

## ROLE OF ATHLETES IN FOSTERING CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN STATE UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

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### Abstract

This study examined the role of student-athletes in fostering conflict resolution within State Universities and Colleges (SUCs). Using qualitative methods, data were collected through focus group discussions and interviews with student-athletes, coaches, and school officials. Thematic analysis revealed four key areas: common types of conflict experienced within SUCs, athletes' perceptions of their role in conflict resolution, existing programs supporting athlete involvement, and proposed strategies to enhance their contributions to campus peace.

Findings indicate that the common conflicts among students, were arising from competition for playing time, disrespect and misunderstandings due to tone and expressive differences, favoritism and preferential access to resources or privileges, and resource and facility allocation issues. The student-athletes perceive themselves as role models for peaceful behavior, active agents in conflict prevention, empowered leaders, and advocates for unity. Existing formal and informal programs, such as leadership councils, mentorship initiatives, and skill-development workshops, provide avenues for athletes to mediate disputes, and model prosocial behavior. However, gaps remain in institutional support, capacity-building, and formal recognition of their contributions. Proposed strategies include expanding leadership opportunities, institutionalizing awareness and capacity-building programs, integrating values-based leadership in sports, providing policy support, and promoting inclusive interactions among students.

The study is anchored in Social Identity Theory, which explains how athletes' group membership shapes peer perceptions and inclusive behavior; Contact Theory, which highlights the importance of structured interactions in reducing intergroup tension; and the Sports for Development and Peace Framework, which positions sports as a vehicle for social cohesion and peacebuilding. The findings underscore the potential of student-athletes to serve as both exemplars and active facilitators of conflict resolution, demonstrating that with institutional support, structured programs, and ethical leadership, sports can contribute meaningfully to a harmonious and resilient campus community.

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*Keywords: Student-athletes, Conflict resolution, Campus peace, Social cohesion, Leadership development, Sports for Development and Peace.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Conflict is widely recognized as an inevitable aspect of human interaction, particularly within complex social institutions such as State Universities and Colleges (SUCs). Educational environments bring together individuals from diverse cultural, socio-economic, political, and ideological backgrounds, which can give rise to differences in perspectives and interests. According to Lewis A. Coser (1956), social conflict is a natural and functional element of group life, arising from competition over values, status, and resources. Similarly, Morton Deutsch (1973) emphasized that conflict emerges when perceived incompatibilities of goals or actions exist between parties. Within higher education institutions, such dynamics may manifest in student activism, faculty-administration disputes, competition in academic and extracurricular activities, and cultural misunderstandings. If left unmanaged, these conflicts can negatively affect academic performance, weaken interpersonal relationships, and disrupt the learning environment (De Dreu, 2015; Rahim, 2011).

In this context, sports and athletics have increasingly been recognized as powerful platforms for promoting social cohesion, dialogue, and peacebuilding. The global recognition of sport as a tool for development and peace is strongly supported by initiatives of the United Nations, which highlights sport's capacity to promote tolerance, respect, and intercultural

understanding. Johan Galtung (1996) argues that peacebuilding involves creating structures that reduce violence and foster positive relationships—principles that are often embedded in organized sports through teamwork, shared goals, and rule-based competition. Furthermore, John Paul Lederach (1997) underscores the importance of relational transformation which sports activities can facilitate by encouraging interaction and collaboration among diverse groups. Sportsmanship values such as respect, discipline, fairness, and tolerance align closely with these peacebuilding principles and contribute to the development of constructive conflict resolution behaviors.

Despite this potential, limited academic research exists that explores the role of athletes in fostering conflict resolution and reconciliation specifically within the SUC system. Understanding how athletes, both as individuals and as representatives of their institutions, contribute to peacebuilding efforts can offer valuable insights for university policies, student engagement strategies, and extracurricular programming.

This study aims to examine how athletes in SUCs serve as agents of change by modeling constructive behavior, facilitating dialogue, and promoting unity across diverse student bodies. It will also explore the mechanisms through which sports can become a structured avenue for mediation, inclusion, and post-conflict healing within the campus setting.

By highlighting the role of athletes in conflict resolution, this research can inform institutional leaders, policymakers, and educators on how to harness the power of sports and athlete leadership in creating more peaceful, inclusive, and resilient academic communities.

## METHOD

This study has adopted a qualitative research design to examine the role of student-athletes in fostering conflict resolution within selected State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Cotabato City, and North Cotabato. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it enabled an in-depth investigation of the lived experiences, perspectives, and social dynamics that shaped how athletes perceived and enacted their roles in campus-based peacebuilding efforts. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on numerical data and broad generalizations, qualitative research prioritizes contextual understanding and meaning-making from the point of view of the participants.

