and later earned degrees from Texas State University and Sam Houston State University. Over the next six decades, she taught and advocated for outdoor education and recreation. In 1974 she moved to the town of Seguin, which sits just east of San Antonio. Lewis not only taught physical education at Seguin High School but founded and coached the girls' basketball, track and field, and cross-country teams. She later served as the school's assistant athletic director, president of the Texas Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance, taught courses at Texas State University and established the Seguin Outdoor Learning Center. This space eventually became a one-hundred-fifteen-acre wilderness site with a pavilion, hiking and biking trails, obstacle courses, and a history and heritage centre.⁷⁹ It was renamed the Irma Lewis Outdoor Learning Center in 2013, following her death.⁸⁰ The Seguin Independent School District adopted a year-round outdoor education course due to her advocacy. Lewis networked with other physical educators throughout the region to reimagine how physical education was taught. Despite all of Lewis' achievements and her transformative role in thousands of students' lives, obituary writers suggested that her most prized accomplishment was establishing the Spurs Sterling Silver Dancers and serving as the group's captain.⁸¹

Lewis held Spurs season tickets for two decades, and after a discussion with the Spurs' Silver Dancers choreographer, Raquel Garcia, Lewis lobbied to create a supporting dance group that featured older women. The Sterling Silver Dancers, captained by Lewis, featured nineteen other women above the age of fifty from Seguin. They performed at a Spurs game for the first time in 2008 and continued to for the next nine years. Lewis appreciated the opportunity to perform on such a stage and called the Spurs' arena 'her favourite place to be'. Despite Lewis' demanding rehearsal schedule, fellow dancers acknowledged her leadership, organisational skills, and enthusiasm but, most of all thanked her for providing them with the opportunity to perform for such large crowds and create new friendships.⁸²

⁷⁹ Marcus Goodyear, 'The Pioneer of Texas Outdoor Education', *San Antonio Express-News*, August 2018.

⁸⁰ Irma Lewis, Obituary, September 16, 2013.

⁸¹ Irma Lewis, Obituary, *The Seguin Gazette*, September 18, 2013; Mary Heidbrink, 'Lewis Made Things Happen', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 19, 2013.

⁸² Ivy Koehler, 'Sterling Silver Dancers', YouTube Video, July 10, 2008, <https://youtu.be/E5XIU8g-7YM>.

Seguin mayor, Betty Matthies, applauded the dance group and suggested it represented the spirit and enthusiasm of their community.⁸³

Guestbook entries throughout Lewis' web cemetery exclaimed, 'Go Spurs Go!' and one suggested that she would be watching and cheering for her favourite team in heaven. While this long-time season ticketholder turned Spurs dancer dedicated much of her time, energy, and income to the organisation, her life was multifaceted, and her personal and professional aspirations inevitably dominated the entries in her web cemetery.⁸⁴ Lewis' guestbook included over eighty contributions from commemorators that included a cast of family, friends, colleagues, former students and even strangers. Numerous entries highlighted Lewis' positive impact on her community and her dedication to education. Tellingly, former students, dating back to 1975, explained how she provided them with meaningful educational experiences. Guestbook contributors often called Lewis the greatest cheerleader, someone who not only cheered for the Spurs, but for so many others.⁸⁵ The legacy Lewis left behind in lessons, spaces, experiences, and friendships, illustrates nicely the complicated and multidimensional nature of fans' lives, how the deceased interacted with several diverse communities, and how a woman can initiate and shape their fanhood.

Helen McLeod was born in 1922 and died the day after Tim Duncan scored a memorable three-pointer against the Phoenix Suns in the Western Conference Semifinals in 2008. The Spurs eventually won that game after double overtime, and McLeod's obituary writers emphasised that she had lived long enough to witness it. They also shared that she had organised and hosted the Spurs Old Ladies Organization, a group that informally brought together older women for game watch parties, but one that had no official connection to the franchise. In her web cemetery guestbook, one friend expressed her condolences to the family, reflected on her time with McLeod, and felt comforted that, given the Spurs' success, her long-time friend would be joining and celebrating with her mother and brother in the afterlife. This was another woman with an interesting and varied life in which she had interacted with several different communities. Before becoming a Spurs fan,

⁸³ Ivy Koehler, 'San Antonio Spurs Sterling Silver Dancers- Blog #2', YouTube Video, October 20, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOswK0PuIrU>.

⁸⁴ Irma Lewis, Obituary, September 16, 2013.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

McLeod had grown up in the small Texas town of Trent, graduated from two regional universities, taught in San Antonio's Northeast Independent School District for thirty-three years, and, following her retirement, she had joined numerous clubs and organisations and travelled to all seven continents and fifty American states.⁸⁶

Originally from Pennsylvania, Janet Reich was born in 1926 and enjoyed cheerleading and various extracurricular clubs and activities in high school. She married a WWII veteran in 1947, and the two remained together until he died in 2003. They owned a grocery store in Pennsylvania which they sold due to a career move to San Antonio in 1965, where Reich attended college and then worked as a nurse for over two decades. Later in life, she enjoyed spending time with her grandchildren and finding jewellery bargains at the local mall. Commemorators recalled that Reich was a 'rabid' Spurs fan and that she and her best friend 'reveled (*sic*) in watching their beloved Spurs destroy other NBA teams'. A family friend commented in Reich's web cemetery guestbook that she would be missed but found comfort in knowing she would be watching over the Spurs and her mother in heaven.⁸⁷

Born in San Antonio in 1924, Aileen Potter attended Catholic school as a child and diligently practiced her faith throughout her life. She married a WWII veteran with whom she raised five children and she became a Spurs fan later in life. Her obituary writers claimed she 'was the Spurs #1 fan' and explained that the Spurs Coyote was one of her last visitors before she died in 2005 at the age of eighty-one. The Coyote's community outreach efforts were discussed in chapter two, and this example illustrates how the mascot became one of the most prominent movers of the Spurs' growing reputation for caring about the community. Potter's survivors posted a photograph of the two together from the hospital (Figure 4.7) in her web cemetery, and her stylist recalled that she and Potter had quickly befriended each other due to their Spurs fandom. During each of her salon visits they discussed games in detail and in Potter's guestbook, her friend signed off with an exclamatory 'go Spurs go!!'.⁸⁸ Potter's obituary writers were not the only ones to claim their loved one was the most ardent Spurs fan. Candelaria Hopper's commemorators did the same,

⁸⁶ Helen McLeod, Obituary, April 20, 2008.

⁸⁷ Janet Reich, Web Cemetery, July 23, 2017.

⁸⁸ Aileen Potter, Web Cemetery, December 27, 2005.

claiming she never missed a game. Hopper was born in Arizona in 1932 but moved to San Antonio, where she raised seven children. After she died in 2017 at the age of eighty-five, friends and family throughout her guestbook supported the observations of obituary writers, claiming that she 'baked the best cakes ever' and would now have Spurs 'season tickets forever' given her new view from above.⁸⁹

Figure 4.7: Potter with the Coyote⁹⁰



The web cemeteries of several Catholic sisters reinforced their connection to the Spurs. Eileen Gurecky was born in 1945 and devoted forty years of her life to ministry, while also earning bachelor's and master's degrees in education. After teaching, she worked as a Catholic school principal for eighteen years and was recognised by the San Antonio Archdiocese in 1996 with the Catholic Educator's Award. A decorated professional and spiritual career also blended with her commitment to her favourite team. Obituary writers noted Gurecky was a 'staunch' Spurs fan, following her death in 2005 at the age of fifty-nine.⁹¹ Other sisters included Maria de la Encarnacion Martinez who was born in Mexico in 1936 and served in the Mercedarian Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for fifty-six years in San Antonio. She died in 2012 at the age of seventy-six. While her attachment to the Spurs clearly did not match her commitment to her religion, the fact that obituary

⁸⁹ Candelaria Hopper, Web Cemetery, August 23, 2017.

⁹⁰ Aileen Potter, Web Cemetery, December 27, 2005.

⁹¹ Eileen Gurecky, Obituary, April 14, 2005.

writers mentioned the team in her epilogue highlighted that this was an identifying feature of her life and reinforces how people interact with and value (to varying degrees) a range of communities.⁹² The same can be said for Sister Ella Heladia Alegria Garcia, who was born in Mexico in 1932 and later joined San Antonio's Society of St. Teresa Academy in 1949, where she worked for the ministry until an illness forced her to retire in 2005. Along with supporting the Spurs, she enjoyed gardening and crocheting; she died in 2013 at the age of eighty-one.⁹³ Like Garcia, Sister Maria de luz Ortega was born in Mexico in 1932 and moved to San Antonio to serve the Society of St. Teresa for over fifty years from 1961 to 2011. While teaching catechism, Ortega earned a bachelor's degree in education, enjoyed arts and crafts and was 'a loyal fan of the Spurs until the end' when she passed at seventy-eight years old.⁹⁴ Born in San Antonio in 1929, Sister Rosalba Garcia travelled the country due to her teaching abilities. Garcia's commemorators noted that she watched the Spurs on television until her illness left her unable to do so. Aged eighty-seven years, Garcia died in 2017.⁹⁵ The web cemeteries of these sisters displayed how Spurs fandom served as but one element in these individuals' lives and contributed to their personal communities, which intersected with the larger imagined community of religion. The sisters' devotion to their faith usurped all other commitments but convent members clearly gravitated towards the Spurs as a collective. As noted in chapter two, this relationship had developed over the years, with Popovich encouraging the start of that bond, and these sources reinforce that connection.⁹⁶

These narratives supported the prosopographical data that illustrated how the Spurs community of fans were sometimes older women. Scholars have contended that such fandom supported the emotional well-being of older adults in times when their personal networks and relationships were dissipating.⁹⁷ While that may be true here, what was more apparent was how survivors had recognised and valued their

⁹² Sr. Maria de la Encarnacion Martinez, Obituary, November 25, 2012.

⁹³ Sr. Ella Heladia Alegria Garcia, Obituary, December 10, 2013.

⁹⁴ Sister Maria de la Luz Ortega, Obituary, February 22, 2011.

⁹⁵ Sr. Rosalba Garcia, Obituary, February 6, 2017.

⁹⁶ Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs Teaming Up To Assist Charity', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 2, 1996; J. Michael Parker, 'Spurs Give An Assist To Faithful Nun', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 18, 1997.

⁹⁷ Yuhei Inoue et al., 'Enhancing Older Adults' Sense of Belonging and Subjective Well-Being Through Sport Game Attendance, Team Identification, and Emotional Support', *Journal of Aging and Health* 32 no. 7-8 (2019): 530-542.

fandom and then used it to narrate the deceased's life story. The fact that these women all supported the Spurs at an older age highlighted that they had pursued other personal and professional priorities during other spans of their lives and that they already had connections to a range of different networks and communities. These web cemeteries also complicate the narrative that suggests intrafamilial team support originates from a father.⁹⁸ Given that all of these women supported the team in late adulthood, their motivations lay elsewhere, and show how women may not be dependent on the influence of a male figure in initiating and shaping their fanhood. More importantly, these older women represented persons often missing from discussions on sports fandom and the evidence demonstrates their existence and how they shaped and used their affinity for a team to bond with others. The historical exclusion faced by females in sports participation and fandom is undeniable. However, the women's movements of the twentieth century and the advertising campaigns that followed, which aimed to recruit female fans, seems here to have signalled a change in the demographics of those who followed American sports with a noticeable growth in female support of the Spurs just prior and after the turn of the new millennium.⁹⁹

Spurs Season Tickets, the Military, and a Personal Network

The military history of San Antonio and the Spurs' attempts to recruit support through marketing that identity, something that has been flagged up in previous chapters, was reinforced through the web cemeteries. These sources shared three commonalities: living in San Antonio, the military, and season tickets. Alice Johnson was born in Pittsburgh, PA, in 1925. She attended university, where she met her husband, had a child, and the couple then moved to Texas following a job opportunity. After their divorce, Alice relocated to San Antonio with her daughter, who then met Dudley Roquemore.¹⁰⁰ Roquemore was born in 1955, and after graduating high school, he enlisted in the Navy and served in the Vietnam War. He

⁹⁸ Robert Krulwich, 'How We Become Sports Fans: The Tyranny of Fathers', October 24, 2011, *National Public Radio*, <https://www.npr.org/sections/krulwich/2011/10/24/141649929/how-we-become-sports-fans-the-tyranny-of-fathers> (accessed June 15, 2022).

⁹⁹ Erin Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 203; Jimmy Sanderson and Kelly Gramlich, 'You Go Girl!': Twitter and Conversations About Sport Culture and Gender', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 33, no. 2 (January 2022): 113, 119-120; Cheryl Cooky and Katelyn Esmonde, 'It's Supposed to be About the Love of the Game, not the Love of Aaron Rodgers' Eyes: Challenging the Exclusions of Women Sports Fans', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 32, no.1 (2015): 23, 40-41.

¹⁰⁰ Alice B. Johnson, Obituary, June 22, 2006.

eventually settled in San Antonio, where he worked as a facilities coordinator and he met and married Johnson's daughter, Lee. The three of them shared an affinity for the Spurs.¹⁰¹ In 2006, obituary writers for Johnson stated she was 'an avid fan of her beloved SPURS' while commemorators for Roquemore detailed his fandom, explaining that he and his wife became proud members of the Baseline Bums in 2007 and maintained their commitment to the group until his death in April of 2014.¹⁰² His obituary also noted he had been 'looking forward to having his wish come true: to see the Spurs win their fifth trophy', although he did not live to see that day, as the Spurs achieved that feat two months later. Commemorators observed that 'he was a selfless gentleman who never raised his voice unless it was at a Spurs game' and jokingly accused the Coyote and Silver Dancers of stealing his patented dance move, one that featured 'Rocky' imitating the playing of a guitar with his leg. Survivors posted in Roquemore's guestbook that, despite his death, they believed he would continue to cheer for the Spurs 'from afar' and that they had had great experiences with him at games.¹⁰³

During the Roquemores' time as Baseline Bums, they befriended Thomas Davis, who was born in Kansas in 1933, served in the Army for over thirty years, and joined the Bums in 2008. Following his military career, Davis moved to San Antonio and worked in finance. Commemorators shared that Davis was 'a proud member' of the Bums until he died in 2011. The first guestbook entry in Davis' web cemetery came from Lee Roquemore, who shared, 'I met Tom when he joined the Baseline Bums and we often worked together at Bums (*sic*) activities. He was a good friend and a hard worker. Rocky and I offer our most heartfelt condolences and we hope our happy memories will ease our sorrow'. Another person explained she befriended Davis in 2001, and 'until the end of (*sic*) 2010-2011 season we shared stories and dinner at every home game. I count it a priveledge (*sic*) and a pleasure to call him my friend. I am sorry for your loss and the loss of a great friend'.¹⁰⁴

Alfred Trafford Jr. was born in 1929 in Long Branch, NJ and after graduating high school, joined the Navy. Trafford served during the Korean War, Vietnam War, and Operation Desert Storm, raised three children, and eventually settled in San Antonio

¹⁰¹ Dudley P. Roquemore, Obituary, May 4-7, 2014.

¹⁰² Alice B. Johnson, Obituary, June 22, 2006; Dudley P. Roquemore, Obituary, May 4-7, 2014.

¹⁰³ Dudley P. Roquemore, Obituary, May 4-7, 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Davis, Web Cemetery, November 13, 2011.

in 1970. After finishing his military career, he worked as a nurse anaesthetist and started following the Spurs. He held season tickets for over twenty years and joined the Baseline Bums. The Spurs recognised him with an exceptional service award a few weeks before his death in January 2010. He was known to friends as 'Big Al'; guestbook entries in Trafford's web cemetery highlighted his commitment to the team and elucidated that being a Spurs fan was one of his most enduring features. Photographs posted publicly by his family supported that notion, given that several presented him connected to something Spurs related, which included apparel, memorabilia, and players (Figure 4.8).¹⁰⁵

Figure 4.8: Alfred Trafford Jr. Web Cemetery Photograph Collage¹⁰⁶



John Campbell Jr. moved to San Antonio from New Jersey in 1949 and lived there until he died in 2015. He served in the Air Force and Navy and worked in the civil service for over thirty years. Campbell volunteered with the Alamo Heights Optimist Club, which aimed to empower children through positive service projects in the community, and the group honoured him with a lifetime achievement award. He enjoyed running, studying history, and supporting the Spurs. Campbell was described as a 'loyal and dedicated Spurs fan...' who 'took pride in the fact that he

¹⁰⁵ Alfred Trafford, Obituary, February 19, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Alfred Trafford, Web Cemetery, February 19, 2010.

and his wife, Emma, were season ticket holders for over 30 years'.¹⁰⁷ Campbell spent his last four years at the Village of the Incarnate Word, an assisted living facility where much of the staff consisted of Catholic sisters, one of whom sent her condolences to Campbell's family through his web cemetery guestbook and exclaimed, 'Spurs games here will never be the same!'.¹⁰⁸

James Cobb Sr. graduated from Brackenridge High School on the city's near southside in 1950 and moved on to complete his degree from Trinity University in 1955. Following that, he joined the Army as a second lieutenant and eventually retired at the rank of lieutenant colonel. As a civilian, he worked in retail and then taught special education. Cobb maintained his support of the Spurs through his season tickets, which he had renewed annually dating back to 1974, and obituary writers claimed that during the late stages of his Parkinson's illness, he continued to watch from a distance 'as if he was still in the arena'. One of Cobb's guestbook contributors fondly recalled how he took her to her first Spurs game when they hosted Michael Jordan and the Bulls. She closed with, 'To this day, that is the best basketball experience I've ever had. Thank you for taking me along Mr. Cobb!'. Although the Spurs were an important part of Cobb's life, his obituary and the entries of loved ones revealed he was a man who valued his Christian faith and youth participation in sports, while also being a gifted storyteller and comedian, highlighting other examples of formal and informal communities to which he belonged.¹⁰⁹

The web cemeteries of Roquemore, Johnson, and Davis record their Spurs fandom and demonstrate how it helped create relationships and aided survivors during bereavement. The living recounted positive experiences they shared with the dead, and their stories often featured the Spurs. More importantly, the connection between Johnson, Roquemore, and Davis revealed a microsocial world or personal community within Spurs fandom, as the team provided them with something to bond over and uncovered how interconnected fans were. It is quite probable that others presented throughout this thesis were also connected in such a way, perhaps even more so. Unfortunately, a shortcoming of these web cemeteries is that they only

¹⁰⁷ John Campbell Jr., Obituary, September 15, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ John Campbell Jr., Web Cemetery, September 15, 2015.

¹⁰⁹ James Cobb, Web Cemetery, July 20, 2011.

provided a brief glimpse into these people's lives and do not always facilitate the discovery of extended personal networks. The web cemeteries of Trafford, Campbell and Cobb clearly exhibited their Spurs fandom, but this was not the only observable phenomenon. They also revealed how death cultivated the creation of stories and how those remembrances aided the bereaved. Although these stories, and the tone in which they were told, exuded nostalgia and melancholia, they collectively maintained a record of the deceased, provided a possible catharsis for survivors, and a means by which a person could avoid a form of oblivion after death.¹¹⁰ These web cemeteries also highlight the deep military connections, a significant overarching theme in this thesis. Clearly, the Spurs and the military played major roles in these people's lives, but their web cemeteries also illustrate how their professional and personal endeavours made them complicated human beings who identified as more than just military veterans and Spurs fans.

Friendship in Spurs Fandom

As the content of this thesis suggests, a person's Spurs fandom often helped develop and enhance relationships, both in terms of chapter one's discussion on identity and community, but also through more concrete communities, as demonstrated by the web cemeteries. Previous explorations of an imagined community, however, have invariably been undertaken in the context of the relationships between fans and the organisation and not strictly amongst supporters, which is why these more personal relationships have been explored in greater detail here. Raul Gutierrez was born in San Antonio in 1945 and worked for the postal service for forty-four years.¹¹¹ He married, raised three children, and he and his wife attended mass at St. Pius X Catholic Church, where both of their wakes were held in 2005 and 2014. Despite earning a modest income, Gutierrez owned Spurs season tickets for over twenty years, and obituary writers urged mourners to wear Spurs attire at his funeral services. His photograph in his web cemetery was accompanied by a basketball scene indicating the joy the sport and his favourite team had provided him. In 1979, the owners of Josephine Street Steaks & Whisky restaurant had begun offering a shuttle service for Spurs games for their patrons,

¹¹⁰ Cecilia Bosticco, 'Narratives and Story Telling In Coping With Grief and Bereavement', *OMEGA-Journal of Death & Dying* 51, no. 1 (2005): 3-7.

¹¹¹ Eva Gutierrez, Obituary, August 2005.

known as the 'Spurs Bus'.¹¹² James Lee operated the bus for twenty seasons and declared that he loved his job because of the 'really close friendships' the old yellow school bus had helped cultivate.¹¹³ In Gutierrez's web cemetery guestbook, four friends sent their condolences and commented that they would miss him on their bus rides to games, while other friends commemorated Gutierrez's character and acknowledged his allegiance to the Spurs.¹¹⁴ One colleague who had worked with Gutierrez at the post office since the 1960s vowed to support the team in light of Gutierrez's absence and hoped they would win another championship.¹¹⁵

Although John Tabak was born in Las Vegas, NV, in 1950, like Gutierrez, he eventually found his way aboard the Spurs Bus. Tabak, a long-time Baseline Bum, died in 2013 and friends commenting in his web cemetery spoke to his Spurs fandom. Of the four entries, three mentioned Tabak's commitment to the team, reminiscing about the Spurs bus rides they shared. Fellow Bum, Patricia Wampler, even urged him to lead a Spurs fan recruitment campaign in heaven.¹¹⁶ Patricia not only mourned the loss of Tabak but also her mother, Virginia, who died three days after Tabak. Virginia Wampler was born in 1921, worked for a school for deaf students and volunteered for several causes and organisations around San Antonio. Despite her deep religious convictions, she accepted and openly loved her lesbian daughter. Over time, the three women, including her daughter's partner, enhanced their bond through their shared love for the Spurs as Baseline Bums. They celebrated Virginia's ninetieth birthday in 2011 at a Spurs game against the Miami Heat, where they presented a 'Beat the Heat. I am 90 today. Go Spurs Go' poster.¹¹⁷ Wampler died two years later at a time when Bum and Spur deaths were increasing as many of those who had been around at the franchise's infancy aged and died. In Wampler's web cemetery, friends and Bums sent their condolences and reminisced about the mother-daughter's unrelenting support of the team and each other.¹¹⁸ The web cemeteries of Gutierrez, Tabak and Wampler highlighted the interconnectedness of individuals within Spurs fandom. Despite coming from

¹¹² '43 years and Still Rammin', Josephine Street Steaks & Whisky', January 29, 2023, <https://www.josephinestreet.com/spurs.php>.

¹¹³ Madalyn Mendoza, 'Josephine Street Marks 43rd Year of Bussing Spurs Fans to Games', *San Antonio Express-News*, August 21, 2022.

¹¹⁴ Raul G. Gutierrez, Web Cemetery, April 2014.

¹¹⁵ Raul G. Gutierrez, Web Cemetery, April 2014.

¹¹⁶ John Tabak, Web Cemetery, August 25, 2013.

¹¹⁷ David Flores, 'Red-Shot Spurs Came to Bury Heat', KENS 5 San Antonio, March 5, 2011.

¹¹⁸ Virginia Wampler, Web Cemetery, August 2013.

various backgrounds, their fandom allowed them to share experiences and develop relationships. The Spurs' arena and supporters' bus provided them with spaces to bond with family and strangers, who subsequently became friends showing how imagined communities can be consolidated through physical means.

Joseph Moran, who died at the age of fifty-nine in 2007, was a 'true Spurs fan' and an outgoing member of the Baseline Bums dating back to 1978. The Bums nicknamed Moran 'Dancin' J.J' as he continuously danced at games. He graduated from a southside high school and worked for twenty-eight years on the supervisory building inspection team for the city. He also served on the San Antonio Folklife Festival steering committee and had deep religious convictions. One friend posted a guestbook entry explaining that their friendship began at work in 1976, after which they bonded through a city bowling league and Baseline Bum membership. Moran's Spurs fandom was certainly an identifying feature of his life, but it was not its entirety and his friendship with this individual, which spanned thirty-one years, was more expansive than just shared fandom. Their relationship was multifaceted involving work and other leisure activities over a long period of time.¹¹⁹ These relationships illustrate fan agency in how they used fandom for their own purposes such as the diversification and deepening of friendships. Several church members elaborated on Moran's commitment to God, character, and humour, while medical professionals and patients connected to him through their experiences in chemotherapy. Moran played many roles, including husband, father, stepfather, inspector, volunteer, grandfather, Spurs fan and Baseline Bum.¹²⁰

Arnulfo Martinez Jr. was born in McAllen, TX, in 1941, and after graduating high school, he moved to San Antonio to attend college. Subsequently, he joined the Army during the Vietnam War. In 1979, Martinez retired from the military, moved to north central San Antonio, married, started a family, and began following the Spurs, signing up for season tickets, which he held for two decades. Martinez later participated in one of the Spurs' charitable events called 'Tux 'N Tennies', which was then operated by the non-profit wing of the organisation called Silver and Black Give Back.¹²¹ The annual event featured silent and live auctions of collectable

¹¹⁹ Joseph Moran, Web Cemetery, September 26, 2007.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Arnulfo Martinez Jr., Web Cemetery, November 2009.

merchandise and travel experiences and benefitted the city's youth through various initiatives.¹²² In Martinez's web cemetery guestbook, multiple Spurs staffers recalled how they befriended Martinez at games and team events. Other family friends promised they would continue supporting the Spurs for Martinez and thanked him for offering game tickets over the years. Martinez's web cemetery also revealed a multigenerational connection to the team. His niece recalled all that she had learned from her uncle and she called him her best friend and 'Spurs game partner' before signing off with a 'Go Spurs Go!'.¹²³

Charles Ebrom was born in San Antonio in 1931 and graduated from Central Catholic High School and St. Mary's University with his bachelor's and law degree. He served in the Army before working as an auditor for a handful of San Antonio law firms and went on to earn an executive position with the Zachary Construction Company. He served on the San Antonio Sports Foundation Board, which promoted community-wide initiatives on sports participation and the city as a desirable destination for amateur and professional sporting events. Ebrom supported the Spurs, and friends posted in his web cemetery that they remembered him for his passion for the team, while a Spurs staffer recalled befriending him and his wife at a game.¹²⁴

After reviewing these web cemeteries, two clear conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, these sources suggest that Spurs fandom was often originated and sustained under the influence of the friendships that people had generated and family connections. While these friendships did not entirely revolve around their shared affinity for the Spurs, they certainly played a role. Secondly, given the extensive networks of relationships that these people shared with others, they lived their lives as fully complicated human beings who experienced and valued many different things. These webs of relationships give a different perspective on some of the existing commentary as to what constitutes imagined fandom communities in sport, given that the friendships developed amongst fans go beyond the sports arena to act as authentic elements of a larger community. The fact that fellow fans operated as

¹²² Alex Navarro, 'Spurs Nonprofit Hosts Annual Tux 'n Tennes Fundraiser Thursday Night', KSAT 12, January 8, 2015, <https://www.ksat.com/news/2015/01/09/spurs-nonprofit-hosts-annual-tux-n-tennes-fundraiser-thursday-night/> (accessed January 26, 2023).

¹²³ Arnulfo Martinez Jr., Web Cemetery, November 2009.

¹²⁴ Charles Ebrom, Web Cemetery, May 30-31, 2017.

more than just a transient force in each other's lives and supported friends and their families during bereavement exhibited a substantial degree of independent fan agency, in that these Spurs supporters cultivated a fandom that suited their own purposes. Regardless of whether a shared passion for the team came before or after the establishment of these relationships, the Spurs assisted their aims to find belonging with others.

Organisational Perspectives of Spurs Fandom

This section elaborates on the team's organisational perspectives discussed in chapter two and contrasts the history from the bottom-up approach discussed above to a top-down analysis using perspectives from mostly 'extraordinary' people within the organisation. After meeting in a Corpus Christi community college registration line in 1947, Charline and Billy Joe 'Red' McCombs were married in 1950, and, following Red's successful business ventures, they subsequently became two of the wealthiest people in Texas.¹²⁵ As explained in chapter two, McCombs went on to facilitate the creation of the Spurs franchise and always said that his overall aim was to raise awareness of San Antonio on the national stage. After years of work ensuring the Spurs' survival, in 1999, the organization honoured the McCombs couple at a game where they received honorary championship rings (Figure 4.9). Along with the couple's franchise ownership, their foundation contributed over \$135 million to the University of Texas at Austin, Southwestern University, MD Anderson's Cancer Research Centers, the Empire and Majestic theatres of San Antonio, and several other regional organisations.¹²⁶ Generally, their philanthropy in the San Antonio area focused on their interests in education, sports, and the performing arts.

Following Charline's death at the age of ninety-one in 2019, many San Antonians, including Mayor Nirenberg and the Spurs' Popovich, commemorated her as someone who had created opportunities for those less fortunate than herself while some former players observed that she had been something of a mother figure for them early in their careers.¹²⁷ A former Spurs staffer who worked at the HemisFair Arena concessions commented in her web cemetery that despite her lofty status,

¹²⁵ Charline McCombs, Obituary, December 14-15, 2019.

¹²⁶ Carmina Danini, "Red' McCombs, San Antonio Business and Spurs Icon, Dies at 95", *San Antonio Express-News*, February 20, 2023.

¹²⁷ Madalyn Mendoza, 'We Adored Her': San Antonio Eulogizes Charline McCombs', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 13, 2019.

she conversed with and supported him when he had struggled through difficult times. Although he did not provide any specifics, she had apparently positively impacted on his life.¹²⁸ In April of 2022, the organisation honoured McCombs and his family at centre court, and a video tribute featured former and current Spurs executives, players, owners, and coaches. In the tribute, Gervin pointedly stated the extent of the former owner's impact on the team and city with 'No Red, no San Antonio Spurs'.¹²⁹ Following his death at the age of ninety-five in 2023, a journalist claimed he was the most impactful San Antonian of the twentieth century, while players and coaches expressed how he had influenced their lives and transformed the franchise and city.¹³⁰ Obituary writers emphasised McCombs' admiration for San Antonio and how, through his business and philanthropic efforts, he had contributed significantly towards creating a civic identity. Commemorators remarked that, 'the city of San Antonio eventually latched on to the Spurs and the common identity it offered...the team truly does belong to the people of San Antonio'. Others posted in his web cemetery guestbook thanking him for founding the team and supporting the franchise over several decades.¹³¹

Figure 4.9: McCombs Couple Honoured at Centre Court¹³²



The Pitluk family worked closely with McCombs during the early years of the Spurs to market the franchise and their web cemeteries praise their connections to the

¹²⁸ Charline McCombs, Web Cemetery, December 14-15, 2019.

¹²⁹ San Antonio Spurs, 'San Antonio Spurs Honors Red McCombs and his Family for their Indelible Impact on the Organization', April 9, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajWlv9T0y6k>.

¹³⁰ Tom Orsborn, 'Spurs Recall 'Larger Than Life' Red McCombs' Impact On Franchise, *San Antonio Express-News*, February 20, 2023.

¹³¹ B.J. 'Red' McCombs, Web Cemetery, February 18, 2023.

¹³² Red McCombs, 'San Antonio Goes Major League- It Started with the Alamodome', *San Antonio Report*, May 14, 2023.

team as well. Jack Jr. and Louis Pitluk were raised in San Antonio, where their father established the Pitluk Advertising Agency, which they later renamed, The Pitluk Group. Jack Jr. and Louis attended the prestigious ivy league Wharton business school of the University of Pennsylvania before Jack Jr., served in the Army during WWII, and Louis served during the Korean War. Following their military commitments, they joined the family business, which became a leading advertising agency in San Antonio throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and earned national recognition. The brothers also participated in various civic and professional organisations, including the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo, the American Red Cross and the Boys and Girls Club, although, according to their obituaries, some of their most valued work was with the Spurs.¹³³ Jack Jr. informed Angelo Drossos that the Spurs were for sale in 1973, and the brothers became two of the franchise's original shareholders.¹³⁴ As noted in chapter two, Jack Jr. helped name the team at the franchise's inception and approved the creation of the Coyote after meeting with Tim Derk, while a friend of Louis later stated in his web cemetery that the only thing he loved more than his agency was the Spurs.¹³⁵ The Spurs engaged the Pitlucks to design the team's first logo, which artist and Pitluk employee Finis Collins sketched, and the Pitluk Group served as the Spurs' primary advertising consultant for thirteen years, helping to establish the franchise in the local consciousness.¹³⁶ The web cemeteries of these two brothers highlighted their familial connections to the organisation and provided a perspective from within the franchise. As original shareholders and long-time partners with the Spurs, both men and their families were embedded within the organisation's history, and that was reflected in their epilogues of life, with Louis' commemorators declaring, 'His most cherished memories were his partnership in the group that brought the Spurs to San Antonio'.¹³⁷

¹³³ Jack N. Pitluk Jr., Obituary April 2002; Louis Pitluk, Obituary, January 2016.

¹³⁴ Angelo Drossos, Obituary, January 11, 1997, *San Antonio Express-News*, 1A.

¹³⁵ Tom Orsborn, 'Coyote' Likes to Get Fans Involved: Spurs Mascot Has Been Delighting Audiences at Arena Since 1982', February 9, 1992, *San Antonio Express-News*; Louis Pitluk, Obituary, January 2016.

¹³⁶ R.J. Marquez, 'Meet the Local Artist Credited With Creating and Designing the Original San Antonio Spurs Logo', KSAT 12 News, August 11, 2022, <https://www.ksat.com/news/local/2022/08/11/meet-the-local-artist-credited-with-creating-and-designing-the-original-san-antonio-spurs-logo/> (accessed January 4, 2024); Jerry McCarthy, 'The San Antonio Spurs: It's a Whole New Ball Game', *San Antonio Magazine*, September 1986, 42.

¹³⁷ Louis Pitluk, Obituary, January 2016.

The web cemetery of another organisational insider, Bob Coleman, revealed similar sentiments. Born in Oklahoma in 1931, Coleman moved to Texas after serving in the Navy and attending the University of Oklahoma. He worked in Houston for some time, where he met and married his wife, Ann. The couple then moved to San Antonio, and both of their web cemeteries confirmed that the two enjoyed the city and valued the work they did within the community, especially around amateur sports. Bob's philanthropy and his involvement in the San Antonio sports community eventually earned him a spot at the negotiating table across from McCombs in 1993 after he established and represented a conglomerate of individuals and corporations who purchased the Spurs for \$75 million.¹³⁸ As explained in chapter two, he then served as the franchise's president for a year and a half before resigning. Ann and Bob's obituaries highlighted their fandom with Bob's suggesting that he fought off a long illness to witness the Spurs win their fifth championship and Ann's noting that she travelled with the team during the 'glory days' of the Robinson era.¹³⁹ A friend of Bob sent their condolences and mentioned how he 'loved San Antonio and his Spurs', an allegiance to the Spurs, and to sports generally, that did not go unrecognised, and the San Antonio Sports Hall of Fame inducted him into the organisation's first class in 1995.¹⁴⁰

While the McCombs', Pitluks', and Colemans' web cemeteries provided a glimpse into the organisation from the top-down, the web cemetery of Spurs supporter and staffer Socorro Acuna revealed one from the bottom-up. Acuna was a civil service employee and retired after a thirty-year career. Thereafter, she worked part-time for the Spurs as an usher for seventeen years. The organisation honoured her with an outstanding service award (Figure 4.10), and the Aguilera family fondly recalled seeing her at games when they commented in her web cemetery,

To the Family of Mrs. Acuna: My family met your Mom when we would go to the Spurs games at the Alamodome. Your Mom/Grandmother

¹³⁸ 'Spurs Owner Sells Club for \$75 Million', *Dallas Morning News*, February 20, 1993; Tom Orsborn, 'Spurs Sale Won't Bring Any Changes This Season', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 20, 1993; Bill Lumpkin, 'Spurs' New Man In Charge', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 20, 1993; Glenn Rogers and Jerry Briggs, 'Local Leaders Praise Purchase of Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 20, 1993.

¹³⁹ Margaret Ann Coleman, Obituary, March 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Bob Coleman, Obituary, July 2014; 'San Antonio Sports Hall of Fame Tribute', San Antonio Sports Hall of Fame, January 30, 2023, <https://www.sanantonioporsports.org/halloffame/current.html> (accessed January 4, 2024).

ushered in our section. We would always see her and she would always greet us with a smile. There were times that our kids would go to the games instead of us and she would always make sure that they were okay, without letting them know she was looking out for them. We were always comforted knowing that when the kids went to the game they were in good hands. Our sincere condolences on your loss. Your Mom/Grandmother was a wonderful person.¹⁴¹

Figure 4.10: Socorro Acuna Honoured at Centre Court¹⁴²



The web cemeteries of the McCombses, Pitluks and Colemans revealed how the powerful individuals who worked within the organisation still seem to have regarded themselves as supporters and, as significant contributors to the franchise's success, their legacy is an important feature of the Spurs' history. Despite their affluence and their completely different lifestyle from that of the lower-income supporters, they shared the experience of investing in the team emotionally to the point that their allegiance to the Spurs mandated inclusion in their commemorations. Their collective desire to keep the Spurs in San Antonio seemingly challenges the conclusion of some scholars who have suggested that trust, obligation, and a sense

¹⁴¹ Socorro Acuna, Web Cemetery, April 17, 2011.

¹⁴² Ibid.

of community between cities and their sports teams are illusory.¹⁴³ Interestingly, despite their unpopularity at times with supporters across the region, there was little or no vitriolic comment within their web cemeteries. This may have been because the funeral home had monitored and screened comments, but it was just as likely a product of supporters understanding that the space was an inappropriate platform to raise their discontent. Acuna's web cemetery and lived experience contrasted with those of former franchise executives, given her modest economic means and organisational position, but obituary writers valued her work with the franchise and shared it proudly. Acuna's web cemetery also uncovered friendships directly resulting from her work for the organisation. Taken together all these people contributed to the franchise, forming a slightly different constituency of Spurs fandom, one that supported the team through their labour as well as through their emotional commitment.

The Value and Purpose of Web Cemeteries

This chapter displayed how Spurs fandom was at least partially generated and sustained over time beyond marketing tactics. It uncovered how untimely deaths provoked survivors to express themselves more deeply and passionately, illustrated how disabled and older persons were not defined by their conditions and led fulfilling lives, elucidated fan perspectives from inside and outside of the Spurs organisation, and the influence of the military and religion around the city. Web cemeteries revealed the various connections fans had to other imagined and personal communities and allowed for a discussion of the interconnected and competing nature of communities. For example, very few fans apparently had any allegiance to the imagined community of political party, which was rarely mentioned, and clearly valued the Spurs more. Conversely, many fans expressed a commitment to their religion and nation, the two imagined communities that were fundamental to Anderson's historical research. While fans probably valued their religion and country more than the Spurs, the fact that their web cemeteries included references to the team reinforces that their imagined community of sports fandom was almost as important to the deceased and to their survivors' memories of them. After their death, their fandom became evident through stories shared by survivors, which contributed to the generation and sustainment of Spurs fandom; as shown through

¹⁴³ Wilcox, *Sporting Dystopias*, 8-11; Alan Ingham and Mary McDonald, 'Sport and Communities/Communitas', in *Sporting Dystopias*, 24, 27, 28.

the web cemeteries where survivors pledged to support the team to honour the deceased. Until now, very few historians have utilised death as a lens to understand how sporting communities develop and endure beyond marketing, and this chapter makes a significant contribution in this regard. Through highlighting how death cultivates the creation of stories which help build community we see how Spurs fandom originated and endured.

This chapter also points to the value of web cemeteries and how they can be useful historical sources. Unlike the quantitative prosopographical analysis, they can reveal fully complicated persons, how people cope with death, and the role that sports fandom can play in that process. More broadly, they allow for a deeper investigation into the experiences of ordinary people. Given that storytelling is an essential component to community building, these sources complicated some notions of an imagined fandom community in sport through the many nuances they recorded related to fan agency.¹⁴⁴ Building on the work of scholars in various fields and the previous chapter which researched the larger imagined community, this chapter's forensic examination of web cemeteries uncovered some of the numerous authentic personal communities of fans that comprised the larger imagined community that some previous research did not.¹⁴⁵ This showcases how these people's fandom transcended mere economic exchange, as they used it to nurture and strengthen relationships with loved ones. So, it seems, while all relationships between a locality and a sports franchise are temporal and conditional, they can, at least for a time, help provide a medium for people to build and strengthen relationships.

Altogether, this chapter helped achieve several thesis objectives including conceptualising and examining team-fan identity formation, Spurs fandom at the microsocial level, and supporters' complicated humanity. This chapter's qualitative bottom-up approach complemented chapters two and three's quantitative and top-down methodologies and it accomplished a primary objective of the thesis, which

¹⁴⁴ Pamela Roberts, 'The Living and the Dead: Community in the Virtual Cemetery', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (2004): 57; Brian de Vries and Judy Rutherford, 'Memorializing Loved Ones on the World Wide Web', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (2004): 23-24; John Foot, 'How Italian Football Creates Italians: The 1982 World Cup, the 'Pertini Myth' and Italian National Identity', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33, no. 3 (2016): 341-358.

¹⁴⁵ Nathan Kalman-Lamb, 'Imagined Communities of Fandom: Sport, Spectatorship, Meaning and Alienation in Late Capitalism', *Sport in Society* 10-12 (2020): 922-936; Nathan Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2018).

was to use intimate sources to humanise supporters and complicate understandings of them in the historiography. The author openly acknowledges the limited and hagiographic nature of web cemeteries, which is why the following chapter combines these sources with a more traditional historical analysis of archives and presents a case study on half a century of the Baseline Bums supporters' group.

Chapter 5- The Extremes of Spurs Fandom: Fifty Years of the Baseline Bums

In 1973, Spurs executive John Begzos and staffers Larry Braun and David Doyle searched for ways to generate support for the ABA's newest franchise. Due to the project's frailty, they sought to create an official supporters' group, and they recruited enthusiastic supporters of the San Antonio Missions minor league baseball team. Part of the initiative was to publish an advertisement in the local newspapers calling for 'only loud beer drinkers'.¹ Collectively, the recruiters, and those recruited, created the Baseline Bums.² Although some scholars have theorised that sports fandom operates as an obscene and dehumanizing fetish, driven by the sports industry's obsession with capital, fandom subcultures have cultivated meaningful experiences and relationships, the things that make us human, and the Bums refashioned their fandom, using it to create and enhance relationships over the last half-century.³ While their mission and demographics have evolved, the Baseline Bums have always valued the team and the other members of their group. There is an existing historiography covering the agency of supporters' groups such as Boston's Royal Rooters and Cleveland's Dawg Pound, but only one historian to date has addressed this collective, and then only briefly, even though the Bums provide an excellent vehicle for understanding the extremes of fandom communities.⁴ This chapter elaborates on the prosopography and collective biographies from previous chapters and introduces an individual biography along with a historical narrative using archives and web cemeteries centring on this elemental community in Spurs fandom.

¹ Pat Putnam, 'Cagey Loan to San Antone', *Sports Illustrated*, February 10, 1975.

² Parts of this appeared in, David Galindo, 'From Clamorous to Charitable: An Abbreviated History of the Baseline Bums', *Playing Pasts Magazine*, February 22, 2021.

³ Nathan Kalman-Lamb, 'Imagined Communities of Fandom: Sport, Spectatorship, Meaning and Alienation in Late Capitalism', *Sport in Society* 10–12 (2020): 922-936; Nathan Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2018).

⁴ K. Aiken, Richard Campbell, and Eric Koch, 'Exploring the Relationship Between Team (as Brand) Personality and Geographic Personality: Linking Consumer Perceptions of Sports Teams and Cities', *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* 15.1 (2013): 2–14; Marci D. Cottingham, 'Interaction Ritual Theory and Sports Fans: Emotion, Symbols, and Solidarity', *Sociology of Sport* 29 (2012): 168–85; Allen Guttmann, *Sports Spectators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Janet Lever, *Soccer Madness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Markus Gerke, 'Supporters, not Consumers': Grassroots Supporters' Culture and Sports Entertainment in the US', *Sport in Society* 21.6 (2017): 932–45; Erin Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Peter Nash, *Boston's Royal Rooters* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005); Andrew Linden, 'Blue-Collar Identity and the 'Culture of Losing': Cleveland and the 'Save Our Browns' Campaign', *Journal of Sport History* 42.3 (2015): 340–60; Frank Andre Guridy, *The Sports Revolution: How Texas Changed the Culture of American Athletics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 259-301.

Figure 5.1: The Baseline Bums Cheer in HemisFair Arena⁵



(Left to Right: Leon Gibson, Ronnie Jackson, Mike Gonzales, and Nina Johnson)

The Bums' Infancy (1973-1976)

In 1975 the Baseline Bums made one of their first appearances in the national media due to an altercation with Denver Nuggets head coach Larry Brown, who had commented a few days before playing the Spurs that, 'The only good thing about San Antonio is the guacamole salad'.⁶ His comment offended some fans, and when he emerged from the visitor's tunnel, the Baseline Bums, seated directly above it in section 20 (Figure 5.2), hurled avocados and guacamole at him, a response that indicated how supporters felt about their team and their city.⁷ When someone demeans a people, their home, and whom they support, those belittled are likely to lash out, a struggle for relevance and respect that was not unique to the Spurs and Bums. It was also true for the ABA, as the NBA establishment disparaged the new league's legitimacy in an era full of countercultural rebellion.⁸ One historian argued that the Spurs played a significant part in revolutionising American athletics in the wake of other social movements, such as the black freedom struggle and the American Indian, women's, and gay liberation movements, because the Spurs helped to establish basketball's relevance to the Texas region and Mexican

⁵ J.M. Scott, 'Ultimate Spurs Fan Club Baseline Bums, Through the Years', My SA of the Express-News, January 22, 2015.

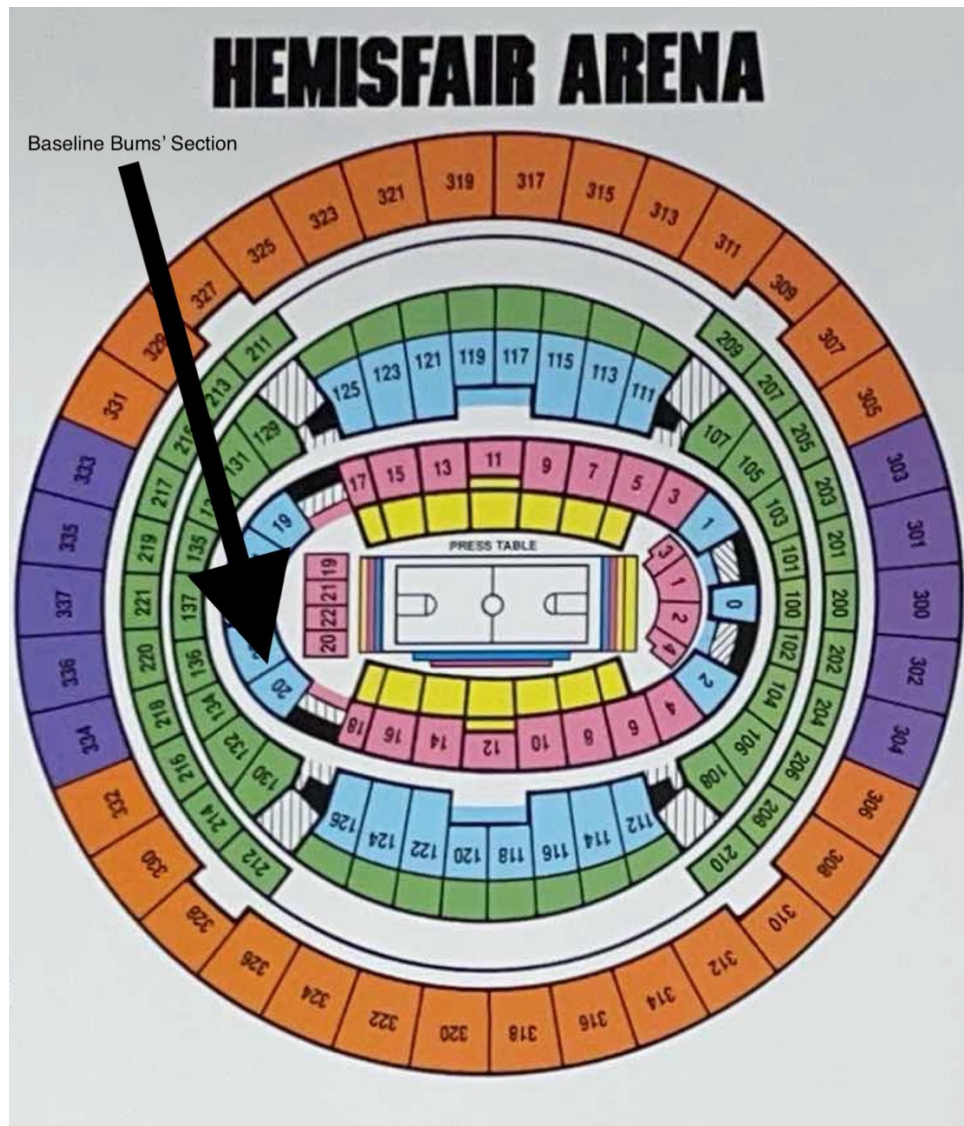
⁶ Terry Pluto, *Loose Balls: The Short, Wild Life of the American Basketball Association as Told by the Players, Coaches, and Movers and Shakers Who Made It Happen* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 305-306.

⁷ Chris Sheridan, 'Brown Got Bums' Rap in 1970s', *The Spokesman-Review*, June 15, 2005.

⁸ *Long Shots: The Life and Times of the American Basketball Association*, directed by Ross Greenburg, screenplay by Steven Stern, Home Box Office, 1997.

Americans.⁹

Figure 5.2 HemisFair Arena Seating Chart with Bums' Section



For one long-time Spurs opponent, Ron Boone, 'The Baseline Bums gave everybody the business' and 'were the best fans for the Spurs and the worst fans for an opponent. I think everyone in the league had a lot of respect for those guys, remembered those guys. Those were awesome fans. Probably at that time you couldn't find better fans in the league'.¹⁰ Swen Nater, a Spur from 1973-75, recalled how supportive the Bums were and how he had a section of fans who called

⁹ Frank Andre Gurdy, *The Sports Revolution: How Texas Changed the Culture of American Athletics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 259-301.

¹⁰ 'HemisFair Arena was Where Spurs First Scored with S.A. Fans', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 7, 2018, accessed June 15, 2020; Quoted in Tom James, 'Ron Boone is Talkin' with TJ', *San Antonio Spurs*, last modified November 6, 2011, accessed November 11, 2020, <https://www.nba.com/spurs/ron-boone-talkin-tj>.

themselves 'Nater's Raiders'.¹¹ Former Spur Mark Olberding explained that 'The fans were fantastic, always behind us. It was great to see the Baseline Bums get on the players, coaches, and officials. They could be intimidating. Some nights they would come into the locker room. I don't think they'd let them do that anymore'.¹² Other former Spurs John Lucas, Gene Banks, and Mychal Thompson agreed with Banks elaborating that,

'HemisFair was unbelievable. There is no other arena in basketball that could compare. And the fans were a factor with the Baseline Bums. The locker rooms were right underneath the fans so as the game got going, you could hear the intensity, so it made you want to play' and that HemisFair 'was one of the most unbelievable places to play. The energy of the fans was amazing. The Baseline Bums were like my family. No matter how down you were, they'd pick you up. They'd have dinners for the players and I'd go to their homes. I enjoyed it'.¹³

Together, the Spurs and Bums challenged ABA opponents and changed how some outsiders understood San Antonio. Bum antics showcased the autonomy that fans commanded during the franchise's infancy and the organisation's complicity in allowing such behaviour can be interpreted in many ways. For one, staffers personally recruited these fans to cause a fuss and hoped that their boisterous passion would cultivate meaning and attract local and outside attention; it appears it did. Another possibility was that the Bums became power brokers and challenged the organisation's control over fan behaviour because of the franchise's fragility and economic uncertainty. Without the Bums, their avid support, and their ability to make local, regional, and national headlines, the Spurs as a sustainable entity was far from certain, and this could explain why the organisation often condoned their behaviour. Some might argue that the team's lack of fan control was simply a

¹¹ Reinis Lacis, 'Sven Nater', The Handle Podcast, February 6, 2016, <https://lamarmatic.com/2016/02/07/the-handle-podcast-sven-nater-070216/> accessed April 21, 2023.

¹² John Whisler, 'Mark Olberding; Where are They Now?', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 20, 2016.

¹³ ; John Whisler, 'NBA Finals Cavaliers at Warriors, Game 1', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 30, 2018; Jabari Young, 'Spurs Off-Topic Conversation: John Lucas', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 27, 2017.

product of the unorganised ABA, but Bum's antics also invaded the hegemonic NBA for several years.¹⁴

George Valle

Despite external criticisms, the ABA acquired and cultivated some of basketball's greatest talents, such as Erving and Gervin, who competed in the 1976 ABA Semifinals. During the series, a sportswriter noted that the Bums screamed at the top of their lungs, danced around their seats, waved the Texas flag, and spilled beer over everyone in their vicinity. Dubbed 'The Psycho Series' and 'internecine warfare', this contest showcased an iconic duel between two all-stars, high-flying offences, player fistfights, and dramatic finishes in the ABA's last season.¹⁵ The *New York Times* stated that the noise Spurs fans produced was 'ear-piercing' and identified the Bums as a 'rabid group' while Spurs forward Larry Kennon observed, 'They're the greatest fans in the world... Tonight we had 10,000 and it sounded like 25,000'.¹⁶ A melee ensued between opposing players in game four that lasted several minutes, with the *San Antonio Express-News* and the *New York Times* subsequently dubbing it the 'Easter Day Massacre' and 'Basketbrawl'.¹⁷ ABA commissioner Dave DeBusschere fined several players and publicly condemned their conduct as demeaning to both the game and the league.¹⁸

During the brawl, one Bum, George Valle, descended from the Bums' section to get into the action. Once he was close to the floor, Valle hurled his beer at New York 'enforcer' Rich Jones, who chased him up the arena steps. Ironically, just twenty months prior, Jones and his family were quoted as saying they had finally found a home in San Antonio and that the friendliness of people in the city was unlike anywhere else that they had lived, but after the Spurs traded him to the Nets, that changed.¹⁹ Spurs fans who previously applauded Jones for his aggressive physical play now vilified his physicality. After throwing his beer, the over three-hundred-

¹⁴ Parts of this appeared in, David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993', *Journal of Sport History* 49, no 1. 2022): 37-52.

¹⁵ Curry Kirkpatrick, '...And a Psycho Series in the ABA', *Sports Illustrated*, April 26, 1976.

¹⁶ Quoted in Paul Montgomery, 'Spurs Beat Nets, 111-103, for 2-1 Lead: Spurs Defeat Nets, 111-103, and Take 2-1 Lead in Playoffs', *New York Times*, April 15, 1976.

¹⁷ Paul Montgomery, 'Nets Beat Spurs, Tie Series', *New York Times*, April 19, 1976; Tom Orsborn, 'HemisFair Arena Memories' *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 2017; Tom Orsborn, 'Winners in Defeat', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 26, 2001.

¹⁸ "A.B.A. Levies Basketbrawl," *New York Times*, April 22, 1976.

¹⁹ Ray Evans, 'This Spur Calls SA "Home"', *San Antonio Magazine*, August 1974, 38.

pound Valle scrambled to safety, and his fellow Bums called him a 'hero'. Another fan later suggested that 'Big George's Miracle Run' helped the Spurs win game six a few days later when continued threats from Spurs supporters forced Nets coach Kevin Loughery to leave Jones, a starter, at a nearby San Antonio hotel.²⁰ Eventually, the game, series, and league ended, but Valle and the Bums remained.

Figure 5.3: Valle in HemisFair Arena²¹



Valle maintained his Bum membership for three decades and, in the 1980s, became president of the supporters' group. Spurs fans often recognised him as 'Big George', who waved the Texas flag in the Bums' section and worked with The Sound of the Spurs to torment opponents. Those who covered the team's early NBA years contended that San Antonians produced the noisiest arena in the league. Collectively, the fans, discount beer nights, Valle and The Sound of the Spurs, and the team's exciting play in the 'bandbox' of HemisFair generated what no other arena could match in terms of decibel output.²² The *Washington Post* agreed: 'For pure spirit, noise, and at times, rowdiness, no NBA crowd equals the ones here'.²³ Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Valle and Sturchio, the leader of the Sound of the Spurs band, determined which songs to play, which changed according to game context (Figure 5.3).²⁴

²⁰ WilldBill2u to Spurs Talk web forum, 'RIP 'Big George' Valle- Baseline Bum and Human Being of the Highest Order', October 1, 2015, accessed June 15, 2020, <https://www.spurstalk.com/forums/showthread.php?t=252866&page=2>; Sam Smith, 'Nets, Spurs to Revive Old ABA Rivalry', *Chicago Tribune*, June 1, 2003.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Tom Orsborn, 'HemisFair Arena Memories' *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 2017.

²³ Paul Attner, 'Crowd Becomes 6th Man at HemisFair', *Washington Post*, April 18, 1978.

²⁴ Tom Orsborn, 'HemisFair Arena Memories' *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 2017.

Valle and The Sound of the Spurs complicated the jobs of opposing players and referees inside the arena, although it was an altercation outside of it in January of 1980 that became one of the most nationally covered incidents in Bums' history. In this case, Valle's friend and fellow Bum, Johnny Merla, accused Boston Celtic Larry Bird of assault and filed an \$825,000 lawsuit against him.²⁵ Valle recalled that he and Merla got into a shouting match with Bird and his teammate Dave Cowens, who called Valle a 'fat hog' while Merla exclaimed Cowens was a 'choker'. After an exchange of spit, Bird struck Merla over the head with his duffel bag. Eventually, Bird's legal team won the case, arguing he acted in self-defence, and Valle later jokingly admitted that his friend had simply attempted to make some money with the lawsuit.²⁶ Insensible and sometimes egocentric, the Bums and their antics fell short of hooliganism—given the absence of socially organised premeditated competitive violence—but they also illustrated how the group maintained a degree of autonomy from the franchise, despite often reflecting negatively upon it in this period.²⁷

The press continuously revisited the Bums' 'golden age' of Valle detailing the inimitable atmosphere it provided. Specifically, former Spurs executive Wayne Witt explained that the organisation deliberately paired groups like the Bums and The Sound of the Spurs, 'We wanted that identity. That was all part of the aura, of opponents saying, "Oh, geez, we got to go to San Antonio and play in that place, where all they do is play that loud Mexican music"'. Opponents remembered the atmosphere, while locals missed it.²⁸ Similar to the numerous myths, memories, and traditions that permeate Texas history, anecdotes such as this created a sense of nostalgia for those who experienced the events first-hand and evoked imaginings in those who did not. Over three decades, Valle hosted many outside functions that fans, players, and staffers attended, and the press featured Valle and sought his input on the team.²⁹

²⁵ 'Jury says Celtics' Bird Acted in Self-Defense,' *San Antonio Express-News*, September 18, 1981.