The researcher explored institutions as separate yet interconnected units for analysis. Each SUC served as an individual case, offering distinct insights into how local culture and athletic programs influence the engagement of student-athletes in conflict resolution. This design was particularly useful for identifying both

common themes and unique variations across contexts, thereby enhancing the depth and applicability of the findings.

This study was conducted in three (3) selected State Universities and Colleges located in Cotabato City, and North Cotabato—areas situated in Central Mindanao, a region historically shaped by cultural diversity, socio-political challenges, and peacebuilding efforts. These locations were strategically chosen due to their relevance to the study's focus on conflict resolution, reconciliation, and the potential of youth—particularly student-athletes—as agents of peace within academic institutions.

The participating institutions include:

1. Cotabato State University - Formerly Cotabato City State Polytechnic College, this institution has recently transitioned into a full-fledged university. Its urban setting and exposure to intergroup interaction provide a rich environment for studying conflict management practices among students.
2. Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology - Located in Arakan, North Cotabato. This institution offers a different socio-cultural context where student-athletes may play unique roles in fostering unity among students from indigenous, Moro, and settler communities.
3. University of Southern Mindanao - Located in Kabacan, North Cotabato, one of the largest state universities in Mindanao, USM is known for its strong athletic programs and active student organizations. Its multi-ethnic campus population makes it an important site for exploring how sports influence intergroup relationships and conflict resolution.

These institutions collectively represented a diverse range of geographic, cultural, and institutional settings, making them ideal for a multiple-case study approach. Their inclusion provided the opportunity to examine how context-specific factors shape the role of student-athletes in promoting peace, both formally and informally, within their respective campuses.

The study focused on individuals who were directly involved in or knowledgeable about student-athletes and their roles in campus-related conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts.

The primary participants of the study were categorized as follows: 1) Student-Athletes who were actively participating in varsity-level sports or institutional athletic programs. They were considered key informants as they can provide firsthand insights into how athletic involvement influences their participation in resolving conflicts and promoting unity on campus; 2) Coaches and Sports Coordinators who oversee the training, discipline, and development of student-athletes. Their perspectives were

essential in understanding the leadership qualities and values instilled through sports, and how these may contribute to peacebuilding efforts. They also provided information on institutional programs or interventions related to sportsmanship and character development; 3) University Officials, includes guidance counselors and student affairs personnel. They were selected for their involvement in student development, mental health support, and conflict mediation services within the university. Their insights helped assess the institutional perspective on athlete involvement in promoting conflict resolution and reconciliation.

Three focus group discussions were conducted, each involving 8 to 12 student-athletes from the respective SUCs. For the key informant interviews, participants were consisted of coaches, sports coordinators, guidance counselors, and student affairs personnel from the SUCs. The study ensured representation from all three institutions, aiming for a balanced distribution of participants across each group."

Purposive sampling was used to select respondents who meet specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives. This included having at least one year of experience as a student-athlete or serving in a student services or sports-related role. All participants were asked to provide informed consent before participating in interviews, focus group discussions, or observations.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The themes illustrate how athletes contribute to conflict resolution within State Universities and Colleges, reflecting their roles, challenges, and interactions in campus settings. Each theme is supported by direct statements from the informants to preserve authenticity and provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics that shape conflict management in SUCs.

### **Part I. Common Types of Conflict Experienced within SUCs**

Understanding the common types of conflict experienced within SUCs is essential for promoting harmonious relationships, enhancing institutional effectiveness, and creating a supportive environment for both academic and extracurricular pursuits. In the context of student-athletes and non-athlete students, conflicts may arise from competition for resources, differences in priorities, interpersonal misunderstandings, and perceived inequities in treatment and recognition.

The thematic analysis of the data revealed several recurring sources and types of conflict within SUCs. These themes highlight not only the practical challenges faced by students—such as competition for playing time, resource allocation issues, and favoritism in campus resource allocation—but also the social and interpersonal dynamics, including disrespect and misunderstandings due to tone and expressive differences. Each theme is analyzed in light of relevant theories, such as Social Identity Theory, Contact Theory, and the Sports for Development and Peace Framework, to provide a comprehensive understanding of how conflicts arise, persist, and can be mitigated within the SUC context.

### **Theme 1. Competition for Playing Time**

Competition for playing time emerged as one of the most prominent sources of conflict among student-athletes in State Universities and Colleges. Respondents consistently described how the limited opportunities to participate in games generate tension, rivalry, and emotional strain within sports teams. Playing time is not only seen as a measure of athletic ability but also as a marker of recognition, trust, and value from coaches, which makes it a sensitive and often contested issue.

Several respondents shared that disagreements typically arise when athletes feel that playing time is not distributed fairly or transparently. When individuals believe they deserve more minutes on the court or field, feelings of resentment, disappointment, or jealousy may develop. This is especially common among teammates who play the same position, where direct competition heightens the sense of rivalry. The struggle for visibility during games also contributes to interpersonal conflicts, as playing time is closely associated with opportunities to showcase skills, earn scholarships, or gain recognition.