²⁶ Tom Orsborn, 'HemisFair Arena Memories' *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 2017

²⁷ Ramòn Spaij, 'Football Hooliganism as Transnational Phenomenon: Past and Present Analysis: A Critique- More Specificity and Less Generality', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24, no. 4 (2007): 412.

²⁸ Tom Orsborn, 'Arena Memories; HemisFair Site is Where Spurs First Scored with S.A. Fans', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 6, 2013.

²⁹ WilldBill2u to Spurs Talk web forum, "RIP 'Big George' Valle- Baseline Bum and Human Being of the Highest Order," October 1, 2015, accessed June 15, 2020, <https://www.spurstalk.com/forums/showthread.php?t=252866&page=2>; Sam Smith, 'Nets, Spurs to Revive Old ABA Rivalry', *Chicago Tribune*, June 1, 2003.

George Valle was born to Juan Antonio Valle and Dominga Ortiz in Devine, TX, which had a population of approximately 1,700 in 1951. Juan Antonio was a man of mestizo descent who served in WWII and then married Dominga. Together, they raised George and his three siblings until the pair separated. George attended St. Joseph's Catholic School and Devine High School where he participated in several extracurricular activities. He was the boys' basketball, baseball, and football manager, the track team trainer, a Future Farmers of America and Greenhand agricultural organisation member, and a yearbook editor. Valle's interests in sports, agriculture and mechanics continued into adulthood. After graduating in 1969, he worked his way up to manager at an auto parts store in Devine and he enjoyed a life of modest means. Altogether, Valle's story represented the classic early blue-collar-Latino Spurs fan.³⁰ One columnist described Valle as 'a great wall of a man with a gold scorpion hanging from a heavy chain around his neck'. She identified Valle and the Bums as loyal 'blue-collar' supporters from a 'blue-collar city' and accurately noted that they received discount tickets in exchange for 'a little volunteer work' for the franchise which became a requirement in the 1990s.³¹

As Valle's stature grew both in terms of his physical size and franchise influence, he convinced the organisation to provide him with a chair on the arena's aisle steps in the Bums' section, given that he could no longer fit into a seat.³² In the twenty years from 1973 to 1993 that the Spurs called HemisFair home, the Bums, with Valle as a focal point, agitated and harassed opponents. Gervin acknowledged that his team's high-powered offence, along with the arena's confined space, made for an atmosphere that opponents loathed and that they were envious of the Bums' support and wished they had a 'Big George' of their own.³³ Gervin and Valle remained friends for decades, and Valle jokingly shared in a 2003 interview that he had Gervin's cell number and pestered him for autographs for friends on occasion.³⁴

³⁰ Devine High School, *Corral* (Devine, TX 1968), 34, 42, 56-57; Devine High School, *Corral* (Devine, TX: 1969), 34-35; George Valle, Web Cemetery, September 26, 2015.

³¹ Katy Muldoon, 'Spurs Fans Pump Up the Volume', *The Oregonian*, May 30, 1999.

³² San Antonio Spurs, 'HemisFair Arena- The Ring of the Rowel', March 23, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7MSv6vKh2U&t=702s>.

³³ David King, 'San Antonio Still in Debt to the ABA', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 2, 1996; Lorne Chan, 'Big George' Was Baseline Bums Ringleader and Friend to Spurs', San Antonio Spurs, last modified September 30, 2015, <https://www.nba.com/spurs/big-george-was-baseline-bums-ringleader-and-friend-spurs>.

³⁴ Mark Heisler, 'Big-Hair Days', *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2003.

Their friendship highlighted the difference between professional sports of the 1970s, when ticket prices started as low as one dollar and fan-player fraternisation was commonplace, to today's hyper-commodified and impersonal realities.³⁵ Gervin made the All-Star game in all nine of his NBA seasons with the Spurs, and Valle often attended the showcase. Observers recalled that when Valle was not with Gervin, he was socialising with the officials that he often berated during games.³⁶ After twelve seasons together, Gervin called Valle the evening he learned his trade to Chicago was completed in 1985 and said, 'Big George, don't you forget that San Antonio will always be your team. It will always be mine'.³⁷ Devine locals recalled how Valle brought Spurs players and staffers to their town and remembered seeing the two Georges golfing and dove hunting together. They also recalled the basketball game fundraisers Valle organised, which featured the Bums and Devine High School faculty against the Spurs.³⁸ After Gervin retired, sportswriters inducted him into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, and the Spurs invited Valle to attend the ceremony.³⁹ Prior to the induction, the city celebrated Gervin and scheduled 'George Gervin Day' in May of 1996. Valle requested that all Bums meet at the Cadillac Bar just south of downtown for a luncheon, and following that, they would join Gervin and organisational and civic officials at city hall and then participate in the river parade, a presentation at the Arneson River Theatre, and a rally at HemisFair Park.⁴⁰ The *Express-News* provided readers with Valle's phone number if they required further information.⁴¹ Bum vice-president Cathy Snyder celebrated at the day's events and claimed that Gervin was 'the San Antonio Spurs'

³⁵ Sean Dinces, 'The Attrition of the Common Fan', *Social Science History* 40, no. 2 (2016): 339-365; Sean Dinces, *Bulls Markets: Chicago's Basketball Business and the New Inequality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Nathan Kalman-Lamb, 'Imagined Communities of Fandom: Sport, Spectatorship, Meaning and Alienation in Late Capitalism', *Sport in Society* 10-12 (2020): 922-936; Nathan Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2018).

³⁶ Lewis Stroud, Phone interview to David Galindo, May 5, 2023.

³⁷ Johnny Ludden, 'Followers' Memories of Iceman Remain Warm Ones', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 7, 1996.

³⁸ Lewis Stroud, Phone interview to David Galindo, May 5, 2023; Mark Heisler, 'Big-Hair Days', *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2003.

³⁹ Johnny Ludden, 'Followers' Memories of Iceman Remain Warm Ones', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 7, 1996.

⁴⁰ Johnny Ludden, 'Iceman Not Likely to Melt During Day in Sun', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 19, 1996; Johnny Ludden, 'Followers' Memories of Iceman Remain Warm Ones', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 7, 1996.

⁴¹ Kevin O'Keeffe, 'ABA Phenom Hawkins to Present Gervin at Hall', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 24, 1996.

and simply 'the greatest'.⁴² Prior to the celebrations. Gervin recalled the 'incredible' support that the Bums had provided during the team's infancy,

I came here from Virginia, where the support had been honorable, but it was nothing like it was in San Antonio. These people were really behind the Spurs. Nobody in the league liked to come here to play. We were blessed to play in the Arena because of its closeness. The fans being so close made it more exciting. Our fans were like a sixth man on the floor, with guys like Big George (Valle) and the Baseline Bums. People were scared to come in here and play us during the ABA days. If Big George and the Baseline Bums didn't get 'em, we'd run 'em to death on the floor. I've never seen anything like it.⁴³

The two George's relationship developed over the decades Gervin spent in San Antonio as a player, coach and retiree, and some of Valle's fondest memories featured Gervin.⁴⁴ The pair's influence on one another is a good example of how professional sports can bring together people who would otherwise have no reason to engage.⁴⁵ The two George's relationship reinforces the notion that supporters and players mutually benefit from a team's presence in lasting ways, speaks to the influence fans once had over the franchise, and how influential characters like Valle contributed to the establishment of the Spurs community.⁴⁶

After missing only four home games in twenty-nine years, Valle discontinued his Bum membership following the team's move to the SBC Center, due to exorbitant costs and the franchise's refusal to accommodate his personal requirements as they had in HemisFair and Alamodome (his special seat). It appeared, like Gervin eighteen years earlier, Valle was now expendable. The franchise's actions disillusioned Valle, and he explained in 2010, '...it's a long story...but I don't watch the Spurs anymore. Not against them just don't watch them. Have only been to 1

⁴² Cary Clack, 'Iceman Cometh for Honors on River', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 24, 1996.

⁴³ David King, 'San Antonio Still in Debt to the ABA', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 2, 1996.

⁴⁴ Jerry Briggs, 'The Place to Be', *San Antonio Express-News*, August 26, 2007.

⁴⁵ Gill, 'Communicating Organizational History', 151.

⁴⁶ David Swindell and Mark Rosentraub, 'Who Benefits from the Presence of Professional Sports Teams? The Implications for Public Funding of Stadiums and Arenas', *Public Administration Review* 58, no. 1 (1998): 11.

game in last 7 years. They don't want or need me there anymore'.⁴⁷ During the Spurs' 2012 playoff run, Valle again shared his alienation, saying, 'Well I did want them to win but didn't really care. After being a die hard (*sic*) fan for 30 years and then when the organisation dumps on you like they did to me you just don't care anymore'.⁴⁸ However, Valle's disenchantment with the franchise did not end his relationships with former players and while his friends expressed their dismay at how the organisation had treated him, he found solace in how former Spurs players like Gervin appreciated and remained in contact with him over the years.⁴⁹ A Denver reporter noted how Valle was integral to the Bums during their early years and how he had befriended players like Karl, Gervin, Dietrick, and former coach Doug Moe, many of whom had made San Antonio their permanent home.⁵⁰ In a 2007 interview, Valle recalled mingling with players after games saying, 'That's one my fondest memories. Ice (Gervin), Louie Dampier, Coby (Dietrick). We knew all the players'.⁵¹ He also said that the Brown-guacamole debacle was an 'urban legend' and that he and other Bums pressed harder on great players like Julius Erving because referees often sided with them. Despite the rough treatment Erving received from Valle and the Bums, he understood that the success of the modern Spurs team came from the contributions of those in the franchise's past in that 'all the groundwork was laid before that (1999 championship), with the former owners, the players, the fans, the Baseline Bums. They were the foundation. The Spurs have roots. It's not like this happened overnight'.⁵² The 'wild' and turbulent times experienced during the Spurs' early years were progressively replaced as the franchise became the 'NBA gold standard for polish and professionalism' by the 2000s.⁵³ Valle's departure represented the latest evolution of the Bums, and his alienation crystallised issues related to stadium gentrification.

⁴⁷ George Valle, 'George's Post', Facebook, November 11, 2010, <https://www.facebook.com/george.valle>.

⁴⁸ George Valle, 'George's Post', Facebook, June 6, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/george.valle>.

⁴⁹ Victor Cervantes, Phone interview to David Galindo, May 11, 2023; Mark Lessing, Phone interview to David Galindo, May 8, 2023.

⁵⁰ Mike Monroe, 'Moe's Home-Court Advantage', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 26, 2005.

⁵¹ Jerry Briggs, 'The Place to Be', *San Antonio Express-News*, August 26, 2007.

⁵² Jerry Briggs, 'The Place to Be', *San Antonio Express-News*, August 26, 2007.

⁵³ Adam Thompson, 'Karl Gained Substance from San Antonio Days', *The Denver Post*, April 26, 2005.

In September 2015, Valle died at sixty-four and was commemorated as being ‘a ringleader of the Baseline Bums and one of the most visible Spurs fans of all-time’.⁵⁴ Gervin commented on Valle’s passing, ‘Big George was the man. He was the Bums, and they were our sixth man on the court. They sat above the visitor’s locker room and brought so much havoc at HemisFair, and we really felt he was part of the organization’. He believed that Valle always motivated the players and that ‘He was the epitome of a fan. Visiting teams hated to see him. He had an impact on them. He was the best, man. He loved those Spurs’. Spurs executive Joe Clark commemorated Valle as ‘a loyal and dedicated supporter. He really embodied the passion of the Baseline Bums, and that passion is still there today, thanks to the group he helped create’. Bum Cathy Snyder summed up the sentiments of fellow Bums, recollecting that during parties, Valle smoked ‘the best damn brisket you’ve ever had’, elaborating, ‘If you were his friend, there was nothing he wouldn’t do for you... He was known as this larger than life fan who waved the Texas flag. Away from the arena, his personality was just as big’.⁵⁵ Former Spurs executive Bob Bass explained that the franchise ‘really needed him in those early years. He was a good guy to have around. He never tried to tell you how to coach or substitute or call timeouts. He just drove in to every game from Devine and hollered and cheered for the Spurs whether they won or lost’.⁵⁶ His cyber obituary modestly noted his commitment to the team, but numerous entries from his friends in his guestbook elaborated on what Valle meant to them and the supporters’ group. A fellow Bum shared,

I remember great years with the Bums - 15 in all. Those years included many get togethers featuring Bums, players, and George's unbeatable BBQ. My mouth waters at the thought. BBQ wasn't his only talent though. He was committed to the Spurs and I think he only missed one or two games over the years we were there... You always could count on the big guy for help when it was needed. I don't know how he managed to keep a smile on his face considering the many issues he

⁵⁴ “‘Big George’ was Baseline Bums Ringleader and Friend to Spurs’, September 30, 2015, <http://global.nba.com/news/big-george-was-baseline-bums-ringleader-and-friend-to-spurs/> (accessed July 22, 2020).

⁵⁵ “‘Big George’ was Baseline Bums Ringleader and Friend to Spurs’, San Antonio Spurs, September 30, 2015, <https://www.nba.com/spurs/big-george-was-baseline-bums-ringleader-and-friend-spurs> accessed April 21, 2023.

⁵⁶ Tom Orsborn, ‘George Valle 1950-2015; “Big George” was Top Bum’, *San Antonio Express-News*, October 1, 2015.

dealt with as Bums President. He's a good guy that you loved to be around.

Another friend stated,

RIP GEORGE! Always had a kind word & a good story for me when I would see him at his work place. A great friend, the number one Spurs Fan & King of the Baseline Bums. He was a special man and will be missed by many. Gilbert: Leigh Ann & I were so saddened to learn of your brother's passing. We send our most heart felt (*sic*) condolences.

The Mejia family commented,

GOD BLESS BIG GEORGE! Our deepest condolences to George's familia (*Spanish word for family*). My heart is sad on losing such a great guy who treated the Mejia family well when we arrived in Devine. I will never forget our breakfast club and all the trips to Spurs games meeting fun folks in the Baseline Bums section. Yes we will miss George but he (*sic*) now in better hands.

Long-time friends and fellow Bums Robert and Adela Munoz also shared their thoughts,

Our most sincere condolences to the Valle Family. George was a great guy and a most dedicated Spurs Baseline Bum. We sat with him through every single game on the very top row of the Baseline Bum Section in the '70 s. We were the rowdiest crowd ever, along with my brother Dancing Harry Ernest Munoz, he has since passed away a year ago this past June. Today's (*sic*) Baseline Bums don't compare to us when it comes to making noise for the Spurs. We enjoyed many a beer with George at the Lone Star Pavilion (*sic*) before and after each game. Believe me George will be greatly missed. He is resting with our Lord now. Blessings to all the Valle Family.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ George Valle, Obituary, September 2015.

Ernest Munoz had died a year before Valle and his web cemetery displayed how deep his affection for the Spurs went, as well as extended familial connections to the team. Born in Laredo in 1942, Munoz moved to San Antonio, joined the Baseline Bums and became their 'Dancing Harry', representing the team's unofficial mascot, or 'rowdiest' fan.⁵⁸ Subsequently, Munoz's nephew, Tommy, carried on the family tradition, serving as the next generation 'die-hard' Spurs fan.⁵⁹ The Munoz's familial commitment to the Spurs highlights that sports fandom is concerned not only with the spectacle but with family history, individual identities, and personal moments of meaning. Tommy worked for the Spurs media services team and enjoyed a seventeen-year career with the organisation in many roles.⁶⁰ He died in 2016 at thirty-three and was remembered by survivors as a Spurs fan and a considerable influence on the local comedy scene.⁶¹ Valle and Munoz developed a forty-year friendship and influenced family members to support the team, a shared commitment that facilitated bonding and contributed to the creation and sustaining of a fan community that went beyond the stadium.

The *Express-News*, Spurs, and NBA wrote articles and issued press releases about Valle after his passing—within those, fans, players, staffers, and journalists shared what he had meant to the franchise over the previous four decades. Despite Valle's disillusionment with the organisation, his Spurs fandom was an undeniable feature of his life, and his niece purchased a commemorative brick for him that was placed outside the Alamodome in the San Antonio Sports Hall of Fame Plaza- a location that honours the historical contributions of important local sports figures (Figure 5.4).⁶²

⁵⁸ Ernest Munoz Jr., Obituary, June 2014.

⁵⁹ George Valle, Web Cemetery, September 2015; Hector Saldaña, 'For Comic, Game No Time for Laughs', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 17, 2013.

⁶⁰ Hector Saldaña, 'For Comic, Game No Time for Laughs', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 16, 2013.

⁶¹ Hector Saldaña, 'Tommy Munoz, 33, was Among "Core Guys" of S.A. Comedy Scene', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 14, 2016; Gilbert 'Tommy' Munoz, Obituary, April 11, 2016.

⁶² Gilbert Valle, Facebook post, April 11, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1325098610840446&set=a.1324263800923927>.

Figure 5.4: George Valle Commemorative Brick⁶³



Valle's individual biography showcases the changing nature of Spurs fandom provided his long-time commitment and importance to the Bums and franchise. He represented who the Bums and many Spurs fans originally were, Mexican American working-class San Antonio Area residents who were not necessarily obsessed with the game of basketball but were general sports enthusiasts who took pride in how the team represented the place they called home. As many scholars have shown, over the past few decades professional sports have been hyper-commodified leading to ticket inflation, stadium gentrification and fan disillusionment and disengagement, which Valle's story underscores.⁶⁴ Despite the franchise's and NBA's growing corporatisation which alienated Valle and others, he valued the opportunities being a Spurs fan afforded him, especially the befriending of staffers, players, coaches, Bums, and other fans who he remained in contact with even after he left the supporters' group. Historians have long used individual biographies to represent the attitudes, values, motivations, and changes and continuities in respective eras, and Valle's life elaborates on this work.⁶⁵ Altogether, Valle's story provides a biographical microhistory that is representative of the broader trends

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Richard Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs: A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football', *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 26, no. 1 (February 2002): 25-46; Sean Dinces, 'The Attrition of the Common Fan', *Social Science History* 40, no. 2 (2016): 339-365; Sean Dinces, *Bulls Markets: Chicago's Basketball Business and the New Inequality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

⁶⁵ Allida M. Black, *Casting Her Own Shadow: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Shaping of Postwar Liberalism* (Columbia University Press, 1997); John Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2008); Samantha-Jayne Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sport History Research: Biography, Collective Biography, and Prosopography', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1855-1882.

present in twentieth and twenty-first century sporting fandoms, including how relationships between fans and franchises are established and sustained over time and how they inevitably end.

The Bums' NBA Reign in HemisFair Arena (1976-1993)

After the NBA absorbed the Spurs in 1976, interest in the team and Bums grew, and fans began applying to and competing to join the supporters' group. The original bureaucratic structure of the Bums was unclear, but in the 1970s and early 1980s, before Valle's ascendance, Richard Elizondo and Rudy Hettler served as president and vice-president.⁶⁶ Over time, as the franchise changed the group's operating structure and membership requirements, other officials, such as the secretary, director of volunteer activities, treasurer, and section leaders, were added. In the more fluid organisation of the early 1980s, Valle explained that to be a Bum, group members had to be loud and attend at least 80 per cent of the team's home games.⁶⁷ *Sports Illustrated* commented in 1982 that, 'There are several qualifications for membership in the Bums, one of which is the ability to drink for at least an hour and still be able to cheer unbelievable obscenities from a semiupright [*sic*] position'.⁶⁸ Described as a 'temperate' Bum, Ronnie Jackson explained he only drank about twelve or fifteen beers a game.⁶⁹ In a television segment narrated by Pat O'Brien for CBS, Leon Gibson noted that the Bums were the 'official cheerleading squad' of the Spurs and a group that opponents feared to which Valle agreed, declaring 'That's a fact Jack!'. O'Brien described the Bums as loud, entertaining, 'far from ordinary', and 'rowdy' and they maintained that reputation over decades.⁷⁰ Original and long-time Spurs public address announcer Pat Tallman said that often 'those people don't stop throwing up until about one o'clock in the afternoon' following game nights.⁷¹ Although excessive alcohol intake appeared to be a prerequisite for Bum membership, Valle did not overindulge due to concerns over his health, however, that did not stop him from providing beer and cigars to Bums, players and

⁶⁶ Terry Frei, 'Spurs' Baseline Bums Just 120 Pro Basketball Fans Having Fun', *Denver Post*, April 28, 1985.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Bruce Newman, 'Best Team You've Never Seen: The Eyes of San Antonio May Be Upon the High-Ridin' Spurs, but Few Others' Are', *Sports Illustrated*, March 8, 1982.

⁶⁹ Dan Balz, 'Bums' Rush to the Aid of their Spurs: The Bums Fan the Fires in San Antonio', *Washington Post*, May 13, 1983.

⁷⁰ 'CBS Segment on The Baseline Bums (1983 Playoffs)', video, YouTube, narrated by Pat O'Brien, 1983, accessed June 15, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBIt90YneOU>.

⁷¹ Bruce Newman, 'Best Team You've Never Seen: The Eyes of San Antonio May Be Upon the High-Ridin' Spurs, but Few Others' Are', *Sports Illustrated*, March 8, 1982.

fans before and after games.⁷² During the 1978 season, the *Washington Post* explained that the Bums' romance with their team was ubiquitous, that membership into the group was exclusive, there was a waiting list to join, active members subjected applicants to an elaborative interview process, and attendance was taken at every home game; failure to appear meant the prospect of being jettisoned.⁷³

After a few years in the NBA, the 'notorious' band of 120 Bums had gained a national reputation as 'loud, doggedly persistent and at times utterly tasteless', and sportswriters voted them as the country's 'most ill-mannered basketball fans'.⁷⁴ In one example, the Bums screamed at Bill Walton of the Portland Trailblazers and accused him of being a communist, given his outspoken criticisms of the U.S. and capitalism during the heightened tensions of the Cold War in the late 1970s.⁷⁵ Although San Antonio only possessed one major sports franchise, the Bums' contributions landed Spurs supporters in the top five of a poll conducted by North American sportswriters as some of the 'worst behaved' and 'most unruly' fans across all sports.⁷⁶ The American basketball scene noticed their heavy drinking and various antics, such as hanging effigies of opposing coaches, dressing up as pregnant nuns, and even staging marriages. Ernest Munoz married his wife at centre court during halftime of a game 'sporting a velvet tux, shades, and a fedora' and the Lone Star Pavilion, the usual rendezvous point before and after games, provided the space for the couple's wedding reception.⁷⁷ Bums and other fans could often be seen drinking inexpensive beers there as early as three hours before tipoff. For Munoz and his wife, their matrimonial union started on the Spurs' home court and influenced a tradition of fandom for subsequent generations. Moments of meaning and ritual that transpired before and after the buzzer sounded have been

⁷² Victor Cervantes, Phone interview to David Galindo, May 11, 2023; Mark Lessing, Phone interview to David Galindo, May 8, 2023.

⁷³ Paul Attner, 'Crowd Becomes 6th Man at HemisFair', *Washington Post*, April 18, 1978.

⁷⁴ Terry Frei, 'Spurs' Baseline Bums Just 120 Pro Basketball Fans Having Fun', *Denver Post*, April 28, 1985.

⁷⁵ David King, 'BillWalton.com a Letdown', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 1, 2000.

⁷⁶ 'New York May be Fun City to Some, but...', *Boston Globe*, December 26, 1980.

⁷⁷ Ernest Muñoz, Obituary, June 26, 2014; Bruce Newman, 'Best Team You've Never Seen: The Eyes of San Antonio May Be Upon the High-Ridin' Spurs, but Few Others' Are', *Sports Illustrated*, March 8, 1982; Tom Orsborn, 'HemisFair Arena Memories', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 2017.

found in various sporting contexts and illustrate how influential sporting sites and fandom can be.⁷⁸

Even after the Bird debacle of 1980, the Bums' 'tasteless' behaviour continued well into the 1980s. In the spring of 1982, the group stuck white tape across their noses and placed black makeup under their eyes, mocking Phoenix Sun Alvan Adams, who accused Gervin of deliberately breaking his nose.⁷⁹ In November of 1982, Leon Gibson attempted to aggravate Quintin Dailey of the Chicago Bulls by dressing up as a female nurse. He had a fellow Bum chase and 'assault' 'her' in the stands and on the court only days after Dailey pleaded guilty to assaulting a female nursing student.⁸⁰ In January of 1983, the Bums waved melted records at Kareem Abdul-Jabbar after his multimillion-dollar Bel-Air mansion burned and destroyed much of his extensive vinyl jazz collection.⁸¹ Jabbar commented on the incident a few years later: 'It wasn't funny then and it isn't funny now... It was tasteless'.⁸² The Bums' antics and passion, as well as their team's play, represented San Antonio to some of those beyond its city limits in both positive and negative ways, as a place previously deemed unworthy of national attention received more publicity from regional and national news outlets.⁸³ Los Angeles Lakers coach Pat Riley contended that HemisFair was the most challenging place to play and recalled that the Bums repeatedly hurled beers at him and his team. When questioned about this, Valle remarked that the yellow liquid Bums threw was of a different variety, as it would be uncustomary for a Spurs fan to waste their beer.⁸⁴ In the 1983 Western Conference Finals, a sportswriter compared the 'glamor and glitter' of Los Angeles to the strange setting of San Antonio, where the Bums wore pyjamas and hurled shaving cream pies. The *Daily News of Los Angeles* identified the Bums as a 'radical

⁷⁸ Cottingham, 'Interaction Ritual Theory', 179; Adam Winkel, 'National Dissonance: The Copa Del Rey Soccer Final as a Site of Political Performance', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 1-2 (2020): 135.

⁷⁹ Bruce Newman, 'Best Team You've Never Seen: The Eyes of San Antonio May Be Upon the High-Ridin' Spurs, but Few Others' Are', *Sports Illustrated*, March 8, 1982.

⁸⁰ Angelo Cataldi, 'Celt Crowd Makes it Easier for Dailey, For One Night', *Providence Journal*, December 23, 1982; Terry Frei, 'Spurs' Baseline Bums Just 120 Pro Basketball Fans Having Fun', *Denver Post*, April 28, 1985; Mark Heisler, 'Big-Hair Days', *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2003.

⁸¹ Mark Barabak, 'Los Angeles Lakers Center Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's Bel-Air Mansion was...', *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1983.

⁸² Mitch Chortkoff, 'Pat Riley Questions Officials', *Daily Breeze*, April 22, 1986.

⁸³ Douglas Hochstetler, 'America Needs Farmers': Communal Identity, the University of Iowa Football Team and the Farm Crisis of the 1980s', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 27:8 (2010): 1362; Tom Orsborn, 'A Trip Down Spurs Memory Lane with Red McCombs', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 25, 2016.

⁸⁴ Mitch Lawrence, 'Spurs of the Moment San Antonio's New Stars Celebrate Wacky History', *New York Daily News*, June 13, 1999.

splinter group...more spirited than most' while *Texas Monthly Magazine* observed that 'In sports-starved San Antonio only one show is bigger than the Spurs—their fans' and noted that the Bums' attire included gorilla costumes, Mouseketeer uniforms, and other outfits that appeared to be something out of 'the Rocky Horror Picture Show'.⁸⁵ For over a decade, press coverage of the Bums helped to create the impression of a 'basketball-mad city' and the fan group became 'an institution almost as important' as the Spurs themselves.⁸⁶

Original Spur, George Karl, who was at the centre of the 1976 'Basketbrawl', fondly remembered mingling with the Bums as a player. When he returned to San Antonio in 1986 as the coach of the Golden State Warriors, he lamented that his former team was in disarray, but looked forward to fraternising with the Bums after the game.⁸⁷ Bums, such as Marilyn Durbin, the group's secretary, were often interviewed by the press to provide their take on Spurs happenings, serving as a type of team representative and critic.⁸⁸ When the franchise was struggling to remain competitive in the late 1980s, a Dallas-based newspaper asked, 'Will somebody please wake up the Baseline Bums and tell them the Spurs need their help?'⁸⁹ Bum Leon Gibson got the message and, shortly after that, presented Michael Jordan of the Chicago Bulls with a cow tongue on account of him often playing with his own tongue sticking out. Spurs general manager Bob Bass openly disapproved, but Gibson only received a public scolding as punishment, which paled in comparison to the actions of some European football clubs and franchises of the NFL who banned fans from their stadiums for provocative behaviour, although these generally resulted from physical or verbal assaults.⁹⁰ Gibson's cow tongue for Jordan appeared to be one of the last outlandish stories the Bums generated, as their autonomy gradually dissipated in the 1990s. The Spurs were now a stable organisation, and with a new arena forthcoming, it increased ticket prices and added luxury box suites, further distancing fans like the Bums from the court. Additionally, as part of his ambition to

⁸⁵ Dan Balz, 'Bums' Rush to the Aid of their Spurs: The Bums Fan the Fires in San Antonio', *Washington Post*, May 13, 1983; Peter Applebome, 'Basket Case: Roundball and Mass Hysteria- No Place but San Antonio', *Texas Monthly Magazine*, December 1982, 124.

⁸⁶ Dan Balz, 'Bums' Rush to the Aid of their Spurs: The Bums Fan the Fires in San Antonio', *Washington Post*, May 13, 1983.

⁸⁷ Bill Sullivan, 'Fans Ignore Spurs of the Moment', *San Jose Mercury News*, December 13, 1986.

⁸⁸ 'Pistons Cranks by Lakers 111-86', *The Wichita Eagle*, June 15, 1988, 1C.

⁸⁹ 'Texas Teams Not Likely to Play for an NBA Title', *The Dallas Morning News*, April 7, 1988.

⁹⁰ Mark Heisler, 'Big-Hair Days', *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2003; 'Germans Blamed for New Soccer Riot- Mayhem in the Streets of Dusseldorf', *The Times*, June 16, 1988; 'Carson Trying to Keep the Brown Afloat- The NFL', *Daily News of Los Angeles*, October 2, 1990.

rebrand the NBA as a professionalised global enterprise, NBA commissioner David Stern pushed an agenda of conformity for both athletes and fans that resulted in stricter and more regularly enforced codes of conduct inspired by a history of player and fan misconduct that had sometimes resulted in violence.⁹¹ These league and organisational decisions relegated the Bums and other rambunctious supporters to the shadows, greatly diminishing the influence they once wielded and contributed to the changing behaviours of fans inside the arena. These changing sensibilities and expectations changed not only fan behaviour, but perceptions of the Spurs fan community, as long-time supporters and journalists expressed wistful affection for a time since past.⁹²

A transformative moment in Spurs history followed the loss to the Phoenix Suns in game six of the 1993 Western Conference semi-finals. That defeat closed the chapter on the season and on HemisFair. At the game's conclusion, one supporter recalled 'raising hell' there, while others reminisced over 'Dancing Harry' (Munoz) gyrating under the spotlight and 'Big George' (Valle) waving his Texas flag. Those who experienced HemisFair Arena shared fond memories of the venue and contributed to preserving its history.⁹³ Although many complained about the venue's obstructed views and lack of modern amenities, the stadium had provided a more inclusive fan experience than its successors. After the Spurs left, the inequity and exploitative nature of professional sport that numerous scholars have observed in other sporting contexts became more apparent.⁹⁴ Life after HemisFair, a stadium with individual seats and no luxury suites, exposed the growing commodification of

⁹¹ Sean Gregory, 'How David Stern Rescued the NBA and Turned Basketball Into a Global Force', *TIME*, January 2, 2020, <https://time.com/5757570/david-sterm-rescued-nba/> (accessed January 7, 2024).

⁹² Michael Wilson, 'Why So Stern?: The Growing Power of the NBA Commissioner', *DePaul Journal of Sports Law & Contemporary Problems* 7, no. 1 (2010): 45-62; Tim Layden, 'Beer-Sports Kinship Hampers Crowd Control', *Seattle Times*, March 5, 1989; Eric Sondheimer, 'Fans Have Reasons for Concern', *Daily News of Los Angeles*, June 7, 1992, S1; Roddy Stinson, 'I Apologize for Missing Final Assault on Arena', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 20, 1994, 3A; Tom Orsborn, 'HemisFair Arena Memories' *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 2017.

⁹³ Archives, '300; S.A. Tricentennial; Sports; Arena Helped Spurs Score with Fans; Wild West Atmosphere was Feared by Opponents', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 8, 2018; Jerry Briggs, 'Phoenix Slams Door on Arena Era Memories Flow Freely After Spurs' Last Game Before Move to Dome', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 21, 1993.

⁹⁴ Sean Dinces, 'The Attrition of the Common Fan', *Social Science History* 40, no. 2 (2016): 339-365; Sean Dinces, *Bulls Markets: Chicago's Basketball Business and the New Inequality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Nathan Kalman-Lamb, 'Imagined Communities of Fandom: Sport, Spectatorship, Meaning and Alienation in Late Capitalism', *Sport in Society* 10-12 (2020): 922-936; Nathan Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2018).

the game that accelerated following the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and the increase in the basketball fanbase generated by the American 'Dream Team', featuring Spur David Robinson and other stars such as Earvin 'Magic' Johnson, Larry Bird, and Michael Jordan, which transformed the NBA into an international spectacle. It established its players as significant cultural icons and influencers and, almost immediately, the Spurs hit long-time fans with the new Alamodome reality, as some ticket prices were increased by seventy per cent.⁹⁵ Valle's season tickets skyrocketed to \$2,500 a season, a significant hike from the initial rate of a dollar per game, and franchise officials decided to place the Bums' new section much further away from the court.⁹⁶ These reactions reinforce the findings of other historical research on stadium loss and gentrification, which has homogenised crowds and evoked in some fans a sense of bereavement and nostalgia.⁹⁷ Valle explained that the Bums' autonomy in HemisFair allowed them to agitate opponents, influence the outcome of games, and fraternise with the Spurs and their opponents, but with each change of venue, that influence and those relationships dissipated. As a creation of the Spurs franchise, the Bums could have been controlled or disbanded at any time by the team's executives, but it seems that this was a gradual process that accompanied each change of venue.⁹⁸

The Bums Fade in the Alamodome (1993-2002)

Although the Alamodome allowed for the admission of thousands of more fans, the poor sightlines, increased distance of most spectators from the court, the vast empty spaces in the half of the facility that was unoccupied during games (split in two by a large blue curtain) and the high ceiling that sat hundreds of feet above supporters provided a less-than-ideal setting for basketball games. During the 1993-94 season, which was the first in the Alamodome, national reporters noticed that the Bums' influence on games had waned and that fans in Detroit and Chicago had usurped

⁹⁵ Tim Griffin, 'Tickets Pro Basketball Courtside Spurs' Fans Will pay More in Dome', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 27, 1993.

⁹⁶ Carter, 'Friendly Rivalry- Houston, San Antonio'; Mark Heisler, 'Big-Hair Days', *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2003.

⁹⁷ Benjamin Lisle, *Modern Coliseum: Stadiums and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2017), 265

⁹⁸ Mark Heisler, 'Big-Hair Days', *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2003; "Get Rowdy with the Baseline Bums," AARP, last modified October 18, 2016, <https://local.aarp.org/news/get-rowdy-with-the-baseline-bums-tx-2017-10-12.html> (accessed April 30, 2021); Melissa Rohlin, 'Baseline Bums Leave Taunting Ways a Spurs Games in Past', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 26, 2016; Parts of this appeared in, David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993', *Journal of Sport History* 49, no 1. (2022): 37-52; George Valle, Web Cemetery, September 2015.

them as the most disorderly in the league. The Pistons' and Bulls' recent success had motivated their fans to care more about these teams, which had resulted in increased abuse against rival players and officials during games. While the Bums' passion may not have dissipated following their move to the Alamodome, Spurs executives had placed the Bums in section 105 (Figure 5.5), as compared with section 20 in HemisFair, thereby moving them further away from the court and no longer near the visitor's tunnel, but adjacent to the Spurs' tunnel, and 'priced out of shooting range'.⁹⁹ However, although the new Alamodome seating configuration limited the Bums' influence on games, the group retained a profile in the press. Upon Karl's return to San Antonio as coach of the Seattle Supersonics in March of 1994, Valle fondly recalled his work ethic, competitiveness and how the Bums had taken to him in his six seasons as a Spur in the 1970s. Valle and Karl's relationship had continued following his playing days in San Antonio, when the pair had often met after games.¹⁰⁰ Fans nicknamed Karl the 'Kamikaze Kid' due to his commitment during play, which often featured him hustling and sacrificing his body through drawing charges, diving for loose balls, and getting into physical altercations with opposing players who were often larger than him. Many fans appreciated players of this kind, so Karl in the 1970s and the Bruise Brothers of the 1980s became fan favourites, despite their limited statistical contributions.¹⁰¹

Figure 5.5 Alamodome Seating Chart with Bums' Section



⁹⁹ Bill Knight, 'Detroit, Chicago, Salt Lake City Full of Feisty NBA Ticketholders', *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, January 25, 1994.
¹⁰⁰ Bill Sullivan, 'Fans Ignore Spurs of the Moment', *San Jose Mercury News*, December 13, 1986.
¹⁰¹ Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs Fans Split on What Changes Should Be Made', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 18, 1994.

After the Utah Jazz defeated the Spurs in the 1994 playoffs, the press sought the opinion of Valle and other Bums on which direction the organisation should head regarding player and executive personnel. Despite an impressive regular season, the team had disappointed supporters in the playoffs and fans acknowledged that their heightened expectations had made the early playoff exit hurt more. A popular cliché in European football, ‘It is the hope that kills you’, seems an appropriate representation of what many Spurs supporters often experienced in postseason play.¹⁰² Bum secretary Marilyn Durbin expressed a similar sentiment but approved when the organisation appointed Gregg Popovich as Vice President of Basketball Operations in June of 1994 and hoped that one of his first accomplishments would be finding a point guard for the team.¹⁰³ That summer, the local press featured the Bums for a reason unrelated to sports but connected to previous discussions of death, commemoration, bereavement, and community. The *San Antonio Express-News* ran a question-and-answer column every Wednesday and Friday for residents who were often new to the area to post inquiries to learn about the city and other more general topics. One reader asked about funeral arrangements and how he could plan a more informal celebration of his life, or as he put it, ‘the best party ever’ that featured ‘rock-n-roll’ music, food, and drinks. A local funeral director explained that those who wanted to arrange services might do so in any way they would like so long as it was within the bounds of the law. His funeral home had once arranged a service for a Baseline Bum, and those who attended the service had brought their horns and noisemakers and provided the deceased a rowdy farewell.¹⁰⁴

Up to that point, the 1994-95 season had been one of the Spurs’ most successful. After qualifying for the Western Conference Finals against the defending champions, the Houston Rockets, a Houston-based journalist discussed San Antonio’s chances with Valle, who observed that this Spurs team provided ‘as good a chance as we’ve ever had’ to claim the franchise’s first NBA title. However, after the Spurs lost games one and two at home in front of crowds of over 33,000 and

¹⁰² Matthew Croasmun, ‘The Hope that Kills You’, Yale Center for Faith & Culture, November 2, 2020, <https://faith.yale.edu/media/the-hope-that-kills-you>.

¹⁰³ David Lauricella, ‘Fans Pleased With Pop’s Hiring’, *San Antonio Express-News*, June 1, 1994.

¹⁰⁴ Jacque Crouse, ‘Some Wishes Ask Mourners to Live it Up During Funeral’, *San Antonio Express-News*, June 26, 1994.

35,000, the vitriol between San Antonio and Houston journalists increased.¹⁰⁵ On May 28, 1995, Marie Ann Smith, a Bum dating back to 1974, came to the defence of her team in the *Express-News*' 'Fanstand' section exclaiming,

Come on, my team! Almost 23 years ago, a bunch of tall guys in short pants came to San Antonio to play basketball. For me, it was love at first basket and I became a Spurs fanatic. The next year, I was accepted into the original Baseline Bums; I missed only four games in the first 12 seasons. Early on, I made the acquaintance of an ABA referee who is still one of my most cherished friends. When the ABA and NBA merged, he told me, 'The NBA is a dirty, rotten business.' Those words rang in my head Wednesday night as I witnessed the Houston fans literally take over my basketball arena, which is the largest in the NBA. Our lovely David does not deserve this, nor does the amazing Dennis, Avery and the rest of our wonderful players. The spirits and hearts of our legacy must be weeping. Most of all, I don't deserve this. I ask my team to rise to the occasion.¹⁰⁶

That same day, the *Dallas Morning News* discussed the growing Texas-sports rivalry and San Antonians' aspirations to escape from the shadows cast by neighbouring Houston and Dallas. The article featured Valle and explained his commitment to the team dating back to the franchise's arrival before the writer explored how Valle had coped with significant ticket hikes over the years. Regardless of the costs involved, Valle explained, 'Spurs basketball is the only thing I live for...I just want to see them win one championship before I die. Then I can leave this world happy'.¹⁰⁷ Following the team's rally to tie the series, many Spurs fans claimed to be the team's most die-hard supporters, as they waited for hours outside of box offices to purchase tickets, travelled to Houston to support the team, spray painted their hair to match Rodman's, and international fans traversed more than 50,000 miles to watch the team. Bum vice-president Cathy Snyder argued that her commitment to the team surpassed all these others, given that her support had

¹⁰⁵ Ed Fowler, 'Our City Scoffed? Look Who's Talking', *Houston Chronicle*, May 28, 1995; 'San Antonio: Home of Margaritas, Minor Leagues', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 28, 1995,

¹⁰⁶ 'Fanstand', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 28, 1995.

¹⁰⁷ Al Carter, 'Friendly Rivalry- Houston, San Antonio Savor 1st NBA Shootout', *Dallas Morning News*, May 28, 1995.

started long before their recent successes. While an air of superiority among Bums could be interpreted from such a statement, the Bums did not appear to view themselves as explicitly better than other fans, but sometimes expressed disapproval of less devoted supporters.¹⁰⁸ Despite the Spurs' efforts, the Rockets eliminated them after their game-six victory. Some fans felt disappointed, others believed their civic pride had been damaged, and Valle described the defeat as heart-breaking.¹⁰⁹

Unfortunately, the Bums suffered a more significant loss a few months later, in October 1995 when Marilyn Durbin died, following which her story was commemorated in the *Express-News*. Durbin joined the Bums in 1986, and Snyder explained that her devotion to the team had been resolute. Durbin collected various Spurs memorabilia and developed close relationships with players, especially guard Willie Anderson who referred to her as 'Mom', and the pair went to dinner and the barbershop together.¹¹⁰ Following the start of the 1995-96 season, another San Antonio-based columnist paid a brief tribute to Durbin, posing the question, 'Is it just me or does the Alamodome seem sadly quieter for Spurs' games this year after the death of Marilyn Durbin, long-time (sic) member of the Baseline Bums?'¹¹¹ This particular commemoration reinforced the notion that sporting spaces, like physical and digital cemeteries, have the potential to conjure up emotions and provide a place to grieve, remember, and commemorate the deceased.¹¹²

When San Antonio hosted their first professional all-star basketball game in twenty-one years in 1996, a former Dallas Chapparral turned Spurs adversary during his playing career returned to the city to cover the event and commented, 'I was kind of sorry to see them move to the Alamodome. I understand why they did, but no building had a greater atmosphere, particularly with the Baseline Bums than the HemisFair'.¹¹³ One Houston-based journalist believed the Spurs' move represented the changing dynamics of the sport,

¹⁰⁸ Marty Sabota, 'Die-Hards Vying for No. 1 Fan Title', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 31, 1995.

¹⁰⁹ Thaddeus Herrick, 'Spurs' Defeat Deflates San Antonio- Yet Again', *Houston Chronicle*, June 3, 1995.

¹¹⁰ 'Durbin Dedicated to Supporting Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 13, 1995.

¹¹¹ Kevin O'Keeffe, 'Could Browns' Run for Dough Send Spurs Elsewhere?', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 8, 1995.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ 'What's the Story? Press Likes City', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 10, 1996.

The Alamodome is very much like the NBA - bigger than big, but distant and unapproachable. Basketball on Broadway. HemisFair Arena was very much like the ABA - community theatre where a small, but talented, group of underappreciated artists got together for a little improvisational work. HemisFair Arena was home to the Baseline Bums, a group of hard-core fans who, after soaking up as much Lone Star beer as possible, revelled in making life miserable for opposing teams.¹¹⁴

Working together, the ABA, Spurs, and supporters like the Bums had created a unique environment that stoked nostalgia and pride for those who had experienced it and in the mid-1990s some of the traditions of the Bums continued despite the change in environment and their waning power in the arena.¹¹⁵ In April 1996, the group held their twenty-third annual spring picnic at Raymond Russell Park Pavilion on the city's far northwest side.¹¹⁶ Events such as these were where many fans enjoyed mixing with players and staffers in a way that would not be possible in the contemporary NBA.¹¹⁷ That same month, game attendance faltered during the Spurs' first-round playoff series but, following the Spurs' five-dollar ticket promotion for seats in the stadium's upper deck, attendance increased, as did feelings of nostalgia.¹¹⁸ One local journalist reported that the campaign put the Spurs back in touch with their working-class roots as previously represented by the Bums, or, as he put it, 'people with more passion than cash'. One city council member observed congestion on the highway south of the dome for the first time in the stadium's history. The southside of San Antonio was a historically impoverished and underprivileged part of town, and the traffic volume indicated that perhaps those previously priced out of in-game experiences finally had an opportunity to attend.¹¹⁹ Subsequently, Peter Holt, the franchise's majority owner, commented on how he planned to increase community engagement for the team and give the Bums more recognition for their sustained support. He felt one way to accomplish that would be to co-finance a new arena with the city so that the Bums could be closer to the court,

¹¹⁴ Michael Murphy, 'The ABA Way', *Houston Chronicle*, February 4, 1996.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Kevin O' Keeffe, 'Spurs' McDermott May Soon be Out as Chairman', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 17, 1996.

¹¹⁷ George Valle, Web Cemetery, September 2015.

¹¹⁸ Tim Griffin, 'Empty Seats Real Concern for the Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 27, 1996.

¹¹⁹ Rick Casey, 'Spurs Heresey: Dome Offers the Best Shot', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 26, 1996.

although his motivation seems less than altruistic given the potential revenue a new taxpayer-funded stadium could provide the ownership group.¹²⁰

Nostalgia continued reverberating about the press as journalists perpetuated the narrative that the Spurs, their fans, and the Bums had enjoyed their 'heyday' in the 1970s and 1980s.¹²¹ The deaths of original team investors Angelo Drossos and Maury Holden in 1997 heightened these emotions, despite the sometimes adversarial relationship that they experienced with the press and fans.¹²² In early 1998, the *Express-News* decided to run features on the original Spurs team of 1973 to commemorate the franchise's twenty-fifth anniversary. Former Spurs forward Bob Netolicky recalled the 'crazy' fans in HemisFair, and how the Bums were a staple of support, although after he was traded and returned as an Indiana Pacer, he received a vitriolic reception he felt he did not deserve.¹²³ Original Spurs coach Tom Nissalke explained the 'amazing' atmosphere in HemisFair and how the Bums had become 'well known around the league'. While he remained bitter about being sacked, he said, 'I loved San Antonio and probably would have lived there for the rest of my life if things had turned out differently. My sister still lives there'.¹²⁴

The 1998 NBA lockout alienated many fans and hurt the finances of those who worked for the organisation. Valle's solution to the problem was,

I say we lock both sides in a room, don't feed them and don't let them come out until they've reached an agreement. Either that or appoint a panel of fans and let us decide who gets what. The NBA is my only pastime. I don't watch baseball or the NFL. All summer long I wait for basketball.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Charlotte-Anne Lucas, 'Spurs Hoping to Schore with a New Marketing Campaign', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 1, 1996.

¹²¹ David King, 'Alamo City's Pro Teams Draw Fans in Big Numbers', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 9, 1997; Tom Orsborn, 'Late 3-0 Leads at Coliseum Far From Safe for S.A. Teams', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 22, 1997.

¹²² 'Angelo Drossos', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 11, 1997; Jerry Briggs, 'One of Spurs' Original Investors Dead at 78', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 22, 1997.

¹²³ Glenn Rogers, 'Silver Spurs: The Original Team', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 15, 1998.

¹²⁴ Glenn Rogers, 'Silver Spurs: The Original Team', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 12, 1998.

¹²⁵ Johnny Ludden, 'Not Actual Spurs Attend FanFiesta', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 4, 1998; Johnny Ludden, 'NBA Preseason Wiped Out', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 6, 1998.

Another Bum, Fernando Rocha, shared Valle's disappointment and had been hoping to see the season get started by late October, but he was becoming increasingly dismayed by the fact that that was highly unlikely.¹²⁶ As the lockout continued into November, Valle grew progressively frustrated and explained he felt 'lost' and 'mad' that his favourite hobby had been stripped away.¹²⁷ Fans had to wait another two months before players and owners agreed to end the lockout, and a few months into the lockout-shortened season, the Spurs decided to rerun the upper-level ticket promotion for the team's upcoming game against the Utah Jazz. A Houston-based sportswriter anticipated that Valle and the Bums would play a key role in helping to create a raucous atmosphere,¹²⁸ but, although Spurs fans showed up in numbers, their team failed to respond with one sportswriter observing,

Forget about the Baseline Bums, the group of notoriously rowdy Spurs fans who used to throw barbs and an occasional cup of beer at opposing players. Forget about those Bums. These days, many observers in the Alamo City think the bums wear Spurs uniforms. Their view is understandable considering the Spurs' 101-87 loss to the Utah Jazz on Sunday before 18,165 fans, none of whom could get out of the Alamodome fast enough afterward.¹²⁹

Despite a difficult start to the season, the team improved and earned a first-round playoff series against the Minnesota Timberwolves, whose assistant coach Greg Ballard had played for the Washington Bullets during the controversial 1979 Eastern Conference Finals, which saw the Bullets win three straight games against the Spurs to earn an NBA Finals berth. Upon his return to San Antonio, Ballard recalled that series and how the Bums gave his team 'all kinds of fits'.¹³⁰ During the 1999 playoffs, a Portland-based journalist labelled the atmosphere that the 35,165 Spurs fans provided during their game one Western Conference Finals victory as fanatical and interviewed Bum Angela Hanck who described the Bums as 'a little family'. Fellow Bum Gabriel Pugliese explained it was their job to 'be loud' and 'have fun',

¹²⁶ Johnny Ludden, 'Spurs Loses Weight- Not Desire', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 14, 1998.

¹²⁷ Johnny Ludden, 'How to Stay Busy Without the Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 1, 1998.

¹²⁸ Glenn Rogers, 'Razzing the Jazz- Spurs Fans Have Reasons Aplenty to Hate Jazz', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 28, 1999.

¹²⁹ Michael Murphy, 'Spurs Go From Bad to Worse', *Houston Chronicle*, March 1, 1999.

¹³⁰ Jerry Briggs, 'Wolves Assistant an Old-School Spurs Nemesis', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 11, 1999.

and the Spurs public address announcer, Stan Kelly, described the Bums as ‘the world’s greatest fans’.¹³¹ During their playoff run, Spur Malik Rose nicknamed the bench players the ‘Bum’s Rush Crew’ as a homage to the supporters’ group and in 2005, the group reciprocated that respect when Rose returned to San Antonio as a new member of the Memphis Grizzlies touting a sign that read ‘Always a Spur in our Hearts- Bum Rush Crew 4-Ever’.¹³²

The Bums continued to receive regional and national coverage after the Spurs qualified for their first NBA Finals. A Fort Worth-based journalist gave the Spurs the advantage in their series against the New York Knicks, at least partially because Valle’s twenty-six-year commitment to the Spurs was more significant than the affection Spike Lee showed for the Knicks.¹³³ A Milwaukee-based journalist commented that the Bums’ ‘presence was always much more evident in the cosier HemisFair Arena than the spacious Alamodome’, but that ‘the Spurs’ superfan group....still come out in droves’ with Gervin confirming that ‘Big George (Valle) and the Baseline Bums, they’re still here. That’s a group of guys and gals who are die-hard Spurs fans. They go on the road and go to different functions. They always back us. They’ve been a special group of people throughout the history of the San Antonio Spurs’.¹³⁴ Valle observed that after the Spurs qualified for the championship series, there was a previously unseen level of support and enthusiasm for the team. After being disappointed for the previous twenty-five seasons, Valle remained cautiously optimistic entering the finals, and he commented on the energy and support from seemingly ‘everywhere’,

For years, we’d go so far and we’d falter – we’d get beat or beat ourselves. Where we are now, it’s indescribable. And we wanted to go against the Knicks, because they’re the big-city team from New York

¹³¹ Katy Muldoon, ‘Spurs Fans Pump Up the Volume’, *The Oregonian*, May 30, 1999.

¹³² Buck Harvey, ‘Spurs Subs: Powering Deep into the Lakers’, *San Antonio Express-News*, May 8, 2003; Johnny Ludden, ‘Rare Stolen Moment- Spurs Fumble Last Chance vs. Grizzlies’, *San Antonio Express-News*, February 27, 2005.

¹³³ Richie Whitt, ‘Two for the Show- Both Finalists Have Karma, but Spurs Have the Towers’, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 13, 1999; Mitch Lawrence, ‘Spurs of the Moment- San Antonio’s New Stars Celebrate Wacky History’, *New York Daily News*, June 13, 1999; Dave Goldinger & Frank Isola, ‘Ewing Leads Charge into Texas’, *New York Daily News*, June 16, 1999.

¹³⁴ Tom Enuld, ‘Career Path Take Schuler From Oak Creek to Finals’, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, June 20, 1999.

and that means more exposure for our team. A lot of people think the only thing we have in San Antonio is the Alamo. We have the Spurs.¹³⁵

Like Valle, fellow Bum Doug Dunman explained his excitement for the series and how the team's journey had captivated him, 'All of us in our lives have some sort of success and failures. We strive for things in our daily lives. And now we see this great bunch of guys going all the way to the top, and we want to go there with them'. Joining the Bums had changed his life since, as with Munoz, Dunman had befriended and courted his wife through Bum membership.¹³⁶ Following the Spurs winning their first championship, the franchise featured the Bums in their river celebration parade, and local reporters singled out Valle as one of the 'crowd-pleasers' given his commitment to the team.¹³⁷ The Bums' support of the champions continued into the offseason as they volunteered to support the Spurs' new arena campaign and the annual Fan Fiesta. For Fan Fiesta '99, the Bums created a family-friendly 'Halloween Street' for supporters to meander down alongside the numerous other activities the organisation and local vendors created for the event.¹³⁸

During the 1999-2000 season, a disagreement between a cable network and a regional telecommunications provider caused a blackout of eleven Spurs games in the San Antonio area. Many fans were upset, and Valle did not understand how the network could not agree to air the games, given that advertising would be sold as usual. He suggested that local television stations contract the games, so those who do not have cable could watch for free.¹³⁹ During that season, Lakers head coach Phil Jackson suggested that the Spurs 1999 title should have an asterisk alongside it since it was won in a shortened lockout season. Unsurprisingly, Spurs fans did not appreciate the comment, and the Bums made regional and national headlines when they displayed a poster that they created for Jackson, which read 'Phil, kiss our asterisk'.¹⁴⁰ During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Spurs-Lakers rivalry

¹³⁵ Thaddeus Herrick, 'NBA Title May City On', *Houston Chronicle*, June 13, 1999.

¹³⁶ Christian Davenport, 'Celebrating All Things Spurs- Joy Over Team's Success Unites Fans of All Types', *Austin American-Statesman*, June 16, 1999.

¹³⁷ Carmina Danini, 'San Antonio Celebrates As Only It Can', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 28, 1999.

¹³⁸ Carlos Guerra, 'Pro-Arena Campaign Under Way', *San Antonio Express-News*, August 29, 1999; Glenn Rogers, 'Dome Doors Open for Fiesta', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 31, 1999.

¹³⁹ Glenn Rogers, 'Spurs TV Dispute Leaves Screens Dark', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 9, 2000.

¹⁴⁰ Mark Rosner, 'Spurs Trip up Lakers', *Austin American-Statesman*, November 9, 2000; Peter Vecsey, 'Smith May Take Minny-Mum', November 10, 2000.

intensified, and Valle commented, 'I don't want anything to do with Phil Jackson. I wouldn't give him the sweat off my body if he was dying of thirst. He doesn't have any respect for us'.¹⁴¹ Although Valle and the actions of other Bums over the years often disrespected Laker players and coaches such as Riley and Abdul-Jabbar, Valle claimed, 'I'd badmouth them during the game, but afterward we'd be friends'. Valle remained friendly with Laker Kobe Bryant's father but was not impressed with Jackson labelling Popovich a 'whacko' and Shaquille O'Neal calling the Spurs a 'WNBA team'.¹⁴² Animosity amongst sporting rivals was nothing new, but after the 'Dawg Pound' of the Cleveland Browns hurled items onto the field and threatened the safety of players and officials in December of 2001, a Cleveland-based reporter criticised the historical and contemporary examples of dangerous fan behaviour that often resulted from an overindulgence of alcohol. Unsurprisingly, the Baseline Bums made his shortlist of disorderly fans, but while the journalist's claim was historically accurate, by the 2000s, the 'rowdy' days of the Bums had long since passed, even though the reputation they had cultivated during the 1970s and 1980s still preceded them.¹⁴³

The Contemporary Bums (2002-2014)

During the 2002 playoffs, Robinson suffered a back injury, prompting a religious response, mainly from Catholics, amongst Spurs fans. Bums Sylvia Montoya, married couple Estella and Juan Gonzalez, and their sister Ruth Garcia prayed for Robinson's healthy return during their first-round series against the Seattle SuperSonics. Montoya explained, 'I have a lot of faith that God will answer our prayers. I firmly believe that. I even lit a candle for him at my church...' Garcia added, 'I've been praying for David, too, and I feel God will do for David what's best for David and the Spurs'. Gonzalez commented, 'I prayed for him at church yesterday and then later at home. I'm sure he's saying his own prayers, too. I really believe prayer helps. Prayer is powerful'.¹⁴⁴ The involvement of Estella, Juan, and Ruth in this way reinforces how Bum membership could sometimes be a family affair that helped create bonding opportunities, and their story highlights the ongoing Catholic presence amongst Spurs fans who often blended their commitments of faith with

¹⁴¹ Tom Orsborn, 'Showing a Familiar Contempt', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 19, 2001.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Bill Livingston, 'Leashing Dawgs is Only a Dream', *The Plain Dealer*, December 29, 2001.

¹⁴⁴ Tom Orsborn, 'Fans Hope Prayers Answered', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 23, 2002.

their fandom.

While many Spurs supporters felt bereaved following the last game in HemisFair, there were mixed feelings after the team's final contest in the Alamodome in May of 2002, which featured a crowd of 32,342.¹⁴⁵ Valle's stance on the 64,000-seat football stadium was unequivocal, 'Good riddance...I hate this place. It's not good for basketball'.¹⁴⁶ Rising ticket prices followed the team's move to the SBC Center, and more fans struggled to cope. A thirteen-year season ticketholder was dismayed and said, 'I literally went to the bathroom and threw up... I feel like my heart's been ripped out, its [sic] financially impossible' after he estimated costs would increase by more than \$8,000 in one season.¹⁴⁷ After the move, Juli Blanda was selected as the new Bums' president, and the supporters' group of approximately 150 members moved from section 105 in the Alamodome to sections 101, 127 and 128 of the new SBC Center (Figure 5.6). As with the dome seating configuration, the Bums were still significantly distanced from the baseline and the opponent's tunnel. The prerequisites to join the supporters' group was no longer having 'the ability to drink for at least an hour and still be able to cheer unbelievable obscenities'.¹⁴⁸ Now the Bums had to participate in twenty-five hours of community service a season, attend eighty per cent of home games, and pay an annual fee of thirty-five dollars to receive discounted season tickets from the organisation.¹⁴⁹ The Spurs hosted their first regular season game in the SBC Center in October of 2002, and franchise executives were excited with all they had done to honour the Spurs' past, while embarking on their future. This included appointing a local artist to design the Spurs' trophy case that was observable to the public in the arena's concourse and included Bums' memorabilia, thereby memorialising and reinforcing their historical connection to the organisation.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ 2002 NBA Western Conference Semifinals Game 4', Basketball Reference, 2023, accessed April 21, 2023, <https://www.basketball-reference.com/boxscores/200205120SAS.html>.

¹⁴⁶ Emanuel Gonzales, 'Fans Love to Hate Last of Loud Dome', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 17, 2002.

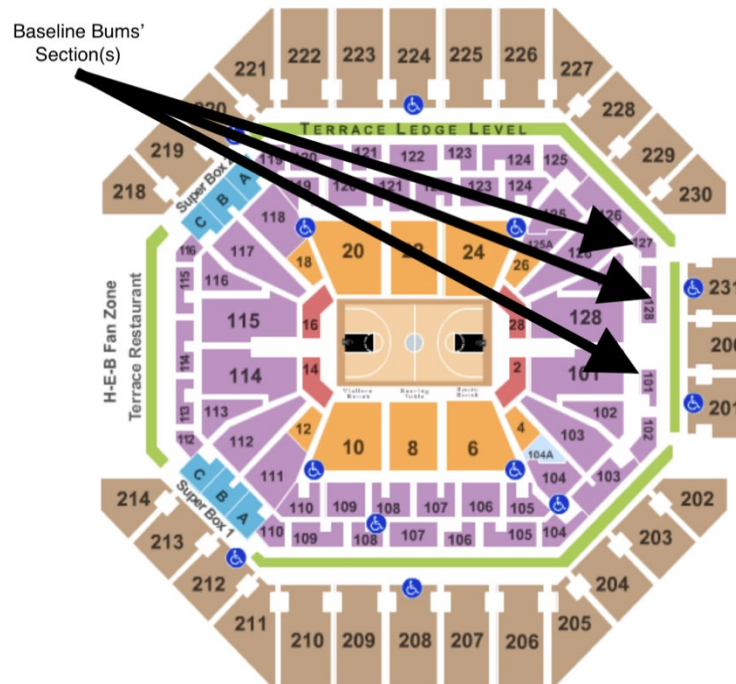
¹⁴⁷ Scott Huddleston, 'Spurs Fans Will Face 'Charter Fee' Charge for Best Seats', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 4, 2001.

¹⁴⁸ Bruce Newman, 'Best Team You've Never Seen: The Eyes of San Antonio May Be Upon the High-Ridin' Spurs, but Few Others' Are', *Sports Illustrated*, March 8, 1982.

¹⁴⁹ Macarena Hernandez, 'Fans Enjoy Time and Tony Show', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 21, 2002; San Antonio Spurs Baseline Bums, Membership Information, <https://sabaseinebums.tripod.com/id100.html> (accessed April 21, 2023).

¹⁵⁰ Dan Goddard, 'A Cultural Arena- SBC Center Confidently Mixes Sports with Art', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 13, 2002.

Figure 5.6 SBC/AT&T Center Seating Chart with Bums' Sections



The two arena moves in Spurs history demarcated the three versions of the Bums. After moving into the Alamodome, a few journalists noticed that the Bums' influence and profile 'diminished' and that their traditions 'changed'.¹⁵¹ Following the move in 2002, not only had their game-influence diminished, but the group appeared to have become more of a charitable organisation, with Blanda explaining,

It's gone from a group that thinks, 'Let's harass the other team', to a group that thinks, 'Let's do what we can to help the organisation'. The harassment is still there, it's just that it's been toned down a little bit. We don't just support the Spurs on the court. We also do it off the court with various community-service projects.¹⁵²

During their tenure in the Alamodome, the franchise had allowed ticket exchanges and purchases by opposing fans in the Bums' section, which had upset the group and created altercations. However, team executives assured Blanda that the 147

¹⁵¹ Tom Orsborn, 'It's All Bums- The Spurs' Venerable Fans Will All Be Together in the New SBC Center', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 16, 2002; Scott Huddleston, 'Then & Now- What In an Arena? - Spurs' Original S.A. Venue had its Good and Bad Points', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 22, 2003.

¹⁵² Scott Huddleston, 'Then & Now- What In an Arena? - Spurs' Original S.A. Venue had its Good and Bad Points', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 22, 2003.

seats in the Bums' new three sections would be exclusively for them. Rick Braneky approved, saying, 'That's going to be a big plus for us. One of the best things about being in the Bums is the camaraderie we have. This will increase it'. Carl Turner also thought the new seating configuration would help emulate the 'electrifying' atmosphere of HemisFair that 'intimidated' opponents and said, 'We want the SBC Center to be just as loud (as HemisFair). Having our own space at the new arena will help us reach that goal. It's going to be a sea of black in our sections'.¹⁵³

Valle's transition to 'President Emeritus' and the apparent absorption of the Bums into the franchise as a community outreach wing appeared complete going into the 2002-03 season. Their bylaws were updated to include a mission statement that read, 'It is the mission of the Baseline Bums to voluntarily and enthusiastically support the San Antonio Spurs Organization on the court and in the community while applying the Spurs' Values in Action'.¹⁵⁴ Russ Bookbinder and other executives had attempted to rebrand the team into an organisation associated with class and prestige, and the pacification of the Bums seemed yet another step in this process. In addition to the cultural shift, the increased cost of admission was also damaging to fans as the Spurs looked to capitalise on the corporate suites and luxury seats the new stadium had to offer. As a result of this gentrification, many long-time fans were priced out of in-game experiences.¹⁵⁵

During the 2002-03 season, Manu Ginobili emerged as one of the team's best talents and fans in his home country of Argentina noticed, as did those in San Antonio. As the team's sole Latino, the Bums created a cheer on his behalf that rang, 'Ole! Ole! Ole! Ole! Manu! Manu!' and it became a staple crowd expression for several years.¹⁵⁶ As the Spurs entered another series with the Lakers in the 2003 playoffs, Bum Debi George noticed a change in fan attitudes from the previous few years, stating, 'I think we have more confidence in the players and our new arena.

¹⁵³ Tom Orsborn, 'It's All Bums- The Spurs' Venerable Fans Will All Be Together in the New SBC Center', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 16, 2002.

¹⁵⁴ San Antonio Spurs Baseline Bums, Legal Type Stuff- Bylaws, <https://sabaselinebums.tripod.com/id6.html> (accessed April 21, 2023).

¹⁵⁵ Scott Huddleston, "Spurs Fans Will Face 'Charter Fee' Charge for Best Seats," *San Antonio Express-News*, February 4, 2001.

¹⁵⁶ Lucy Hood, 'Visitin' Manu's Native City', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 17, 2003.

We've drawn in new fans'.¹⁵⁷ George's comments seemed accurate following the Spurs' win over the Lakers, thus ending their three-year reign as NBA champions. In anticipation of their matchup against the Dallas Mavericks in the conference finals, Bum Eddie Knight explained, 'We're having a hard time getting mad! We hated those Lakers so long, we finally beat 'em and made 'em cry. Now we're having a hard time getting mad'. Another Bum, Kathy Ingram, mirrored Knight's comments as Bums searched for ways to find motivation from their upcoming opponents.¹⁵⁸ After the Spurs defeated the Mavericks and qualified for the NBA Finals, tens of thousands of fans, including a Bum of five years, Frank Juarez, celebrated in the streets.¹⁵⁹

For the first time, the 2003 NBA Finals featured two former ABA franchises (the Spurs and New Jersey Nets), and the media created a nostalgic narrative that referred to the previous playoff series between the two teams, expressly, the 'Basketbrawl' of 1976.¹⁶⁰ Understanding that this was Robinson's last season, Bum Gene Olson hoped he would retire a champion.¹⁶¹ Following the Spurs' series-clinching win, San Antonians' celebrated, in Valle's case, with a thirty-five dollar cigar and a case of beer in the arena parking lot.¹⁶² A few months later, the Spurs retired Robinson's jersey, and he thanked the Baseline Bums for their sustained support.¹⁶³ All the Bums in attendance wore shirts that read 'Thanks 50' along with sailor hats and American flags as a homage to Robinson's Naval Academy service (Figure 5.7). While many celebrated, Bum Rosemary Perez lamented, 'I miss him. It doesn't seem the same looking down there and not seeing him. He went out in glory. It was perfect, but I miss him'.¹⁶⁴ A few weeks later, some San Antonians took exception to those who received championship rings after Holt gave one to the San Antonio Archbishop, even though it was not him but the Spurs Nuns who had

¹⁵⁷ Karen Adler, 'Spurs Fever Takes Hold at Area Schools as Team Leaves for L.A.', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 9, 2003.

¹⁵⁸ Steve Blow, 'Spurs, SA Too Nice to Despise', *The Dallas Morning News*, May 21, 2003.

¹⁵⁹ Elaine Aradillas, 'Joyous Spurs Fans Fill the City's Streets', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 30, 2003.

¹⁶⁰ Steve Politi, 'Here's to the Old ABA- The "Rematch" Recalls Days of Some Serious Fun', *The Star-Ledger*, June 1, 2003.

¹⁶¹ Amy Dorsett, 'NBA Final, Game 2: Nets 87, Spurs 85', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 7, 2003.

¹⁶² Scott Huddleston, 'City Celebrates in Style- Spurs' Championship Brings Few Arrests but Plenty of T-Shirt Sales', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 17, 2003.

¹⁶³ Johnny Ludden, 'Duncan, Parker Lead Spurs Past the Jazz', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 11, 2003.

¹⁶⁴ Amy Dorsett, 'No. 50 Hangs It Up= Spurs Retire Admiral's Jersey in Postgame Ceremony', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 11, 2003.

supported the team over the years. That same fan also took exception to the Baseline Bums not receiving rings. In several editorial comments, others questioned whether the archbishop would accept his vow of poverty and donate his diamond-laden ring to charity. For many observers, this 'honor wasn't earned', and it showed how Spurs executives were perhaps out of touch with those who truly supported the team.¹⁶⁵ The fact that fans took offence in this way was an acknowledgement on their part of the contributions of groups like the Spurs Nuns and Baseline Bums, but the organisation clearly had other priorities and recognised the value of people of power to the franchise.

Figure 5.7: The Baseline Bums Salute David Robinson March 25, 2003¹⁶⁶



In 2004 the Josephine St. Café celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversary, and Spurs fans and Bums such as Gloria Drash applauded the restaurant staff for providing her and other fans with meals before games. Many supporters had ridden the Josephine St. Spurs Bus to and from games over the years, and owner Pat Molak took pride in knowing the services his establishment provided to patrons was more than just food and drinks but included experiences and friendships.¹⁶⁷ A few weeks later, the Spurs faced the Lakers in another second-round playoff series. After the Spurs won game one, many fans were elated, but Bum Pat White reined in his enthusiasm, opting for a cautiously optimistic approach, and the Spurs eventually

¹⁶⁵ 'Your Turn', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 29, 2003.

¹⁶⁶ J.M. Scott, 'Ultimate Spurs Fan Club Baseline Bums, Through the Years', *My SA of the Express-News*, January 22, 2015.

¹⁶⁷ Edmundo Conchas, 'Café Marks 25 Years of Food, Fun', *San Antonio Express-News*, March 31, 2004; 'Playing to the Crowd', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 11, 2005.

lost to the Lakers in a competitive series.¹⁶⁸ The Spurs enjoyed more success during the 2004-2005 season, and, while Bum Cecilia De La Fuente was disappointed after the team's game four loss to the Phoenix Suns in the Western Conference Finals, the team went on to win the series and qualify for their third NBA Finals in seven years. The Spurs faced the defending champion Detroit Pistons, and Spurs 'fanaticism' was fully displayed through Bum Leti Gonzales, who decorated herself in elaborative Spurs outfits.¹⁶⁹ During the Finals, the Bums received press coverage from international newspapers that discussed the group's history. Since former Spurs coach Larry Brown had returned to San Antonio as head coach of the Pistons, the often rehashed story of the Bums throwing guacamole on him resurfaced, as did recollections of the Bums as a provocative group.¹⁷⁰ During the series' first two games, the Bums continued their Olé chants for Ginobili, and national reporters continued to identify Spurs supporters as the few fans of modest means left in the league, partially attributing that to their roots in the ABA and the early work of the Bums.¹⁷¹ Stadium gentrification became more evident following the Spurs and corporate sponsors H-E-B Grocery Company's decision to host a free watch party at the SBC Center for game three of the series, where fans could enter at no cost and watch the contest on the arena's numerous screens. Approximately 18,000 supporters filled the arena, and attendees explained they came because they could not usually afford tickets—open seating applied to all except the Bums who had their usual sections reserved.¹⁷² Although the Spurs lost that contest, they defeated the Pistons in seven games, and hundreds of thousands of San Antonians celebrated in the streets. A few days later, the city hosted the Spurs championship river parade that concluded with a presentation at the Alamodome. Mayor Phil Hardberger commented on the civic pride the Spurs had generated, saying, 'Anybody that thinks that sports doesn't bind a city together wasn't there Thursday night -- either at the arena or out celebrating. It's very helpful to the psyche of San Antonio. The Spurs have given us more than a championship, they've given us a sense of community'.

¹⁶⁸ Amy Dorsett, 'Game 1: Spurs 88, Lakers 78', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 3, 2004; Adam Thompson, 'Karl Gained Substance from San Antonio Days', *The Denver Post*, April 26, 2005.

¹⁶⁹ Mariano Castillo and Amy Dorsett, 'Can't Mask Fanaticism', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 10, 2005.

¹⁷⁰ Chris Sheridan, 'When Avocados Flew: Brown's History in San Antonio Sometimes Got Messy', *Associated Press*, June 11, 2005; 'Cuando Volaban Aguacates y Cerveza en San Antonio', *LATAM*, June 11, 2005; 'Spurs' Home Memorable- Brown Familiar with Rabid Fans', *The Calgary Sun*, June 12, 2005.

¹⁷¹ Mark Kiszla, 'Grit, Glamour Class at Finals', *The Denver Post*, June 12, 2005; Mike Monroe, 'Preview/Review', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 11, 2005.

¹⁷² Amy Dorsett and Vincent Davis, 'S.A. Fans See All the Way to Detroit', June 15, 2005.

Other former mayors like Lila Cockrell and Howard Peak, as well as Bum Maria Ann Smith, agreed, 'It's beautiful. I'm so proud of our Spurs and I'm so proud of our city. They're our choirboys, and we love them'.¹⁷³ Given some San Antonians' impression that they and their city received minimal respect at a national level, one local journalist observed that 'the collective self-esteem of the city was floating somewhere above the stratosphere' during the celebrations which contributed to the prestige of the franchise and sustainment of the Spurs fan community.¹⁷⁴

In December 2005, the Bums caught the attention of national and local media outlets when a soldier wished a Merry Christmas to his family, the Baseline Bums, and the Spurs on Fox News' popular Hannity & Colmes show.¹⁷⁵ That month the Spurs honoured Bums' treasurer Gloria Drash and her husband Wilbert at centre court as 'co-captains' which was the franchise's way of celebrating fans' commitment to the team. These co-captains participated in the pregame meeting and photo-op between players and referees. The couple dressed up as Mr. and Mrs. Claus as they often did during their volunteer work for the Bums.¹⁷⁶ Given Drash's long white beard, he did not need an artificial one (Figure 5.8).¹⁷⁷ A few days later, former vice-president of the Bums, Al Vasquez, and his friend Mike Brown received media attention for their elaborate Christmas decorations featuring the Spurs. Vasquez had received a signed basketball from all the players the year he departed from his vice-presidency and the ball was in a case next to the ten-foot-tall Spurs Christmas tree he designed, which featured the Coyote on top.¹⁷⁸ Following the team's success, the local affinity for the Spurs seemed stronger, or at least more widespread, than it had been for some time. However, some fans were critical of Spurs player Tony Parker's actress partner Eva Longoria, who became one of the most recognisable Spurs fans at the time, provoking a Baseline Bum to defend her in a newspaper editorial by claiming that Longoria's support increased national attention on the city

¹⁷³ Amy Dorsett, 'Fan-Demonium', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 26, 2005.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Sean Hannity and Alan Colmes, 'Seattle Teacher Convicted of Sex Abuse', Hannity & Colmes, December 2, 2005.

¹⁷⁶ Berry Tramel, 'Nothing but Net- Vision, Luck, Commitment Helped Spurs Hit it Big in Pro Basketball', *The Oklahoman*, December 18, 2005.

¹⁷⁷ Berry Tramel, 'Nothing but Net- Vision, Luck, Commitment Helped Spurs Hit it Big in Pro Basketball', *The Oklahoman*, December 18, 2005; Wilbert Drash Jr., Obituary, January 19, 2021; J.M. Scott, 'Ultimate Spurs Fan Club Baseline Bums, Through the Years', *My SA of the Express-News*, January 22, 2015.

¹⁷⁸ Chrissie Murnin, 'Trees a Crowd', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 24, 2005.

and that her consistent attendance at games proved she valued the team.¹⁷⁹ It appeared that this Bum believed that their rank among the team's fan base and their public defence could help make Longoria appear as a legitimised fan.

Figure 5.8: Baseline Bum Wil Drash¹⁸⁰



By 2007 the Bums' standards and codes of conduct differed significantly from those that had characterised their early history. The group also adapted to ensure the success of their fan community by utilising the internet as a critical form of communication through their website, which featured their newsletter, membership hotline, and extensive bylaws. In contrast to the practices of previous iterations, they now had bi-seasonal scheduled meetings, where they discussed all Bum-related items, and a new seat-sharing program that posited different requirements for newly approved 'part-time' Bums. The bureaucracy of the Bums grew to include a president, vice president, director of volunteer activities, treasurer, secretary, and section and co-section leaders. As Blanda explained, it now operated 'like a club', and each elected official had duties and responsibilities and terms of service that often lasted two years. The group enforced term limits, and some leadership positions required previous experience within the Bums before they could be eligible for election.¹⁸¹ Encouragingly, women began to dominate the Bum ranks in membership and leadership positions and may have contributed to the changing and caring nature of the group. The growing contingent of female fans often wore 'oversized Spurs jerseys over their dresses or skirts' and took 'advantage of the

¹⁷⁹ 'Your Turn', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 6, 2006.

¹⁸⁰ Wilbert Drash Jr., Web Cemetery, January 19, 2021; J.M. Scott, 'Ultimate Spurs Fan Club Baseline Bums, Through the Years', My SA of the *San Antonio Express-News*, January 22, 2015.

¹⁸¹ San Antonio Baseline Bums, 'Go Spurs Go', <https://sabaselinebums.tripod.com/id97.html> (accessed April 21, 2023).

team's array of pink apparel. And, of course, a good number of them wear Spurs-affiliated pins and buttons'.¹⁸² A section leader, Cynthia Yruegas, noted that to be a part of the Bums, 'You have to live, breathe and bleed silver and black'.¹⁸³ While the Bums' influence inside the arena seemed limited, one member, Jerry Casarez, received recognition for his 'hysterical and boisterous cackle' that he often screamed out during an opponent's free-throw attempt. In a profile feature, Casarez explained that he started following the Spurs in 1973, became a season ticket holder in 1996, and joined the Bums in 2002. He admired Ginobili and Gervin and his most prized possession was an autographed Gervin shirt.¹⁸⁴ In an interview a few years later, Yruegas explained how Jerry was invited to a luncheon hosted by Spurs players to perform in a skit where he yelled out his loud laugh, and that he had received international attention from an Argentinian journalist who had described the group as 'the World Famous Baseline Bums'.¹⁸⁵

Despite the changing nature of the Bums, there were always references to their past featured in the press, especially during the playoffs. Former NBA player Robert Reid recalled how Spurs players 'drank beer with the Baseline Bums after games' and ate at a local cafeteria with them in the early days. He believed those fans were an 'inspiration' and appreciated the support they provided to the players.¹⁸⁶ While these forms of fraternisation rarely existed in 2007, the Bums' commitment to the team continued. Bum subsection leader Cheryl Haynes insisted that fan support of the team during the Spurs' fourth NBA Finals in nine years would be 'buck wild'. While Haynes assured readers that the Finals would 'be a frenzy' and the crowds would 'be off the chain', perhaps San Antonians had become accustomed to winning and she noticed the more 'relaxed' crowds in 2007 compared with previous years, particularly the fervour she had experienced in 1999.¹⁸⁷ During the championship series against the Cleveland Cavaliers, a local sportswriter named a list of 'trinkets' that hypothetically belonged in the Spurs Hall of Fame, one of which was Valle's

¹⁸² 'When it Comes to Their Team, These Diehard Fans are Loud, Loyal and "Bleed Silver and Black" Spurlicious', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 25, 2007.

¹⁸³ 'When it Comes to Their Team, These Diehard Fans are Loud, Loyal and "Bleed Silver and Black" Spurlicious', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 25, 2007.

¹⁸⁴ '20 As With the Cackler', *Conexión*, April 26, 2007.

¹⁸⁵ Jordan Rivas, 'Interview With a Bum', Project Spurs, October 14, 2009, <https://projectspurs.com/interview-with-a-bum/> (accessed April 21, 2023).

¹⁸⁶ David Flores, 'Ex-Rocket Reid Scoffs at Claims Spurs Play Dirty', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 18, 2007.

¹⁸⁷ Richard Oliver and Jennifer Lloyd, 'A Winning Tradition', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 7, 2007.

Texas flag. He also named the top five contributors (besides players) to the Spurs' success which included Popovich, Drossos, Bass, Stembridge and the Baseline Bums.¹⁸⁸ The 2008 release of *Semi-Pro*, starring actor Will Ferrell, brought San Antonio Spurs fans and the Baseline Bums back into the national spotlight, since the movie's producers reportedly used the ABA, specifically the Spurs, as a model. For instance, Ferrell's team, the Flint Tropics, had a supporters' group, 'The Tropical Isle', modelled on the Bums.¹⁸⁹ The movie's executive producer, Kent Alterman, grew up in San Antonio and used his experiences at Spurs games in the 1970s to inform his creative decisions.¹⁹⁰ At a local level, the Bums became 'celebrity' spokespeople for a local embroidery company. During the 2008 playoffs, Bum Cheryl Haynes provided commentary on the second-round playoff series win against the New Orleans Hornets, in which she discussed issues with the officiating.¹⁹¹ A few months later, Josephine St. Café hosted its annual Spurs Pep Rally & Parade that featured the Bums, the Samba Vida Dance Company and aired on a local talk show called San Antonio Living (Figure 5.9).¹⁹²

Figure 5.9: Spurs Pep Rally at Josephine St. Café¹⁹³



During San Antonio's annual Fiesta celebrations of 2009, the Bums participated in the Battle of Flowers Parade through downtown, a tradition that dated back to 1891. The 2009 event attracted approximately 300,000 spectators, and the Bums earned

¹⁸⁸ Tim Griffin, 'Beyond the Game', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 14, 2007.

¹⁸⁹ 'Where There's a Will', *Winston-Salem Journal*, February 28, 2008.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Melissa Monroe, 'New to the Market; EmbroidMe Provides a Stitch in Time', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 3, 2008; Richard Oliver, 'Spurs Fans Now are Scratchin' Their Heads', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 15, 2008.

¹⁹² 'What's Up', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 20, 2008; J.M. Scott, 'Ultimate Spurs Fan Club Baseline Bums, Through the Years', My SA of the *San Antonio Express-News*, January 22, 2015.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

a third-place award in the best amusements float category.¹⁹⁴ That year the Bums actively supported San Antonio's McAllister Park baseball team, which qualified for the Little League World Series. Bum Rose Mary Mason said, 'We feel like they're our little Spurs. They behave just like the Spurs do – gentlemanly'.¹⁹⁵ While the Bums maintained their presence in the community, one writer argued that their presence at Spurs games had diminished. He compared the contemporary Bums to those of the 1970s and remarked that 'In today's sanitised NBA, of course, the Baseline Bums are about 90 rows from the court and are seldom, if ever, heard above the ear-splitting din of piped-in, canned music...'¹⁹⁶ This type of commentary was common and continued into the following years reflecting a cognitive dissonance, with some reporters admiring the old version of the Bums and others embracing the new.¹⁹⁷ An interview with Cynthia Yruegas highlighted the divide between the old and new version of the Bums, who were no longer the 'rowdy' and 'drunk' Spurs fans their public reputation would lead some to believe. Yruegas detailed how the Bums were an organisation focused on helping the community. Bookbinder and other Spurs executives understood how important it was to cultivate an image of the franchise that exuded professionalism, class, and community care, and it seemed they had achieved this objective by this point. Yruegas detailed some of the charitable events the Bums participated in; her favourite was the group's annual coat and blanket drive, where they collected donations to provide supplies to San Antonio's impoverished and unhoused residents in anticipation of winter. She explained that other NBA franchises had approached the Spurs to learn how to emulate the Bums but insisted that, despite the numerous inquiries, the Bums and Spurs partnership would always be unique.¹⁹⁸ The Bums' community outreach and public appearances increased with new annual traditions such as the Josephine St. Pep Rally and Battle of Flowers Parade.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Battle of Flowers Association, About the Parade, <https://www.battleofflowers.org/events/about-the-parade/#:~:text=Save%20To%20Calendar,spectators%20from%20around%20the%20nation> (accessed April 21, 2023).

¹⁹⁵ Vianna Davila, 'Little Leaguers Treated to Big Welcome Home', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 1, 2009.

¹⁹⁶ David King, 'Rambling From a Baseball Celebrity and a Bit of Recorded Wit', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 1, 2009.

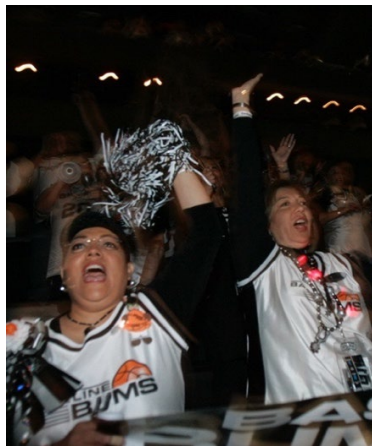
¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Jordan Rivas, 'Interview With a Bum', Project Spurs, October 14, 2009, <https://projectspurs.com/interview-with-a-bum/> (accessed April 21, 2023).

¹⁹⁹ 'What's Up', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 19, 2009; 'North Central Community Calendar', *North Central News*, December 15, 2011.

The professionalisation of the Bums during the first decade of the twenty-first century occurred because of the influence of the Spurs corporate front office, who were supported in their task by the group's leaders. While most Bums were former military and retirees, President Blanda still worked and enjoyed business success. The Alamo Heights Chamber of Commerce appointed her as their Chair, and the affluent San Antonio enclave's chamber was supported by major corporations such as Mercedes-Benz and Grande Communications. Unsurprisingly, the Baseline Bums volunteered at the chamber's events to fulfil their community service obligations and as a favour to their outgoing president, who was replaced by Bonnie Keammerer in the fall of 2010 (Figure 5.10).²⁰⁰ By 2010, women held all elected positions of authority within the Bums' organisation. Along with Keammerer, the vice president, director of volunteer activities, treasurer, and secretary were all women, which may explain the group's less aggressive and more charitable behaviour. Of the six section leaders and co-leaders, all but one was a woman. The changing demographics of the group illustrated the growing presence of women within Spurs fandom and across professional sports and during the 2010s.²⁰¹

Figure 5.10: Baseline Bum Bonnie Keammerer (left) Cheers²⁰²



In the summer of 2011, several former Spurs players and Bums attended former Spurs guard Mike Mitchell's funeral service at a Baptist church on San Antonio's

²⁰⁰ Edmund Ortiz, 'Taste' Scales New "Heights", *North Central News*, September 30, 2010; 'What's Up', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 20, 2010; San Antonio Baseline Bums, 'Go Spurs Go', <https://sabaselinebums.tripod.com/id97.html> (accessed April 21, 2023).

²⁰¹ San Antonio Baseline Bums, 'Go Spurs Go', <https://sabaselinebums.tripod.com/id97.html> (accessed April 21, 2023).

²⁰² J.M. Scott, 'Ultimate Spurs Fan Club Baseline Bums, Through the Years', *My SA of the San Antonio Express-News*, January 22, 2015.

east side.²⁰³ However, this level of affection was not solely expressed for players. Cheryl Haynes, the long-time Bum, died in March of 2012 (Figure 5.11).²⁰⁴ Haynes, who retired from the Army and worked as a Wilford Hall Medical Centre lab technician, had become one of the most recognisable Bums of the twenty-first century. She had subscribed to Spurs season tickets in 1997 and became a Bum in 2002. Former Spurs player Robert Horry remembered her as a ‘great supporter’ and the type of fan ‘you fall in love with’ due to her unwavering support. While Haynes lay weakened from her long battle with cancer, she remained a vocal supporter of the team, and when she learned of an official making a questionable call against the Spurs, she exclaimed, ‘I would have gone down there and kicked his butt’. Bums Wil Drash and Iris Trevino described how she always exuded positivity, avidly supported the Spurs, and provoked fellow fans and Spurs executives to stand up and support the team when they seemed idle at games. Drash’s wife, Gloria, the Bums’ treasurer, remembered vacationing together in Jamaica, Miami, Louisiana and Missouri over the years and that just before Haynes’ death, the three had spent time in Hawaii despite Haynes’ diminishing health.²⁰⁵ The friendship developed between these Bums underscores how deeply committed these community members were to each other as they shared meaningful experiences beyond the arena providing yet another example of how people used their fandom for their own purposes, in this case, the enhancing of friendships.

Figure 5.11: Baseline Bum Section Leader Cheryl Haynes²⁰⁶



²⁰³ Jerry Briggs, ‘Mike Mitchell: 1956-2011; Star’s Community Work Remembered’, *San Antonio Express-News*, June 17, 2011.

²⁰⁴ J.M. Scott, ‘Ultimate Spurs Fan Club Baseline Bums, Through the Years’, *My SA of the San Antonio Express-News*, January 22, 2015.

²⁰⁵ Richard Oliver, ‘Haynes was Spurs Fan “You Will Fall in Love With”’, *San Antonio Express-News*, March 11, 2012.

²⁰⁶ J.M. Scott, ‘Ultimate Spurs Fan Club Baseline Bums, Through the Years’, *My SA of the San Antonio Express-News*, January 22, 2015.

The Bums earned another third-place finish at Fiesta's Battle of Flowers parade in the amusements float category in 2012 as they continued to immerse themselves into the community as a recognisable entity.²⁰⁷ As the franchise entered its fortieth season in San Antonio, a local magazine ranked the Baseline Bums as the number twenty reason to celebrate the team, just ahead of the Hall of Famer Robinson. While the Bums had changed over time, the writer insisted that 'their spirit and dedication to the Spurs is as fervent as ever'.²⁰⁸ Locally, the Gridiron Gals' of St. Mary's Hall High School were modelled after the Bums, and the coach hoped that, over time, they would develop their own reputation as the Bums had.²⁰⁹ During the 2012-13 season, the Spurs qualified for the NBA Finals against the Miami Heat and, as the series continued, Bums like the Munoz family, given their well recorded lineage as Spurs fans, appeared in the local newspapers.²¹⁰ Ginobili struggled during the championship series, with the press claiming that the Bums 'yelled for the Argentine to quit jacking up shots', and the Spurs eventually lost the series in the decisive seventh game, marking the first time they had lost in the NBA Finals.²¹¹

Previewing the 2013-14 season in *San Antonio Magazine*, President Keammerer advised fans on how to maximise their Spurs game experience, explaining how they could procure player autographs, photographs with the championship trophies, join the Bums in their spirit march, which featured the group singing, chanting, and marching into the arena during pregame, and enjoy the fan zone.²¹² True to form, the *Express-News* created another preseason quiz for readers, which was prefaced with 'If you were a member of the Baseline Bums at HemisFair Arena, you get two bonus points. One, for being there. Another, for somehow remembering it'.²¹³ Several months later, the Spurs won the Western Conference championship and earned a rematch against the Miami Heat in the Finals. The press in south Florida observed that the Bums had changed over the years into 'mostly middle-aged fans who dressed up in tinsel wigs, face-paint and various Spurs costumes while

²⁰⁷ Tracy Idell Hamilton, Karisa King and Nolan Hicks, 'Fiesta: Battle of Flowers', April 28, 2012; Rebecca Fontenot and Kathleen Petty, 'Battle of the Flowers', *San Antonio Magazine*, April 26, 2013.

²⁰⁸ '40 Reasons to Love the Spurs', *San Antonio Magazine*, September 28, 2012.

²⁰⁹ Pat Turner, 'St. Mary's Hall Provides "Gridiron Gals" With a Football Education', *North Central News*, May 16, 2013.

²¹⁰ Hector Saldaña, 'For Comic, Game No Time For Laughs', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 17, 2013.

²¹¹ Paul Weber, 'Manu's Misfires Worrying Spurs in NBA Finals', *Associated Press*, June 14, 2013.

²¹² 'Spurs Season Preview', *San Antonio Magazine*, September 30, 2013.

²¹³ Josh Brodesky, 'A Quiz to Test Your Devotion as a Spurs Fan', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 30, 2013.

waving pompons...'²¹⁴ While the Bums and Spurs stars like Duncan, Ginobili and Parker were certainly ageing, that did not stop Bums Keammerer, Brenda Flores, and Nick Lockard from supporting 'The Big Three' during their game one victory against the Heat (Figure 5.12).²¹⁵

Figure 5.12: Baseline Bums Flores, Keammerer and Lockard'²¹⁶



The Spurs eventually defeated Miami and won the franchise's fifth NBA title. As had become a tradition, the city and Spurs organised the championship river parade and featured the Bums on barge number fifteen on account of their 'legacy' (Figure 5.13).²¹⁷

Figure 5.13: Spurs 2014 Championship River Parade²¹⁸



²¹⁴ Dave Hyde, 'Miami Wilts Without A/C and later LeBron', *Sun Sentinel*, June 6, 2014.

²¹⁵ Scott Ball, 'Fans Hold Up Faces of "The Big Three"', *San Antonio Report*, June 7, 2014.

²¹⁶ Hunter Bates, 'Heat & High Costs Don't Seter Spurs Diehards', *San Antonio Report*, June 7, 2014.

²¹⁷ Andrew Delgado, 'Live Blog: Bringing it Home! Spurs Celebrate Title With City-Wide Party', *Kens 5 San Antonio*, June 18, 2014; Cathy De La Garza, 'Spurs River Parade', *San Antonio Business Journal*, June 18, 2014.

²¹⁸ Cathy De La Garza, 'Spurs River Parade', *San Antonio Business Journal*, June 18, 2014.

Following the Spurs' 2014 championship, the Bums' community service continued with Nancy Kessel supporting a library fundraiser on the city's far northside.²¹⁹ Although the new Bums differed from their predecessors, the press continued to honour their legacy, given their consistency and passion.²²⁰ In 2014 *Sports Illustrated* published the 'NBA's Greatest', which featured a top ten in over twenty categories based on a poll from sportswriters across North America. Voters selected the Bums as number six in the 'Best Courtside Characters' category, which also featured Lakers fan Jack Nicholson and Knicks fan Spike Lee.²²¹ The local media also continued to give coverage to the Bums, and Peggy Dickerson, a Bum for over thirty years, was featured in *San Antonio Magazine* (Figure 5.14).²²² In perhaps the most revealing and detailed interview with a Bum in the press, Dickerson gave readers an insight into who the Bums were and their commitment to the team. She explained how she became a Bum and why she had continued supporting the team for so long.

I do three things: I take care of my husband, who has a terminal disease, I go to church every Sunday and I go to Spurs games. I tell everybody, 'I don't joke about Jesus, I don't joke about my president and I don't joke about my Spurs.' If you've got some jokes about my Spurs, we're not going to be having any conversations at all. I go to every game. I'm at peace when I'm at the Spurs game. I've been a fan ever since we moved to San Antonio with the military 30 years ago. I'd always wanted to live in a city with a professional sports team, and when we got the chance to come here, I couldn't get here fast enough...I met a woman at church, Evelyn Richardson, who'd overheard me talking about my Spurs. Evelyn took me to a game with her and—I still get emotional when I talk about that game—it was like a dream. Everybody around us was dressed up and cheering. We were sitting with the Baseline Bums. When I got home, I told my husband, 'I don't care what we have to sacrifice. I want to sit with that

²¹⁹ Jeff Flinn, 'Best Seat in the Library; Unusual Fundraiser Brings in the Bucks for Universal City Friends of the Library', *Northeast Herald*, September 17, 2014.

²²⁰ Jason Quick, 'Trail Blazers Fans In Section 314: The Pulse and the Pride of the Moda Center', *The Oregonian*, October 27, 2014; Tom Powers, 'After Minnesota, the Ryder Cup Will Never be the Same', *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 2, 2016.

²²¹ Mike Monroe, 'NBA Want a Debate? Try Picking Best Ever', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 16, 2014.

²²² Kathleen Petty, 'Peggy Dickerson', *San Antonio Magazine*, January 2015.

group.’ Evelyn introduced me to the Baseline Bums officers and they interviewed me. When they called and told me I could be a part of the San Antonio Spurs’ Baseline Bums, I just started crying. I was so happy. The Baseline Bums are like family. The atmosphere at the game—there’s nothing like it. We also do volunteer work with the Spurs organisation...I don’t understand how you could live in this city and not support the Spurs. If you’re from here, I don’t want to see you walking around with Lakers crap on. How can people do that? I fly my Spurs flag every game day, and at every game, I wear cowboy boots and hats that are all decorated for the Spurs...I’m a better fan with the Baseline Bums just like the players on the Spurs are better because of the team. On some teams, it feels like everybody is playing independently. Not here. The Spurs are a family.²²³

Figure 5.14: Baseline Bum Peggy Dickerson²²⁴



Dickerson demonstrated a high level of commitment to the team over a long period of time and she represented a typical member of the contemporary Bums’ community. Similar to other fans studied in this thesis, Dickerson’s top values included her family, faith, country, and Spurs. Her military service brought her to San Antonio and her Bum origin story revealed that she had befriended Evelyn Richardson, an African American woman from San Antonio’s historically black east

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

side, through church membership, and the two had a close relationship that spanned over three decades until Richardson died in 2017. Richardson's web cemetery featured several comments stressing her affection for the Spurs, her funeral program listed Dickerson as a flower bearer, with the Baseline Bums as honorary pallbearers. Given her dedication to the team, the organisation commemorated her during a game.²²⁵ Richardson's program also explained that her deceased husband was a long-time Bum and that she had continued the Bum 'legacy' in his honour. The fact that both Richardson and Dickerson had struggled with spousal bereavement could have strengthened their affection for one another and their bonding reinforces how fans have historically used team allegiance to develop and enhance their relationships with others. The fact that these women embarked on Bum membership before their husbands and continued their membership following their deaths reinforces how women's commitment to the team was not predicated on the wishes of their partner, and that they acted as independent agents in the development of their fandom, using it for their own purposes. Dickerson's insistence that the Bums were not only a community, but a family may seem hyperbolic, but given that her husband and best friend were also members during her extensive tenure, it seems appropriate for her to label this group as such. In fact, as she suffered from the losses of both her husband and Richardson, she found 'peace' with the Bums at Spurs games. Scholars have expressed how fandom and their communities can support the mental well-being of supporters and it appears Dickerson was a beneficiary of this.²²⁶ Richardson could have also benefitted from this and sought refuge amongst the Bums following the loss of her significant other. The networks and webs of interdependence that constitute a community are often based on these emotional bonds, as well as on other more practical and pragmatic relationships.

²²⁵ Evelyn Richardson, Web Cemetery, February 24, 2017; 'Celebrating the Life of Evelyn Joyce Porter Richardson', True Vision Church, March 9, 2017, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph1289979/m1/3/zoom/?resolution=2&lat=1587&lon=750> (accessed April 21, 2023).

²²⁶ Yuhei Inoue et al., 'Enhancing Older Adults' Sense of Belonging and Subjective Well-Being Through Sport Game Attendance, Team Identification, and Emotional Support', *Journal of Aging and Health* 32 no. 7-8 (2019): 530-542; Wann et al., 'Applying the Team Identification- Social Psychological Health Model to older sport fans', *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 74 no. 4 (2011): 303-315; Daniel Cheng-Hao Hunag, 'The lost bodies in sports, Taiwan: The history of sports for individuals with physical disabilities between 1945 and 2007', PhD Thesis, (Loughborough University, 2019); Kris Southby, 'Supporting the Fans: Learning-Disability, Football Fandom and Social Exclusion', PhD Thesis, (Durham University, 2013).

To attract and maintain fans such as Richardson and Dickerson, the franchise moved to modernise their facilities. The Spurs' employment of Sony's jumbotron in 1986 had changed the in-game fan experience in professional sports, and thirty years later, the franchise raised a new digital scoreboard as part of the \$110 million renovation of the AT&T Center (formerly the SBC Center).²²⁷ Prior to the completed renovation, Bum Brenda Flores, who often received recognition on account of her elaborate face paint (Figure 5.15), shared her excitement about the prospect of the franchise installing a new scoreboard, given that she could hardly read what was displayed during games.²²⁸ A few months later, Flores expressed her approval of the stadium renovations that also included improved Wi-Fi, bars, restaurants and lighting.²²⁹

Figure 5.15: Baseline Bum Brenda Flores²³⁰



The Bums' Evolution and Legacy

Eighty-two-year-old Bum Edward Knight, a member since the 1970s, said in 2016 that 'My Spurs keep me going', and explained how the Bums harassed opposing teams, while underscoring that the group had evolved over time.²³¹ Keammerer

²²⁷ Ken Rodriguez, 'Introduced by the Spurs, the JumboTron Marks a Sports Arena Milestone', *San Antonio Report*, April 22, 2017.

²²⁸ Mike Monroe, 'AT&T Center; Planned Arena Upgrades a Hit Among Fans', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 11, 2014; Madalyn Mendoza, 'Super Spurs Fan Paints Butt on Her Nose for Ginobili All-Star Vote', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 16, 2017.

²²⁹ Jordan Amman, 'AT&T Center Renovation Plans Unveiled', *ICT monitor Worldwide*, April 8, 2015; Hector Saldaña, 'New Rock & Brews Brings Star Power', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 12, 2015.

²³⁰ J.M. Scott, 'Ultimate Spurs Fan Club Baseline Bums, Through the Years', My SA of the *San Antonio Express-News*, January 22, 2015.

²³¹ Melissa Rohlin, 'HemisFair Days No Longer Define Baseline Bums', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 27, 2016.

defended the Bums' evolution, pointing out, 'We're still here, the only thing that's really changed is now we have NBA rules, and our Spurs values that we emulate. We had to tone down some of the verbal heckles and things that we used to say that we can't now. We've turned that energy into something positive' such as continued community service efforts.²³² Despite the differences between the Bums of the 2010s and those from previous eras, they seemed to have had a common class origin, emerging from the lower to middle-class communities.²³³ One commentator on the cultural connection the Spurs had with San Antonians, described the allure of the team and its 'ineffable bond' with the city as stemming from 'the vaunted Spurs Way — which puts no stock in ego or individual aggrandizement and emphasizes teamwork, continuity and self-sacrifice' and reflects 'back to us all the qualities that we want to see in ourselves'. He went on to describe Spurs fans as working-class Mexicans who cultivated their own 'offbeat art', citing the Bums' annual Fiesta medals as an example.²³⁴

In 2019, a journalist made a comparison between the vitriol directed at former Spur Kawhi Leonard upon his return to San Antonio as a Toronto Raptor and the treatment opponents received from fans in the past, suggesting that the recent emotional outpour seemed comparatively 'tame'.²³⁵ When a Boston Celtics fan threw a beer can towards the Spurs bench in 2020, local journalists compared those actions to the early Bums, although they failed to cite Valle's contribution to the chaotic 1976 'Basketbrawl' scene.²³⁶ The two events were approximately twenty-six years apart, and the outcomes highlighted the increased regulation of fan behaviour over that period. On the one hand, Valle attended Spurs games for another twenty-seven years and became one of the most recognisable fans ever, while the twenty-two-year-old Celtics fan received public ridicule and a lifetime ban from Boston's TD

²³² 'Spurs Baseline Bums Visit Alpha Home, Alpha Home, December 12, 2016, <https://www.alphahome.org/spurs-baseline-bums-visit-alpha-home/> (accessed April 21, 2023).

²³³ Roy Bragg, 'Austin Wants to Dance With Our MLS Date', *San Antonio Express-News*, October 17, 2017.

²³⁴ Gilbert Garcia, 'San Antonio Cultural Connection with the Spurs Goes Deep', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 6, 2019; Priscilla Aguirre, 'Spurs Baseline Bums Unveil 2020 Fiesta Medal', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 27, 2019.

²³⁵ 'Writers' Roundtable', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 6, 2019.

²³⁶ Mark Dunphy, 'What the Spurs and Celtics Said About a Boston Fan Throwing a Can on the Court', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 9, 2020; Mark Dunphy, 'Update: Fan Who Threw Can on the Court During Spurs-Celtic Game Banned for Life From Arena', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 9, 2020.

Garden.²³⁷ Stadium gentrification and increased regulations played a part here, as did contemporary observers' memories or imaginings of a time when fans played a more significant role in sports, and perhaps that appreciation detracted from the actions of Bums that would undoubtedly be considered inappropriate today, given contemporary sensibilities. Over fifty years, the behaviour of the Bums changed in response to increasing rules and regulations from both the league and franchise, as well as evolving societal attitudes towards fan behaviour amidst the rise of social and political conservatism across the U.S. Additionally, the number of former military and female Bums increased. The Bums' toned-down nature was perhaps essential to the group's survival, given that their actions in the early years of the franchise would have been deemed unacceptable and could have resulted in the groups' dissolution. The contemporary Bums have worked to distance themselves from the actions of previous generations and have established themselves as a positive community-focused cohort.

In March 2021, Spurs fans attended games for the first time since the outbreak of COVID-19. One of those fans was seventy-nine-year-old Navy veteran and Bum Phil Sloan, who approved of the safety precautions that the franchise had instituted.²³⁸ As a type of normalcy returned to the in-game experience in 2022, a local journalist compared the Spurs' early years to the present day, highlighting how average admission costs increased thirty-fold from 1976 while household income only tripled.²³⁹ Team and attendance struggles caused fears of a franchise relocation, and when majority owner Peter J. Holt tweeted to appease Spurs fans, he cited the Baseline Bums as an integral element in the Spurs' relationship with San Antonians.²⁴⁰ That relationship continued into 2023 when the franchise celebrated its fiftieth year in San Antonio, and a list of the fifty most important moments and people in Spurs history included the Bums.²⁴¹ The over half-century-long relationship between the Spurs and Bums cultivated an appreciation for

²³⁷ Mark Dunphy, 'Update: Fan Who Threw Can on the Court During Spurs-Celtic Game Banned for Life From Arena', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 9, 2020.

²³⁸ Madalyn Mendoza and Tom Orsborn, 'Entertainment; Fans Delighted to See Spurs in Person Again', *The Southside Reporter*, March 17, 2021.

²³⁹ Clint Davis, 'San Antonio Spurs: Then and Now', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 16, 2022; 'Money Income in 1976 of Families and Persons in the United States', United States Census Bureau, July 1978.

²⁴⁰ Clint Davis, 'San Antonio Spurs: Then and Now', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 16, 2022.

²⁴¹ Jeff McDonald, '50 for 50: Golden Moments', *San Antonio Express-News*, January 8, 2023.

professional basketball in Texas.²⁴² While all communities are conditional and temporal, the fact that theirs has endured speaks to the efforts of the people who have ensured its survival. That included those employed by the Spurs organisation and those recruited to join the supporters' group. Over time, the Baseline Bums became an integral part of the Spurs' identity, and they developed lasting relationships between themselves, team officials, and players. In the Spurs' first twenty years, before the game's hyper-commodification, Bums converged at HemisFair to support *their* team, experienced the most inclusive venue in franchise history, and acted as autonomous agents creating a persona for the media, a perception that has affected perspectives of Spurs fans ever since. Over the following years, league and organisational decisions changed the nature of the Bums as they became 'civilised' by regulation and the imposition of moral codes. Historically, eras of expression and rebellion are often followed by a conservative backlash and an urge to establish 'law and order', signs of which were obvious following the Spurs' multiple stadium moves, which decreased the Bums' influence on games, and their visibility.²⁴³ In some ways, the pacification of the Bums reflects broader societal transformations of the last half-century in the U.S. as the autonomy of residents and citizens has been reduced during a rekindling of far-right ideology unseen since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Bums of the past and present have expressed their support for the team inside the arena in various ways, just as they operated differently outside of it. Valle's departure as president highlighted the changing nature of who the Bums were and what was expected of them and illustrated the expendability of even the most ardent fans. The franchise's decisions were unsurprising, given that everyone (fans, players, coaches, executives, and staffers) in the sports industry are disposable. Over time, Bum demographics changed dramatically, as the previously young male-dominated group transformed into an older female-dominated one, which is an encouraging trend provided the historical exclusion women in sports have faced. In an almost Weberian fashion, the Bums evolved into a more rational bureaucratic structure that operated within a larger one (the Spurs organisation) and moved away from traditional and charismatic authority systems towards rational-legal authority,

²⁴² Michael Hall, 'How the San Antonio Spurs Made Texas Safe for Basketball', *Texas Monthly*, January 17, 2023.

²⁴³ Terence McArdle, 'The "Law and Order" Campaign that Won Richard Nixon the White House 50 Years Ago', *The Washington Post*, November 5, 2018.

as prescribed by the franchise.²⁴⁴ Despite their differences, over the past half-century, the Bums have supported the Spurs and fostered a community, actively using their fanhood for their own purposes. The Bums are, and were always a community, a collection not only of individuals but of friends and families, as spouses, nuclear families, and extended families often made up a significant portion of members. These fans demonstrated agency with their cultivation of moments of meaning, bonding, and cultural expressions that fostered a legacy. While pacification, alienation and gentrification happened progressively, at any one moment, whether that was one season or multiple decades, the community found collective inspiration in being a Bum and proudly touted the title to those who cared to look or listen. In a 2019 interview, Spurs fan Fred Carrasco declared that 'The Spurs mean everything; they are the heart of San Antonio' and there is no doubt that, despite his hyperbole, many San Antonians, particularly those who were Bums, shared this sentiment.²⁴⁵

This chapter illuminated the history of the Bums' membership, mission, activities, and demographics, how the group endured and evolved as an organisational staple for fifty years, and contributed to several thesis objectives which included producing a narrative to illustrate how the relationship between the franchise and fans has changed over time, how each party influenced the other's identity, and how perceptions of San Antonio were altered through the Bums' actions. This chapter's illustration of the Bums' change over time helped achieve this thesis' aim which was to examine the interplay between Spurs supporters and the franchise and how they generated and sustained Spurs fandom over time. Through Bum membership, hundreds of personal communities were developed, as fans created new relationships with fellow Bums; simultaneously, Bums attracted friends and family to support the team. The Bums have been a fulcrum of support for the Spurs and have influenced the outcome of games and perceptions of the franchise in San Antonio and beyond. However, over time, this community has been impacted by accelerated commodification, ticket inflation, stadium gentrification, and fan pacification and alienation. As shown through multiple examples above, most notably Valle, even those who were ardently committed to the team grew frustrated

²⁴⁴ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: A New Translation*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 344-387.

²⁴⁵ David Mandujano, 'Fans Say Spurs Are 'Heart' of San Antonio', *The Mesquite*, November 19, 2019 (accessed June 15, 2020).

and disillusioned by the Spurs. These happenings align with historical interpretations that show how sports franchises have disrupted fan communities and preyed upon city resources.²⁴⁶ Conversely, the contemporary Bums assisted the Spurs with their community care initiatives, which helped the franchise grow in professional prestige and further bonded them to some San Antonians.

²⁴⁶ Sean Dinces, *Bulls Markets: Chicago's Basketball Business and the New Inequality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 225; Sean Dinces, 'The Attrition of the Common Fan', *Social Science History* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 360; Ralph C. Wilcox et al., eds., *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Cultures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

Conclusion

While the relationship between fans and organisations has been studied in some detail, there are significant gaps in the historiography, not least with respect to the humanising of fans and to developing an understanding of how fan communities, real and imagined, have been created and sustained by North American sports franchises.¹ While other sport historians and sociologists have adopted Anderson's notion of the imagined community when examining fans, thanatological approaches were not utilised to inform their research objectives.² This thesis' application of death and dying and bereavement studies modifies the historiography and underscores how death cultivates the creation of stories, and how they are essential to community building. This blending of historical and sociopsychological approaches contributed to the aim and objectives of this work. From the outset, the aim of this thesis was to explore the historical antecedents surrounding the generation and sustainment of Spurs fandom and provide a new interpretation on the interplay between place, a sports organisation, and supporters. To achieve this, several objectives were established, each of which would demand the use of a different historical methodology and a novel set of sources. However, before these objectives could be established, a thorough review of the existing historiography was required which was fully covered in the thesis' first chapter. This collection of research informed the six thesis objectives. The first objective was to conceptualise and examine the evolution of an imagined community of fandom in sport and interpret its meaning within the broader context of San Antonio, which was fully achieved through the prosopographical analysis provided in chapter three. The second objective was to collect a diversity of sources to create a narrative illustrating how the relationship between the Spurs franchise and their local supporters has changed

¹ Ralph C. Wilcox et al., eds., *Sporting Dystopias: The Making and Meanings of Urban Sport Cultures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003); Sean Dinces, *Bulls Markets: Chicago's Basketball Business and the New Inequality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Nathan Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport*, (Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2018).

² Nathan Kalman-Lamb, *Game Misconduct: Injury, Fandom, and the Business of Sport*, (Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2018); Nathan Kalman-Lamb, 'Imagined Communities of Fandom: Sport, Spectatorship, Meaning and Alienation in Late Capitalism', *Sport in Society* (2020): 932-934; John Foot, 'How Italian Football Creates Italians: The 1982 World Cup, the 'Pertini Myth' and Italian National Identity', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33, no. 3 (2016): 341-358; John Harris, 'Cool Cymru, Rugby Union and an Imagined Community', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 27, no. 3/4 (May 2007): 151-162; David L. Andrews, Jacob Bustad, and Samuel Clevenger, 'National Sporting Pastimes, Spectacles of Sporting Otherness and American Imaginings, 1880-1920', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, no. 1-2 (2014): 224-249.

over time, which was accomplished through the archival research in chapter two, the examination of web cemeteries in chapter four, and the analysis of the Baseline Bums in chapter five. This thesis prioritised humanising Spurs supporters using intimate sources which was detailed in chapters three, four and five by utilising cyber obituaries and web cemeteries in combination with more traditional historical sources. Investigating how the Spurs and their supporters influenced one another's identities over time was another key objective and was addressed in chapters two, three, four and five. The archival research conducted in chapters two and five helped accomplish the thesis' remaining objectives which were to analyse how the Spurs and their supporters altered the perception of the city of San Antonio to locals and outsiders and allowed for the evaluation of the role the Spurs organisation has played in the San Antonio community over time.

Archival Investigations: Fifty Years of the Spurs in San Antonio

To accomplish the thesis objectives related to narrating the history of the Spurs franchise and its relationship to local supporters, investigating how the two parties influenced one another's identities and changed the perception of San Antonio along with evaluating the role the franchise has played in the community over time, a rigorous analysis of civic and newspaper archives was conducted and featured in chapter two of the thesis. Summarily, the archival investigations detailed how with its relocation from Dallas in 1973, the San Antonio Spurs basketball franchise began a twenty-six-year journey to a major championship in 1999. That could not have been achieved without the support of franchise executives, players, staffers, civic leaders, and dedicated fans. Although the team's fortunes fluctuated during those years, they never lost that support, even when the franchise struggled with on-court competitiveness and financial stability in the late 1980s. These difficult years contrasted with the team's success throughout the 1990s when Spurs fandom reached new heights. In the aftermath of the Spurs' first NBA Championship, tens of thousands of San Antonians took to the streets to celebrate, and a few days later, hundreds of thousands attended the team's river parade celebrations. Spurs executives rode this momentum into the November 1999 referendum, seeing residents approve of tax increases to raise \$120 million for new arena construction³ and the Spurs ranked first in league attendance over their remaining years in the

³ Jim Thomas, 'Voters Approve Arena For Spurs', *Daily Breeze*, November 4, 1999.

Alamodome.⁴ The confluence of talent that the organisation enjoyed following Duncan's arrival established the Spurs as an elite North American sports franchise through achieving five NBA championships, twenty-two straight playoff appearances, and increased global popularity, partly due to their embrace of international talent and culture. This era of unparalleled success brought stability to the Spurs community and redefined its identity. Gervin's tree metaphor for the greatest players in Spurs history seemed accurate, but over the fifty years that the team resided in San Antonio, investors, businesses, politicians, staffers, journalists, fans, and residents provided the requisite soil for the Spurs tree to flourish. San Antonians became more bonded to the franchise over time through team success and the organisation's cultivation of an image of community care. Collectively, over half a century, San Antonians and the Spurs forged an identity and a solid community but one that was not immune to fractures and uncertainty.

This archival research contextualised the franchise in San Antonio and the broader American basketball scene. Examining these archives was essential to understanding how the Spurs and their fans have interacted over the past fifty years, demonstrating their value as useful historical sources. Since the inception of the historical craft, practitioners have utilised such sources to develop new interpretations of the past and this thesis contributes to that ever-extending dialogue.⁵ Although archives were useful regarding this project, outside elements such as the COVID-19 pandemic impacted what work could be done and when. As the project progressed, the archives were unavailable for nearly two calendar years, which forced the adoption and analysis of other sources, including digital archives. Without having contextualised the Spurs in San Antonio through thorough archival investigations, this work would have been incomplete. The local newspapers such as the *San Antonio News*, *San Antonio Express*, *San Antonio Express-News*, and *San Antonio Light* provided the bulk of information regarding this section of thesis and helped achieve several respective objectives to accomplish the thesis' aim. Having laid out the foundation for how the relationship between the franchise and

⁴ Chris Foltz, *Bronchos to Spurs: Sports in San Antonio since 1888*, (San Antonio: Maverick Publishing Company, 2004), 112-113; 'NBA Attendance Report- 2001', ESPN, http://www.espn.com/nba/attendance/_/year/2001/order/false (accessed December 8, 2022).

⁵ Martin Johnes, 'Archives and Historians of Sport', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1784 and 1795.

San Antonians was generated and sustained over time a natural next step was to investigate fans more closely in the subsequent chapters.

Spurs Fandom, Cyber Obituaries, and Prosopography

As suggested by other practitioners, prosopography enabled the organisation of large amounts of data, allowed for the rigorous analysis of biographical information and facilitated the qualitative analyses of web cemeteries.⁶ Collecting and analysing nearly two thousand cyber obituaries unveiled the essential features of this fan community, which is significant, provided that biographical information on fans can be elusive. This methodology helped conceptualise and examine the imagined community of Spurs fandom, how the relationship between fans and the franchise changed over time and how the two parties influenced each other's identities which were all outlined objectives used to accomplish the thesis' aim. Cyber obituaries displayed identifying features of people's lives and how survivors remembered the deceased. The cultural value and function they provide made them suitable for this study affirming the assertion of scholars who previously demonstrated their utility.⁷ More importantly, these sources revealed the cultural attitudes of not only Spurs fans but of San Antonians more broadly. This approach also provided a pathway to explore broader inequities and disparities using the amassed biographical data that have implications far beyond sport. A prosopographical analysis of cyber obituaries offers historians a valuable methodology to investigate communities and societal trends, as demonstrated in this thesis' forensic analysis of various demographics, which both affirmed and complicated previous interpretations.

The racial and ethnic totals of Spurs fans demonstrated how minority groups were underrepresented in the prosopography and thus, probably, within the Spurs fan

⁶ Lawrence Stone, 'Prosopography', *Historical Studies Today* 100, no. 1 (Winter 1971): 63, 66, 46; Katharine Keats-Rohan, *Biography, Identity and Names: Understanding the Pursuit of the Individual in Prosopography* (Oxford, UK: UPR Linacre College, 2006), 140; Samantha-Jayne Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sport History Research: Biography, Collective Biography, and Prosopography', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1868; Dave Day, 'Swimming Natationists, Mistresses, and Matrons: Familial Influences on Female Careers in Victorian Britain', *The International Journal for the History of Sport* 35, no. 6 (2018); Lisa Taylor, 'The Women's Amateur Rowing Association 1923–1963: A Prosopographical Approach', *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (June 25, 2018): 307-330.

⁷ Janice Hume and Bonnie Bressers, 'Obituaries Online: New Connections with the Living-and the Dead', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 60, no. 3 (2009-2010): 267; Charles T. Clotfelter, 'Die-Hard Fans and the Ivory Tower's Ties that Bind*', *Social Science Quarterly* 96, no. 2 (2015): 381-399; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Last Words", *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2002): 30–36; Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb, 'The Portrayal of Librarians in Obituaries at the End of the Twentieth Century', *Library Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2004): 152–180.

community. Sport scholars and historians have illustrated how ethnic, external group, personal and team identities have impacted on spectatorship and consumer habits and these influences were clearly visible in the history of the Spurs, since, despite San Antonio's majority Latinx population, whites accounted for almost sixty per cent of fans.⁸ Latinx supporters were nearly forty-one per cent, and collectively, blacks, Asians, and indigenous persons accounted for less than two per cent. When compared to city census data, all of these nationally minoritized groups were underrepresented, which aligns with the conclusion of other researchers who have identified how fans of colour have been historically marginalised.⁹ Despite the various marketing strategies the Spurs employed to gather support from historically oppressed constituencies, the prosopography of cyber obituaries revealed an underrepresentation of them that either illustrates the limitations of the Legacy Memorial cyber obituary database or the historical exclusionary nature of sports fandoms. Although some historians have identified San Antonio as a progressive pocket in the Deep South, others have highlighted how historically black and Latinx individuals have been denied political, social, and cultural representation within the city, which may also partially explain their limited presence in the Spurs community.¹⁰

⁸ Jae-Pil Ha, Mary Humes, and T. Christopher Greenwell, 'Using Cultural Factors to Explore Sport Consumption Behaviors of Ethnic Minority Groups: The Case of Asians in the United States', *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* 17, no. 2 (2016): 130; Bob Heere and Jeffrey D. James, 'Sports Teams and Their Communities: Examining the Influence of External Group Identities on Team Identity', *Journal of Sport Management* 21 (2007): 331-332; K. Damon Aiken, Richard M. Campbell, and Eric C. Koch, 'Exploring the Relationship Between Team (as brand) Personality and Geographic Personality: Linking Consumer Perceptions of Sports Teams and Cities', *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* 15, no. 1 (2013): 8; Sean Brawley, "Can You Imagine the Shire Without the Sharks!?: Building the Community Capital of the Cronulla-Sutherland Rugby League Club- from 1967 to the Eve of Super League in 1996", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 3 (2012): 493; K. Damon Aiken, Richard M. Campbell, and Eric C. Koch, 'Exploring the Relationship Between Team (as brand) Personality and Geographic Personality: Linking Consumer Perceptions of Sports Teams and Cities', *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* 15, no. 1 (2013): 15; John Hughson, Clive Palmer, and Fiona Skillen, *The Role of Sports in the Formation of Personal Identities: Studies in Community Loyalties* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), 4.

⁹ Stefan Lawrence and Christian Davis, 'Fans for Diversity? A Critical Race Theory Analysis of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Supporters' Experiences of Football Fandom', *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 11, no. 4 (November 14, 2018): 709-710; Daniel Burdsey and Kuljit Randhawa, 'How Can Professional Football Club Create Welcoming and Inclusive Stadia for British Asian Fans?', *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* 4, no. 1 (December 14, 2011): 106; Katherine Lavelle, 'No Room for Racism: Restoration of Order in the NBA', *Communication & Sport* 4 no. 4 (2015): 426-427, 436; Timothy Piper, 'Where "Post-Race" Happens', *Moving Image* 18 no. 1 (Spring 2018): 20.

¹⁰ Char Miller, 'Streetscape Environmentalism: Floods, Social Justice, and Political Power in San Antonio, 1921-1974', *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 118, no. 2 (2014): 177; Char Miller, *San Antonio: A Tricentennial History*, (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2018), 72-77; Gabriela Gonzalez, *Redeeming La Raza: Transborder Modernity, Race, Respectability, and Rights* (New

Cyber obituaries made possible the geographical allocation of Spurs supporters around San Antonio, which facilitated an interrogation of median household incomes to explore whether finances were a significant barrier to Spurs fandom. The class status of fans affirmed the work of historians who have uncovered the economic segregation San Antonians have and continue to endure.¹¹ On the one hand, segregation and inequality undoubtedly exists within Spurs fandom. On the other hand, there lives a symbolic unity. Despite historical and contemporary forces, fans with limited economic means constituted a sizable portion of the prosopography. This suggests that poverty did not present an insurmountable barrier to being a Spurs fan and that individuals of various socioeconomic statuses, both deceased and survivors, placed importance on commemorating not just the passing of individuals but their identity as Spurs fans.

Similar to the historical exclusion that sports spectators have endured based on racial, ethnic and economic lines, gendered barriers have also been present and restricted women and girls from joining sport fan communities and the historiography on this trend is extensive.¹² While this author fully accepts the historical violence, toxic masculinity, racism, exploitation, and heterosexism within sporting communities as a fact, the thesis reveals an encouraging pattern for female participation in Spurs fandom, that has not been identified in other literature. The 817 female Spurs fans discovered accounted for forty-five per cent of the total in the prosopography, a substantial presence that did not reinforce notions of gendered exclusion. Female participation in Spurs fandom grew over time and, at best, represented significant social change, given that sports fan communities were

York: Oxford University Press, 2018); David Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Rodolfo Rosales, *The Illusion of Inclusion: The Untold Political Story of San Antonio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

¹¹ Christine M. Drennon, 'Social Relations Spatially Fixed: Construction and Maintenance of School Districts in San Antonio, Texas', *Geographical Review* 96, no. 4 (October 2006), 590-91; Christine Drennon, 'Economic Segregation in San Antonio: How We Got Here, is it Real?', *San Antonio Express-News*, December 23, 2017; Rebecca Walter, Nathan Foote, and Corey Sparks, 'Historic Roots of Modern Residential Segregation in a Southwestern Metropolis: San Antonio, Texas in 1910 and 2010', *Urban Science* 1, no. 2 (2017): 19.

¹² Svenja-Maria Mintert and Gertrud Pfister, 'The Female Vikings, a Women's Fan Group in Denmark: Formation and Development in the Context of Football and Fan Histories', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 31, no. 13 (July 2014), 1651-1652; Jimmy Sanderson and Kelly Gramlich, 'You Go Girl!': Twitter and Conversations About Sport Culture and Gender', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 33 no. 2 (2014): 113, 119-120; Katelyn Esmonde, Cheryl Cooky, and David L. Andrews, 'It's Supposed to be About the Love of the Game, Not the Love of Aaron Rodgers' Eyes': Challenging the Exclusions of Women Sports Fans', *Sociology of Sport* 32, no. 1 (2015): 23, 40-1

historically exclusionary to women and girls. In fact, some of the most well-known Spurs fans were women, such as the local celebrity Spurs Nuns, although it is always possible, of course, that obituary writers' biases or desires to express commonalities with the dead could have contributed to the large total of females visible in the data. This research has revealed how most women did not support the Spurs until adulthood, and it has complicated understandings of fan origins that have generally suggested that intrafamilial team support originated from the father.¹³ This inference opens the possibility that some of these women might have initiated Spurs fandom for their families or that their children might have motivated their affinity for the team. While these conclusions are speculative, the prosopography demonstrated that the Spurs played a significant role for dozens of older women towards the end or at the end of their lives. It may well be that the Spurs helped them find meaning and belonging after their outliving or separation from family and friends. Their fandom could have also struck against the monotony of their retirement or institutionalisation and spurred connections to neighbours or staff and residents at their assisted living facilities. Regardless of their respective motivation, cyber obituaries centred their Spurs fandom and complicated the notion of sports fandoms operating as male-hegemonic structures. Female fans have historically been less visible and underappreciated but represented a force within Spurs fandom, especially over recent decades, and this thesis highlighted their contributions.¹⁴ Though departed, these females' presence in Spurs fandom continues through their living cyber obituaries, which may well continue to generate and sustain the Spurs fan community as a result of their accessibility, optimistic renderings of the team, and desires of survivors to share a connection with the deceased.

Overall, most Spurs fans supported the team at an older age, thereby at least partially substantiating scholars' suggestions that sports fandom contributes to the

¹³ Robert Krulwich, 'How We Become Sports Fans: The Tyranny of Fathers', October 24, 2011, *National Public Radio*, <https://www.npr.org/sections/krulwich/2011/10/24/141649929/how-we-become-sports-fans-the-tyranny-of-fathers> (accessed June 15, 2022).

¹⁴ Svenja-Maria Mintert and Gertrud Pfister, 'The Female Vikings, a Women's Fan Group in Denmark: Formation and Development in the Context of Football and Fan Histories', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 31, no. 13 (July 2014): 1651-1652; Parts of this appeared in: David Galindo, 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family'', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (August 3, 2020): 670-691.

subjective well-being of older adults.¹⁵ Most commemorators mentioned a Spurs fan's marital status (93 per cent), which vastly outnumbered inclusions of religion, education, and politics. Married fans accounted for forty-seven per cent of Spurs supporters while twenty-eight per cent were widowed and three per cent were divorced, reflecting the age range noted above. Significantly, these findings facilitated the discovery of some women who followed the team to commemorate their deceased spouse and highlights how the imagined community of Spurs fandom was comprised of a multitude of personal communities.¹⁶ Given the historical anatomy of obituaries and religion's role in Western attitudes and beliefs on death, it was not surprising that seventy per cent of Spurs fan commemorations included their faith with forty-six per cent being Catholic, while twenty-three per cent were Protestant. Altogether, most commemorators said fans were religious, their age probably played some part in this, and most individuals therefore were participating in multiple imagined communities, religious and sporting included, and this thesis allowed for at least anecdotal coverage of how fandom and faith supported or challenged the other.¹⁷

Some studies of sports fans suggested they were uneducated, while others have struck against this narrative.¹⁸ The prosopographical data on Spurs fans could not conclusively support or refute these conclusions but provided space for speculation. Women nearly achieved as much proportionately which is another encouraging finding from this data and contributes to the sizeable historiography of how women

¹⁵ Yuhei Inoue et al., 'Enhancing Older Adults' Sense of Belonging and Subjective Well-Being Through Sport Game Attendance, Team Identification, and Emotional Support', *Journal of Aging and Health* 32 no. 7-8 (2019): 530-542; Wann et al., 'Applying the Team Identification- Social Psychological Health Model to older sport fans', *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 74 no. 4 (2011): 303-315.

¹⁶ Gertrude Mika, Obituary, June 2018; Kathleen Petty, 'Peggy Dickerson', *San Antonio Magazine*, January 2015, <https://www.sanantoniomag.com/peggy-dickerson/> (accessed April 21, 2023); Evelyn Richardson, Web Cemetery, February 24, 2017; 'Celebrating the Life of Evelyn Joyce Porter Richardson', True Vision Church, March 9, 2017, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph1289979/m1/3/zoom/?resolution=2&lat=1587&lon=750> (accessed April 21, 2023).

¹⁷ Rebecca Salinas, 'Cemetery Bans Spurs Decorations', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 16, 2014; 'Your Turn', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 29, 2003.

¹⁸ G.S. Földesi, 'Social and Demographic Characteristics of Hungarian Football Fans and their Motivations for Attending Matches,' *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 31 no. 4 (December 1996): 414-415; Lisa Lewis, *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1992); 21-24; Megan O'Neill, *Policing Football: Social Interaction and Negotiated Disorder* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 24.

in and beyond sporting communities have challenged traditional gender roles.¹⁹ The seven per cent of male Spurs fans that at least partially owned and operated a small business reflected American societal values going back centuries and underscores how ‘small businesses are the lifeblood’ of the U.S. economy.²⁰ Notions of a relentless work ethic, self-determinism, and entrepreneurial spirit that developed from eighteenth-century roots facilitated the growth of small businesses, which have been an essential economic, social, and cultural element to the American experience.²¹ Unsurprisingly, the jobs of female Spurs fans highlighted the gendered spheres of the twentieth-century U.S., as twenty per cent of women worked in education or healthcare. While the gendered nature of occupations reflected the limitations historically placed on women, seventy-two per cent of female obituary writers decided to include the deceased’s occupation, highlighting how attitudes towards women in the workforce have changed over time. Fan occupations were dominated by those who worked for, or with, the U.S. military. The substantial link to the military in the cyber obituaries highlighted what work of the dead commemorators valued, and none appeared as important as service to country. These deep military connections illuminate the prevalence of another imagined community in the form of the nation that interconnected with Spurs fandom. The imagined community of the nation was a strong influence in Spurs fans’ lives and highlights how these entities complement and compete, as shown through Spurs marketers’ historical attempts to target this external group identity through various monikers, promotions, and merchandise.²²

¹⁹ Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Dave Day, ‘Swimming Natationists, Mistresses, and Matrons: Familial Influences on Female Careers in Victorian Britain’, *The International Journal for the History of Sport* 35, no. 6 (2018): 494-510; Lisa Taylor, ‘The Women’s Amateur Rowing Association 1923–1963: A Prosopographical Approach’, *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (2018): 307-330.

²⁰ Office of Advocacy, ‘Small Businesses Generate 44 Percent of U.S. Economic Activity’, U.S. Small Business Administration, January 30, 2019, <https://advocacy.sba.gov/2019/01/30/small-businesses-generate-44-percent-of-u-s-economic-activity/> (accessed January 4, 2022); J.D. Harrison, ‘The Decline of American Entrepreneurship- in Five Charts’, *The Washington Post*, February 12, 2015.

²¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1835), 684.

²² Mendoza, ‘Spurs Unveil “City Edition” Jersey, and Some Fans are Pissed’, *San Antonio Express-News*, December 30, 2017; Laurie Jasinski and Martin Kohout, ‘San Antonio Spurs’, Texas State Historical Association Handbook of Texas, August 11, 2021, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/san-antonio-spurs> (accessed January 4, 2022); ‘San Antonio Captures Team’s First NBA Championship; Fans Salute Spurs In City Parade’, *Jet*, July 12, 1999, 51, ; Travis Hale, ‘Remember The Alamo! – And Remember Tim Duncan’, *The Cauldron*, May 13, 2016,); Dave Zirin, ‘Gregg Popovich: ‘The System Has to Change,’ *The Nation*, June 1, 2020.

Prosopography demonstrated the existence of Spurs fandom and facilitated a rigorous analysis of its characteristics within the context of the historic racial and economic segregation in San Antonio, alongside other regional and national trends. This approach allowed for uncovering the extremes of Spurs fandom and the cultural and societal values of San Antonians. According to this research, this community was established and sustained over time through sports marketing, friendships, intrafamilial fanhood and commemoration. As Stone suggests, prosopography proved a useful tool when dealing with such large numbers and revealed the networks of sociopsychological bonds of fans that produce the Spurs fandom 'universe'.²³ Collectively, obituaries revealed who fans were and what their community valued in a way previously unseen in the historiography confirming the value of the method.²⁴ Without relying on prosopography as a foundational tool, a holistic understanding of Spurs fandom and its operation within San Antonio at a macrosocial level would not have been attainable. Recording biographical information into the dataset was simple but time-consuming. The Legacy Memorial database's usability increased the efficiency of the process compared with a physical collection but was limited in terms of the range of people discoverable. While this may seem a detriment, it provided a manageable scope (death dates from 2001-2018) for this project that otherwise may have grown too large. Naturally, this method reduced the significance of individual experiences and stories and did not allow for the complete humanisation of supporters, which was why a mixed-methods approach was adopted. Collectively, these fans represented the imagined community known as the 'Spurs Family.' Upon closer examination of people within this group, a multitude of subset personal communities were uncovered that highlighted this fandom's multifaceted, interactional, intergenerational and ever-changing nature. So, the utility of prosopography is demonstrated as an end of itself, and the start of another, and seems an appropriate place to begin for any historian attempting to understand a community on a macro level.

²³ Lawrence Stone, 'Prosopography', *Historical Studies Today* 100, no. 1 (1971): 63, 66 and 46.

²⁴ Katharine Keats-Rohan, *Biography, Identity and Names: Understanding the Pursuit of the Individual in Prosopography* (Oxford, UK: UPR Linacre College, 2006), 140; Samantha-Jayne Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sport History Research: Biography, Collective Biography, and Prosopography', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1868; Dave Day, 'Swimming Natationists, Mistresses, and Matrons: Familial Influences on Female Careers in Victorian Britain', *The International Journal for the History of Sport* 35, no. 6 (2018): 494-510; Lisa Taylor, 'The Women's Amateur Rowing Association 1923-1963: A Prosopographical Approach', *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (2018): 307-330; Matthew L. Jockers, *Microanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary Theory* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 26.

Spurs Fandom in Web Cemeteries

From the prosopography, dozens of web cemeteries were closely examined due to their explicit or extensive inclusion of the Spurs to produce a qualitative analysis to accomplish a few thesis objectives. In doing so, this methodology revealed the numerous subsets of personal communities within the larger imagined community of Spurs fandom. This approach diversified the sources used to illustrate how the relationship between the Spurs and its supporters changed over time, while also humanising fans and uncovering identity formation at the personal level, all of which were key objectives of this thesis and limited in the historiography despite a few critical contributions.²⁵ Although web cemeteries have been used in thanatological research, they have not been used by historians of sport, or of any variety for that matter. This is the first critical contribution in providing historians an innovative approach to understanding the lived experience of ordinary people of the modern era. Through web cemeteries we can also observe how fandom can be used as a tool to enhance communities and to cope with bereavement, further demonstrating their value to historical research.²⁶ These sources countered the impersonal deficiencies of prosopography, presented fans as multifaceted people, and promoted, produced, and prolonged social relationships. The historical accuracy of these public sources is sometimes questionable, but they function to shape and share stories, aid the bereaved, and resist oblivion for the deceased. Web cemeteries represent how ordinary people and new technologies democratised obituaries through the published embrace of persons previously deemed unworthy of public commemoration. For survivors, web cemeteries help reduce social isolation and provide a platform for personal expression and community building. Collectively, these ingredients cultivate community. Web cemeteries revealed intrafamilial and intergenerational Spurs fandom and the deceased's personal

²⁵ Marci D. Cottingham, 'Interaction Ritual Theory and Sports Fans: Emotion, Symbols, and Solidarity', *Sociology of Sport* 29 (2012): 168-185; Daniel Nathan, *Rooting for the Home Team: Sport, Community, and Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); John Hughson, Clive Palmer, and Fiona Skillen, *The Role of Sports in the Formation of Personal Identities: Studies in Community Loyalties* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012); Adam Winkel, 'National Dissonance: The Copa Del Rey Soccer Final as a Site of Political Performance', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 1-2 (2020): 135-154.

²⁶ Amanda Herbert, 'Queer Intimacy: Speaking with the Dead in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Gender & History* 31, no. 1 (March 2019): 25-26; Pamela Roberts, 'The Living and the Dead: Community in the Virtual Cemetery', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (2004): 57-76; Brian de Vries and Judy Rutherford, 'Memorializing Loved Ones on the World Wide Web', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (2004): 5-26.

communities. Survivors coped with loss by reflecting in guestbooks, and as these reflections demonstrate, they found solace in following the Spurs. Moreover, the ongoing visits and contributions to the cemetery by commemorators several years after its publication highlight the unique nature of these sources, offering a dynamic and dialogic window into the human experience unlike any other historical documents.

Web cemeteries facilitated the discovery of personal stories of people such as Logan Lott and Gabriel Quintanilla who used their fandom to cope with losing their parents. Intrafamilial team support was discovered amongst dozens of families including the Galindos, Martinezes, Mikas, Munozes, and Obergs to name a few. Analysing these web cemeteries elaborated on and modified the historiography on intrafamilial fandom and affirmed the work of researchers who have noted that an individual's personal community begins with the family and that family members often influence the entry of loved ones into various communities such as sports fandom.²⁷

More broadly, web cemeteries illustrated how survivors coped with untimely deaths. An exceptional example was that Jade Herrick. Her web cemetery's popularity was due to her death at the age of fifteen and how family and friends posted multiple times over several years. Many entries were substantial, extending to nearly 3,000 words. The posts Herrick's survivors shared were often in conversation with other guestbook entries and underscored how these sources were dialogic, motivated storytelling, comforted the bereaved, and facilitated community building. Herrick's mother's guestbook posts over several years displayed bereavement's complicated and evolving nature as she expressed disbelief, anger, sadness, nostalgia, joy, and acceptance. Angelina Arriaga's mother also displayed such emotions in multiple posts over seven years. Several guestbook contributors commented on Arriaga's

²⁷ Ray Pahl, 'Are All Communities Communities of the Mind?', *The Sociological Review* 53, no. 4 (November 2005): 634, 623, 637; Katrina Koch and Daniel L. Wann, 'Team Identification and Sport Fandom: Gender Differences in Relationship-Based and Recognition-Based Perceived Antecedents', *Journal of Sport Behavior* 39, no. 3 (2016): 278-279, 295; Richard Giulianotti, 'Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs: A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football', *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 26, no. 1 (February 2002): 25-46; Robert Krulwich, 'How We Become Sports Fans: The Tyranny of Fathers', October 24, 2011, *National Public Radio*, <https://www.npr.org/sections/krulwich/2011/10/24/141649929/how-we-become-sports-fans-the-tyranny-of-fathers> (accessed June 15, 2022); Erin Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 1-8.

Spurs fandom, but her uncle's post elaborated on how the two bonded over the team and how he dreaded experiencing Spurs moments without her. How Arriaga's uncle coped was contrasted with Tyler Green's best friend's tactics. Green's untimely death at twenty-four years of age led to eighty-three guestbook entries, and the posts from his wife and best friend elaborated on Green's affinity for the Spurs. Green's best friend submitted a second guestbook entry one month after Green's passing following the Spurs' game five win in the 2005 NBA Finals. This post revealed how Green and his friend's (para)social relationship continued. For his survivor, Green and the Spurs were inseparable, and he was comforted by celebrating the Spurs' victory in his best friend's web cemetery. These examples elucidated how survivors used their fandom to cope with loss and confirmed the assertions of other researchers who contended that these digital spaces provide a place for healing, enhance relationships, and facilitate community building through the embrace of vulnerability, storytelling, reflection, and introspection.²⁸ Therefore, fans' membership into the Spurs fan community along with their commemorations enhanced relationships, albeit in different forms (social/parasocial).

The discovery of web cemeteries of fans with disabilities complicated understandings of who Spurs fans were and revealed again familial and multigenerational fanhood. These sources also unveiled numerous communities that intersected with that of the Spurs including the church and local advocacy organisations. Steven Cox, Steven Higby, Karen Dorsey, and Anthony Barron lived with intellectual disabilities but were supported through various organisations and a personal community within Spurs fandom. Most of these fans joined the San Antonio Association for Retarded Citizens, local church groups, and competed in the Special Olympics. Other fans lived with physical disabilities due to injury and disease, and their web cemeteries revealed their Spurs fandom and how survivors used their shared their affinity for the team to deal with bereavement. In these web cemeteries, commemorators contended that these folks were not limited to their disability and lived meaningful lives. A close analysis of these commemorations allowed for the inclusion of those with disabilities in this thesis and, more broadly, into a field that has historically excluded them.

²⁸ Pamela Roberts, 'The Living and the Dead: Community in the Virtual Cemetery', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (2004): 57; Brian de Vries and Judy Rutherford, 'Memorializing Loved Ones on the World Wide Web', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (2004): 23-24.

Some gerontological studies suggest that older people's sports fandom supports their emotional well-being,²⁹ and this was observed through numerous web cemeteries of older female Spurs fans, a sizeable contingent whose role in the Spurs fan community increased over time. Through researching fans such as Irma Lewis, Helen McLeod, Janet Reich, Candelaria Hopper and Aileen Potter we see how older women used their fandom to bond with peers and family. The web cemeteries of Sisters Eileen Gurecky, Maria de la Encarnacion Martinez, Ella Heladia Garcia, Maria de luz Ortega and Rosalba Garcia exposed how deeply Spurs fandom had affected the local sisterhood. Collectively, the fact that these women supported the Spurs later in life highlighted their multifaceted and evolving nature; their presence as a force within the community of supporters challenged their historical exclusion in the historiography of sports fandom and raises some interesting possibilities for future research.

Web cemeteries revealed significant military links and some people became Spurs fans through extending their personal networks when their service sent them to San Antonio. The web cemeteries of Dudley Roquemore, Lee Roquemore, Alice Johnson, and Thomas Davis revealed how the military and Spurs fandom brought them together. The Roquemore's guestbook entries in Davis' web cemetery revealed a microsocial world in which people supported each other through bereavement and shared the positive Spurs memories they experienced with the dead to commemorate them. The web cemeteries of Alfred Trafford Jr., John Campbell Jr., and James Cobb Sr. also illustrated the deep military connections within Spurs fandom. Spurs fandom was a both a friend and family affair and the web cemeteries of Raul Gutierrez, John Tabak, and Virginia Wampler showcased how fans befriended each other aboard the Spurs Bus and revealed the multifaceted nature of personal relationships within Spurs fandom, as well as how imagined communities could become tactile. For example, Virginia Wampler accepted and loved her lesbian daughter and partner despite her religious convictions, and the three used the Spurs to strengthen their relationship through shared experiences.

²⁹ Yuhei Inoue et al., 'Enhancing Older Adults' Sense of Belonging and Subjective Well-Being Through Sport Game Attendance, Team Identification, and Emotional Support', *Journal of Aging and Health* 32 no. 7-8 (2019): 530-542; Wann et al., 'Applying the Team Identification- Social Psychological Health Model to older sport fans', *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 74 no. 4 (2011): 303-315.

Friendships were also multifaceted and not contingent upon Spurs fandom, as shown through the over thirty-year friendship between Joseph Moran and Julie Soto Villarreal. The commemorators of Arnulfo Martinez Jr. and Charles Ebrom, who recounted Spurs experiences shared with the deceased, emphasised how people used their fandom to enhance a relationship with the living and prolong one with the dead supporting the work of psychologists who suggest that these imagined relationships can improve a person's self-esteem and help them cope with terror management- the fear of death.³⁰

The web cemeteries of influential Spurs supporters such as the McCombs, Pitluk, and Coleman families revealed how the franchise impacted on them and how their actions affected other San Antonians. Examining web cemeteries from these 'big names' in Spurs history complemented the subaltern history of fans. Although their economic means and city-wide influence dwarfed those of ordinary supporters, their commemorations comprised similar messaging that asserted their Spurs fandom. Their survivors valued the work they did for the franchise and how they had contributed to a collective civic identity. Similarly, commemorators for a long-time Spurs usher, Socorro Acuna, shared how they befriended her at games and praised the services she provided. Although her contribution may have been less influential than those of the McCombs, Pitlucks, and Colemans, for her family and friends, she made a significant impression on their interpretation of the franchise. Altogether, survivors valued their work and relationship with the Spurs. These examples reinforce data collected from the cyber obituaries suggesting that fans came from various socioeconomic backgrounds.

This novel work with web cemeteries underscored their value in historical research as they facilitated the humanisation of people, the discovery of personal communities within the larger imagined community of Spurs fandom, and the understanding that sports fandom can be used to enhance relationships and cope with bereavement. The web cemeteries of Spurs fans displayed how death cultivated the creation of stories and how those experiences and memories contributed to community building. These findings support the work of thanatologists

³⁰ Shane M. Semmler, 'The Existential Function of Parasocial Relationship Interaction', in Lindsey A. Harvell and Gwendelyn S. Nisbett, *Denying Death: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Terror Management Theory*, (New York, Routledge, 2016), 90-91.

who have demonstrated the value of these sources and how they can be used to improve understandings of the human experience while also diversifying such contributions by exploring how sports fandom specifically plays a part in the bereavement process and (para)social relationships.³¹ While valuable, their hagiographic nature is something for researchers to flag and it is rather necessary to use these in combination with other sources to craft historical interpretation given their limitations in depth, breadth, and accuracy.

A Baseline Bums Community

To address four primary objectives of the thesis, a considerable amount of research was undertaken into a particular fan group who established a physical community to complement their membership of a wider, imagined community of fans. Spurs executives, staffers, and those they recruited in 1973 deliberately created the Spurs official supporters' group, the Baseline Bums, to provide a focal point for their fans. Over the next half-century, Bums challenged and acquiesced to franchise hegemony, used their membership to create and enhance relationships, and cultivated an idiosyncratic fan culture and community. During the franchise's infancy in the ABA, the Spurs and the league struggled to control Bum behaviour and, through various actions that live in Spurs lore, such as the avocados for Brown incident or 'Big George's Miracle Run,' the Bums established themselves as a force within the franchise and the ABA. The confluence of franchise fragility, ardent Bum support, and relationships developed between Bums, staffers, and players contributed to the supporters' group and to the Spurs' ongoing viability, which aligns with the historiography surrounding other contemporary North American professional supporters' groups who showed fanatical levels of devotion.³² Only eighteen Baseline Bums were discovered because of the prosopographical research. Of this small cohort of extreme Spurs fans, most were men (14), white

³¹ Amanda Herbert, 'Queer Intimacy: Speaking with the Dead in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Gender & History* 31, no. 1 (March 2019): 25-26; Pamela Roberts, 'The Living and the Dead: Community in the Virtual Cemetery', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (2004): 57-76; Brian de Vries and Judy Rutherford, 'Memorializing Loved Ones on the World Wide Web', *OMEGA- Journal of Death and Dying* 49, no. 1 (2004): 5-26; Shane M. Semmler, 'The Existential Function of Parasocial Relationship Interaction', in Lindsey A. Harvell and Gwendelyn S. Nisbett, *Denying Death: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Terror Management Theory*, (New York, Routledge, 2016), chapter 7.

³² Andrew Linden, 'Blue-Collar Identity and the "Culture of Losing": Cleveland and the "Save Our Browns" Campaign,' *Journal of Sport History* 42 no.3 (Fall 2015): 340–360; Peter Nash, *Boston's Royal Rooters* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing), 2005.

(11), and married (9). All were born before 1970, lived an average of sixty-seven years, and at least two joined the supporters' group in their inaugural season. Unlike season ticket holders, most Bums resided in lower-income San Antonio zip codes. This and their lower educational attainment and occupations indicated they may have primarily come from the city's working class. A third were military veterans; others worked in the service industry, education, human resources, automotive repair, and telecommunications. Collectively, the cyber obituaries of Baseline Bums mirrored the characteristics discovered through archival research, and their commemorations reinforced how their Spurs fandom was an identifying feature of their life. However, their fandom was not the entirety of their existence, and a closer examination of Baseline Bum web cemeteries demonstrated that these people were complicated and multifaceted.

The Bums' appearance as a powerful fan group became a matter of public record after the Spurs' admission into the NBA in 1976, after which national sportswriters quickly acknowledged the Bums' avid support of the Spurs, their indulgence in alcohol, and their disorderly behaviour.³³ Journalists subsequently explained how they had developed a more bureaucratic organisation, and early Bum leaders such as Richard Elizondo, Rudy Hettler, and George Valle appeared in the press. These men represented the typical membership of the group in its early years, as the majority were male and working class.³⁴ Throughout the early 1980s, sportswriters suggested that the Bums were the 'most ill-mannered,' 'worst behaved,' and 'most unruly' American sports fans and various Bums' antics made regional and national headlines, including their treatment of opposing players and coaches and the unique fan culture they established through ceremonies and rituals.³⁵ During their first few

³³ Paul Attner, 'Crowd Becomes 6th Man at HemisFair', *Washington Post*, April 18, 1978; Bruce Newman, 'Best Team You've Never Seen: The Eyes of San Antonio May Be Upon the High-Ridin' Spurs, but Few Others' Are', *Sports Illustrated*, March 8, 1982.

³⁴ Parts of this appeared in, David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993', *Journal of Sport History* 49, no 1. 2022): 37-52; Terry Frei, 'Spurs' Baseline Bums Just 120 Pro Basketball Fans Having Fun', *Denver Post*, April 28, 1985; Bruce Newman, "Best Team You've Never Seen: The Eyes of San Antonio May Be Upon the High-Ridin' Spurs, but Few Others' Are," *Sports Illustrated*, March 8, 1982, ; Dan Balz, "Bums' Rush to the Aid of their Spurs: The Bums Fan the Fires in San Antonio", *Washington Post*, May 13, 1983; 'CBS Segment on The Baseline Bums (1983 Playoffs)', video, YouTube, narrated by Pat O'Brien, 1983, accessed June 15, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBlt90YneOU>.

³⁵ 'New York May be Fun City to Some, but...', *Boston Globe*, December 26, 1980; Terry Frei, 'Spurs' Baseline Bums Just 120 Pro Basketball Fans Having Fun', *Denver Post*, April 28, 1985; Paul Attner, 'Crowd Becomes 6th Man at HemisFair', *Washington Post*, April 18, 1978; Tom Orsborn, 'HemisFair Arena Memories' *San Antonio Express-News*, April 9, 2017; 'Jury says Celtics' Bird Acted in Self-

decades, journalists and historians contended that the Bums cultivated an appreciation for basketball in Texas, especially among Mexican Americans, and that they had become a significant San Antonio institution with Bums and players befriending one another and the Bums establishing themselves as the Spurs' most recognisable representatives.³⁶ The autonomy and outlandish antics of the Bums dissipated throughout the 1990s as the franchise and league moved to control fan behaviour.

Following the team's move from HemisFair Arena into the Alamodome, the Bums' influence greatly diminished, and some members struggled to cope with the increased cost of their favourite pastime. Despite this decline, long-time Bums such as Valle continued to provide media commentary on team happenings, and the Bum Marilyn Durbin was commemorated in the press following her death.³⁷ Throughout the 1990s, the Bums continued annual traditions such as their spring picnic, and sportswriters from outside San Antonio regularly interviewed members to gain insight into the team and their fans.³⁸ Valle's invitation to Gervin's Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame induction ceremony in 1996 and the Bums' central presence at the city's celebratory 'George Gervin Day' highlighted a fan-player relationship that spanned multiple decades and included fraternisations beyond Spurs events.³⁹

Defense', *San Antonio Express-News*, September 18, 1981; Bruce Newman, 'Best Team You've Never Seen: The Eyes of San Antonio May Be Upon the High-Ridin' Spurs, but Few Others' Are', *Sports Illustrated*, March 8, 1982.; Mitch Chortkoff, 'Pat Riley Questions Officials', *Daily Breeze*, April 22, 1986; Angelo Cataldi, 'Celt Crowd Makes it Easier for Dailey, For One Night', *Providence Journal*, December 23, 1982; Terry Frei, 'Spurs' Baseline Bums Just 120 Pro Basketball Fans Having Fun', *Denver Post*, April 28, 1985; Mark Heisler, 'Big-Hair Days', *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2003; Mark Heisler, 'Big-Hair Days', *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2003; 'Germans Blamed for New Soccer Riot-Mayhem in the Streets of Dusseldorf', *The Times*, June 16, 1988; 'Carson Trying to Keep the Brown Afloat- The NFL', *Daily News of Los Angeles*, October 2, 1990.

³⁶ Peter Applebome, 'Basket Case: Roundball and Mass Hysteria- No Place but San Antonio', *Texas Monthly Magazine*, December 1982, 124; Dan Balz, 'Bums' Rush to the Aid of their Spurs: The Bums Fan the Fires in San Antonio', *Washington Post*, May 13, 1983; Frank Andre Guridy, *The Sports Revolution: How Texas Changed the Culture of American Athletics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 259-301; Johnny Ludden, 'Followers' Memories of Iceman Remain Warm Ones', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 7, 1996.

³⁷ Jerry Briggs, 'Spurs Fans Split on What Changes Should Be Made', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 18, 1994; 'Fanstand', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 28, 1995; Kevin O'Keeffe, 'Could Browns' Run for Dough Send Spurs Elsewhere?', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 8, 1995.

³⁸ Al Carter, 'Friendly Rivalry- Houston, San Antonio Savor 1st NBA Shootout', *Dallas Morning News*, May 28, 1995; Thaddeus Herrick, 'Spurs' Defeat Deflates San Antonio- Yet Again', *Houston Chronicle*, June 3, 1995; Kevin O' Keeffe, 'Spurs' McDermott May Soon be Out as Chairman', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 17, 1996.

³⁹ Johnny Ludden, 'Iceman Not Likely to Melt During Day in Sun', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 19, 1996; Johnny Ludden, 'Followers' Memories of Iceman Remain Warm Ones', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 7, 1996; Cary Clack, 'Iceman Cometh for Honors on River', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 24, 1996; Lewis Stroud, Phone interview to David Galindo, May 5, 2023; Victor

Although the 1998 NBA lockout frustrated many Bums, they celebrated the team's subsequent 1999 championship success and, as San Antonians observed previously unseen levels of Spurs fandom being demonstrated across the city, the Bums received widespread national media coverage.⁴⁰ The franchise showed its appreciation for the Bum's community by reserving a barge for them in the organisation's championship river parade in front of hundreds of thousands through downtown San Antonio.⁴¹ During the series and celebrations, Bums shared how the team had captivated and inspired them, and how the group had brought people together.⁴² These personal communities, established by Bums through their shared fandom, were robust, and they needed to be since another venue move, ticket inflation, stadium gentrification, and increased franchise surveillance alienated some of their long-time members.

The team's move into the SBC Center in 2002 and the franchise's increased control of the group transformed the Bums and their leadership. The Bums' early autonomy from the Spurs allowed them to influence game outcomes and fraternise with players, opponents, and officials. However, after each move, that influence and those relationships dissipated. Spurs officials modified the group's mission, appointed new leadership, and further regulated their behaviour to promulgate Bookbinder's vision for the franchise.⁴³ As the Spurs experienced unparalleled

Cervantes, Phone interview to David Galindo, May 11, 2023; Mark Lessing, Phone interview to David Galindo, May 8, 2023; Cary Clack, 'Iceman Cometh for Honors on River', *San Antonio Express-News*, May 24, 1996.

⁴⁰ Johnny Ludden, 'How to Stay Busy Without the Spurs', *San Antonio Express-News*, November 1, 1998; Katy Muldoon, 'Spurs Fans Pump Up the Volume', *The Oregonian*, May 30, 1999; Richie Whitt, 'Two for the Show- Both Finalists Have Karma, but Spurs Have the Towers', *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 13, 1999; Mitch Lawrence, 'Spurs of the Moment- San Antonio's New Stars Celebrate Wacky History', *New York Daily News*, June 13, 1999; Dave Goldinger & Frank Isola, 'Ewing Leads Charge into Texas', *New York Daily News*, June 16, 1999; Tom Enuld, 'Career Path Take Schuler From Oak Creek to Finals', *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, June 20, 1999; Thaddeus Herrick, 'NBA Title May City On', *Houston Chronicle*, June 13, 1999; Christian Davenport, 'Celebrating All Things Spurs- Joy Over Team's Success Unites Fans of All Types', *Austin American-Statesman*, June 16, 1999.

⁴¹ Carmina Danini, 'San Antonio Celebrates As Only It Can', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 28, 1999.

⁴² Christian Davenport, 'Celebrating All Things Spurs- Joy Over Team's Success Unites Fans of All Types', *Austin American-Statesman*, June 16, 1999.

⁴³ Mark Heisler, 'Big-Hair Days', *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2003; "Get Rowdy with the Baseline Bums," AARP, last modified October 18, 2016, <https://local.aarp.org/news/get-rowdy-with-the-baseline-bums-tx-2017-10-12.html> (accessed April 30, 2021); Melissa Rohlin, "Baseline Bums Leave Taunting Ways a Spurs Games in Past," *San Antonio Express-News*, April 26, 2016; Parts of this appeared in, David Galindo, 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993', *Journal of Sport History* 49, no 1. 2022): 37-52; Tom Orsborn, 'It's All Bums- The Spurs' Venerable Fans Will All Be Together in the New SBC Center', *San Antonio Express-News*,

success during Duncan's prime, some Bums like Valle grew disenchanted with the franchise. Although Valle's relationships with former players, staffers, and other fans continued, he could not embrace the franchise as he had previously.⁴⁴ Valle stepped down as Bums president due to rising costs and a disagreement with a Spurs executive. Other Bums remained, and recruits joined and bonded over their Baseline Bum membership. Examples included but were not limited to spouses Wil and Gloria Drash and their friends Cheryl Haynes and Iris Trevino, friends Al Vasquez and Mike Brown, the Wampler and Oberg families, and friends Peggy Dickerson and Evelyn Richardson. These pre-existing and newly formed personal communities were enhanced by Bum membership. Often, these fans gravitated towards the Spurs as a form of commemoration for a loved one or continued their support of the team in honour of the deceased. As women began to dominate the supporters' group, their mission changed as they began to operate as a community outreach wing of the franchise. The growing role of women in sports fandom has been displayed by some historians and this contribution elaborates on those discussions by introducing a unique group of supporters previously unseen in the historiography. While some have traced the evolution of some women fan groups, they have not done so through the various methods and sources adopted here and have not revealed how the death of a loved one at least partially inspired their allegiance to a team.⁴⁵

In some ways, Valle represented who the Bums originally were. He was a working-class Mexican American sports fan who embraced a new team and valued the

October 16, 2002; Scott Huddleston, 'Then & Now- What In an Arena?- Spurs' Original S.A. Venue had its Good and Bad Points', *San Antonio Express-News*, June 22, 2003; San Antonio Spurs Baseline Bums, Legal Type Stuff- Bylaws, <https://sabaselinebums.tripod.com/id6.html> (accessed April 21, 2023); Scott Huddleston, 'Spurs Fans Will Face "Charter Fee" Charge for Best Seats', *San Antonio Express-News*, February 4, 2001; Macarena Hernandez, 'Fans Enjoy Time and Tony Show', *San Antonio Express-News*, April 21, 2002; San Antonio Spurs Baseline Bums, Membership Information, <https://sabaselinebums.tripod.com/id100.html> (accessed April 21, 2023).

⁴⁴ George Valle, 'George's Post', Facebook, November 11, 2010, <https://www.facebook.com/george.valle>; (accessed January 7, 2024); George Valle, 'George's Post', Facebook, June 6, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/george.valle> (accessed January 7, 2024); Victor Cervantes, Phone interview to David Galindo, May 11, 2023; Mark Lessing, Phone interview to David Galindo, May 8, 2023.

⁴⁵ Erin Tarver, *The I in Team: Sports Fandom and the Reproduction of Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Svenja-Maria Mintert and Gertrud Pfister, 'The Female Vikings, a Women's Fan Group in Denmark: Formation and Development in the Context of Football and Fan Histories', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 31, no. 13 (July 2014): 1639-1655; Katelyn Esmonde et al., 'It's Supposed to be About the Love of the Game, not the Love of Aaron Rodgers' Eyes: Challenging the Exclusions of Women Sports Fans', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 32, no.1 (2015): 22-48.

friendships that followed. It was important to outline Valle's biography in some detail to complement the prosopography and collective biographies of other chapters and highlights how an individual's story can represent broader historical trends. Sport historians have detailed how these biographical methods can be used apart and in combination to produce meaningful histories and this thesis elaborates on their work.⁴⁶ Valle's death in 2015 ushered in commemorations from the franchise, players, Bums, and more. Although he grew disillusioned with the franchise, his support of the Spurs was an identifying feature of his life and other Bums. Newspaper articles and web cemeteries of members highlighted how this group enhanced and expanded personal communities. Although the values and members of the Bums changed over time, and their actions became increasingly controlled, members valued their commitment to the Spurs and Bums. The Baseline Bums represented another community within the larger imagined community of Spurs fandom, and Bums' personal communities were enhanced, expanded, and sustained through a shared affinity for the team. The discovery of this authentic community complicates narratives surrounding imagined communities of fandom in sport by revealing how, upon closer examination, the larger imagined entity is comprised of a multitude of smaller communities that operate as genuine collectives. However, that does not mean this community and the larger imagined 'Spurs Family' were not immune to fractures and alienation, following the commodification of professional sport that resulted in stadium gentrification and increased fan control over the last fifty years, which aligns with the assertions of historians who identified such similar patterns in other American cities.⁴⁷

Chapter five's analysis of periodicals and web cemeteries helped to narrate the history of the Bums and elaborated on and modified the work of previous chapters through the examination of a particular community within Spurs fandom. While the complementary sources facilitated the creation of a narrative of the Bums' history,

⁴⁶ Dave Day, 'Swimming Natationists, Mistresses, and Matrons: Familial Influences on Female Careers in Victorian Britain', *The International Journal for the History of Sport* 35, no. 6 (2018): 494-510; Lisa Taylor, 'The Women's Amateur Rowing Association 1923-1963: A Prosopographical Approach', *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (2018): 307-330; Samantha-Jayne Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sport History Research: Biography, Collective Biography, and Prosopography', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1855-1882.

⁴⁷ Sean Dinces, *Bulls Markets: Chicago's Basketball Business and the New Inequality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 225; Sean Dinces, 'The Attrition of the Common Fan', *Social Science History* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 360; Andrew Linden, 'Blue-Collar Identity and the 'Culture of Losing': Cleveland and the 'Save Our Browns' Campaign,' *Journal of Sport History* 42.3 (2015): 340-360.

identified community characteristics, and contributed toward the humanisation of fans, they were limited in how deep they delved into a particular Bums' biography. Sport historians have explained the usefulness of biographical methods and this thesis' use of prosopography, and collective and individual biography reinforced such conclusions.⁴⁸ To account for the deficiencies in this approach, oral history seems a natural next step towards enriching understanding of the Bums and producing more exhaustive biographies. This development provides opportunities for further exploration into the Bums and a possible path for other researchers to follow when thoroughly interrogating an imagined community of fandom in sport and the numerous personal communities within them.

Reflections – Originality and Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis utilised a mixed-methods approach to explore the historical antecedents surrounding the generation and sustainment of Spurs fandom and provides a new interpretation on the interplay between place, a sports organisation, and supporters.⁴⁹ Achieving this aim addressed gaps in the existing historiography that had not examined sports fandom at both the macro and microsocial level to delineate its evolution and did not acknowledge fans as complicated agents who define their fanhood and use it for their own purposes. Its original contribution lies in its geographical location, selection of sources, and how they were analysed through the lenses of sport history and thanatology. Traditional and digital archives produced a historical narrative of the franchise, a prosopography of cyber obituaries unveiled the universe of Spurs fandom and its historical and contemporary characteristics, and the examination of web cemeteries and Baseline Bums showcased the multitude of personal communities within the larger imagined Spurs community. Collectively, this approach uncovered the characteristics of Spurs fans, emphasised their humanity through using intimate sources that are bereavement tools and elucidated how a relationship between a city and franchise and its associated communities have been sustained over time. In that sense they may have implications for those studying how other sports fan communities have persisted and provide a useful template for historians who are looking to apply this

⁴⁸ Samantha-Jayne Oldfield, 'Narrative Methods in Sport History Research: Biography, Collective Biography, and Prosopography', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1868.

⁴⁹ Samantha-Jayne Oldfield, 'Narratives of Manchester Pedestrianism: Using Biographical Methods to Explore the Development of Athletics During the Nineteenth Century,' PhD Thesis, (Manchester Metropolitan University: 2014), 225-226.

methodology to other topics and locations.

As the archival research showed, the work of the franchise, press, civic officials, and fans helped the Spurs become established into the city's consciousness. The prosopography of cyber obituaries and examination of web cemeteries illustrated that beyond marketing tactics, Spurs fandom was sustained through the personal communities of fans who were active agents in the development of their respective fandom. In contrast to theorists who have suggested that fans have been the perennial victims of commodification, these fans were not just passive consumers exploited by sports marketers but people who sought out ways to enhance relationships and produce meaning in their lives. For them, one way to do that was through following the Spurs to varying degrees. One of the critical elements to community building and historical preservation is storytelling and the sources of commemoration synthesised in this thesis demonstrated how they were integral to the Spurs community's longevity. It is quite possible that none of this would have occurred without the extended success of the team on the court that came because of the strategic acquisition of talent at various franchise levels accompanied with some luck, of course, without which the Spurs surely would have been relocated despite some franchise executives having ties to San Antonio. The fact that this relationship has endured in one of the smallest markets in North America highlights how a certain confluence of factors can result in an extended relationship between a sports franchise and its supporters. Uniquely and collectively, the cyber obituaries, web cemeteries, and archival research revealed how early franchise success can initiate fandom which can then be perpetuated through the personal communities of families and friends. Altogether, this thesis elaborated on, modified, and complicated the historiography on sports fan communities and contends that to enrich interpretations, historians must recognise that fans are active agents in their fandom.

It is recommended that historians continue the critical work of researching sports fans, everyday sorts of people, and communities through traditional and non-traditional sources to further complicate understandings of them. The accessibility and usefulness of cyber obituaries provide a place to start for historians attempting to discover persons or communities of any variety. From there, the vast and largely unexplored frontier of web cemeteries has plenty to offer for researchers to shift foci

from the macro to the microsocial level as this thesis has demonstrated. Serving as one of, if not the first example of how to incorporate web cemeteries in historical research, this thesis forges a new path to develop interpretations on the human experience. Such a historical exploration allows us to see the lived experiences and values of ordinary people. This thesis displayed not only the origins and evolution of the Spurs franchise, but how San Antonians embraced the team and used their fandom to enhance relationships and cope with death and dying. Consciousness, sentience, and mortality define our humanity, imploring us to seek meaning and belonging in our fleeting existence; this thesis has demonstrated, to varying degrees, how some found these elusive elements through fandom.

Despite their occasional hagiographic tendencies, obituaries and web cemeteries possess distinctive functionality, sentimentality, intimacy, and liminality that render them culturally significant historical sources. These elements encourage historians to humanise their subjects, promoting more empathetic and nuanced interpretations that counteract purely dystopian views of contemporary society. Engaging with such sources often evokes deep emotions and reflections, which historians must carefully navigate. By approaching obituaries with sensitivity and striving to avoid misrepresentation, while affirming and amplifying the personal narratives of their subjects, historians can generate new and profound insights into the human experience and communities. However, these sources have limitations, and it seems appropriate to execute a deeper micro-historical approach. One that focuses on a single personal network within a sports fandom to emphasise how they are or are not representative of the larger community. This seems a natural next step from this project, as does extending the geographical reach to beyond San Antonio to determine if Spurs fandom has pervaded other places and how. Regardless of some limitations, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the historical field through revealing the lives of ordinary people along with its application of a mixed-methodology and embrace of diverse and novel sources that can be applied to any locality or region to enhance understandings of the histories of not just sports fandoms but all human communities.

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Appendix 1. Prosopographical Questionnaire

This was informed by Verboven, Koenraad, Myriam Carlier, and Jan Dumolyn, 'A Short Manual to the Art of Prosopography.' In *A Short Manual to the Art of Prosopography*, edited by Katherine Keats-Rohan. Oxford: Unit for Prosopographical Research, 2007, 55-56, and Oldfield, Samantha-Jayne. 'Narratives of Manchester Pedestrianism: Using Biographical Methods to Explore the Development of Athletics During the Nineteenth Century.' PhD Thesis, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2014, 227.

Category	Aspect	Purpose
<i>Personal Information</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Name 2. Life Dates (birth, death) 3. Age (at the time of death) 4. Gender 5. Race/Ethnicity 6. Marital Status 7. Religion 8. Education 9. Occupation 10. Geographic Location (zip code) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Median Household Income 11. Politics 	To identify, examine and interpret the demographics of Spurs fans within the broader social and historical context and to situate them in the historiography.
<i>Spurs Fandom</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Season ticket holder 2. Baseline Bum 3. Elaborative commentary on fandom 4. Familial connections 	To identify the extremes of Spurs fandom, humanise supporters, uncover fan agency and the multitude of personal communities within Spurs fandom.

Publications and Presentations Associated with this Thesis

Journal Articles

Galindo, David Christopher. 'Spurs Fandom in San Antonio: The Baseline Bums and HemisFair Arena, 1973-1993.' *Journal of Sport History* 49, no 1. (Spring 2022): 37-52. muse.jhu.edu/article/867327.

Galindo, David. 'An Imagined Community in Sport: The San Antonio 'Spurs Family.' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 8 (August 2020): 670-691. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2020.1796651>.

Academic Presentations

Galindo, David. 'Cheering, Aging, and Dying: Older Women Sports Fans at the Intersection of History, Gerontology, and Thanatology.' Paper presented at the 52nd North American Society for Sport History Annual Convention, Denver, CO, May 26, 2024.

Galindo, David. 'Bonding Over the Silver and Black: The Surprising Friendship of George Gervin and George Valle.' Paper presented at the 51st North American Society for Sport History Annual Convention, Washington D.C., May 28, 2023.

Galindo, David. 'From the Web Cemetery: Community Building in San Antonio Spurs Fandom.' Paper presented at the 50th North American Society for Sport History Annual Convention, Chicago, IL, May 30, 2022.

Galindo, David. 'Humanizing the Fan: Reflections on the Obituary's Place in Prosopography.' Paper presented at the 49th North American Society for Sport History Annual Convention, Online, May 31, 2021.

Galindo, David. 'How I am Remembered: The Obituaries of Spurs Fanatics.' Paper presented at the 47th North American Society for Sport History Annual Convention, Boise, ID, May 20, 2019.

Public Engagement

Galindo, David. 'Baseline Bums.' The Texas State Historical Association's *Handbook of Texas Online*. December 19, 2023. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/baseline-bums>.

Galindo, David. 'From Clamorous to Charitable: An Abbreviated History of the Baseline Bums.' *Playing Pasts: The Online Magazine for Sport & Leisure History*. February 2021. <https://www.playingpasts.co.uk/articles/team-sports/from-clamorous-to-charitablean-abbreviated-history-of-the-baseline-bums/>.

Public Appearances

Galindo, David. 'Groups and Organizations: The San Antonio Spurs.' Guest lecture at Intro to Sociology Courses at Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, September 23, 2020.

Galindo, David. 'Getting Published in an Academic Journal.' Panellist at the Friends of History Event at the University of Texas at San Antonio. San Antonio, TX, March 1, 2021.