The issue is further intensified by the emotional pressure inherent in collegiate athletics. Respondents explained that the desire to perform well, combined with academic stress, can make athletes more sensitive to perceived inequities in playing time. When players feel overlooked or undervalued, misunderstandings during training or games are more likely to escalate into personal conflicts. In some cases, athletes carry frustrations into team interactions, affecting cooperation and overall team morale.

Moreover, competition for playing time influences team dynamics beyond individual relationships. It may lead to subtle divisions within the group—between starters and bench players, veterans and newcomers, or

those favored by the coach versus those who feel marginalized. These internal fractures can disrupt communication, reduce trust, and hinder the team's collective performance.

The statements above were manifested by the responses of the participants and key informants of the study.

Participant (P2-FGD) said,

*"Madalas talaga nagkakaroon ng tensyon kapag usapan na kung sino ang dapat mas maraming playing time. May mga teammates na pakiramdam nila mas deserving sila kaya nagkakainitan minsan."*

(Conflicts often happen when it comes to who deserves more playing time. Some teammates feel they should be playing more, and this sometimes leads to tension.)

Participant (P7-FGD) stated,

*"May mga pagkakataon na nagkakatampuhan lalo na kapag pareho kayo ng position. Parang may unspoken rivalry kung sino ang uunahin ng coach sa game."*

(There are times when misunderstandings occur, especially when two players share the same position. It creates an unspoken rivalry about who the coach will let play first.)

Key informant (KI1) expressed,

*"Isa sa pinakakomong pinagtatalunan sa team ay yung playing time. Kapag hindi pantay o hindi malinaw ang basehan, doon nag-uumpisa ang samaan ng loob."*

(One of the most common sources of conflict in the team is playing time. When the basis for it isn't clear or seems unfair, that's when disagreements start.)

The responses indicate that competition for playing time is not merely a technical issue related to game strategy; it is a deeply personal and relational concern that affects athletes' motivation, self-esteem, and interpersonal behavior.

In a study on university athletes, Smith and Thompson (2021) found that uneven playing time distribution often results in frustration, jealousy, and reduced motivation among non-starters. They noted that athletes who consistently receive fewer minutes report feeling marginalized, which

heightens sensitivity to coaching decisions and contributes to subtle interpersonal conflicts.

Similarly, Garcia and Lee (2022) observed that competition for playing time intensifies conflicts between athletes occupying similar positions, as direct comparison becomes unavoidable. Their qualitative interviews revealed that bench players frequently interpret coaching decisions as biased or unfair, leading to strained relationships and decreased trust within the team. These findings reinforce the idea that intra-team competition, while potentially motivating, can also fracture team unity when not managed transparently.

From a sociological perspective, Rahman (2024) examined playing time distribution through the lens of team hierarchies. His study concluded that visible divisions between starters and non-starters create status boundaries that shape interaction patterns and group cohesion. Athletes positioned at the lower end of the hierarchy tend to perceive internal competition as threatening rather than developmental, particularly when coaches provide unclear or inconsistent performance criteria.

According to Williams and Carter (2025), when coaches fail to communicate selection criteria effectively, players are more likely to interpret decisions as favoritism. Their study demonstrated that transparent communication mitigates negative emotions, reduces interpersonal tension, and strengthens athletes' acceptance of competitive outcomes.

The findings show that team dynamics and competition for playing time strongly influence relationships among student-athletes. From a Social Identity Theory perspective, players who receive more minutes form the "in-group," gaining confidence and a stronger athletic identity, while those with limited roles often feel like outsiders, leading to low self-esteem and conflict. Contact Theory explains that even though athletes interact regularly, conflict still arises when key conditions for positive contact—equal status, shared goals, cooperation, and support—are missing. Using the SDP Framework, the results highlight a gap between the ideal goals of sports (teamwork, character building, peace) and actual experiences: when playing time is uneven or mismanaged, sports may unintentionally create rivalry, exclusion, and tension instead of cohesion.

## **Theme 2. Disrespect and Misunderstandings Due to Tone and Expressive Differences**

Disrespect and misunderstandings due to tone and expressive differences emerged as a significant source of conflict among student-athletes within State Universities and Colleges. Respondents consistently highlighted that differences in temperaments, interaction styles, and ways of expressing ideas or opinions often result in misunderstandings and tension during both training sessions and competitive events.

Respondents noted that some athletes are direct and confrontational, preferring immediate feedback or open debate, while others are indirect or hesitant to express concerns, leading to misinterpretation or unresolved tensions. In high-pressure athletic environments, even minor misunderstandings—such as tone of voice, timing of instructions, or informal remarks—can escalate into interpersonal conflict.

The following are the common responses of the participants in the focus group discussions and key informant interviews:

One of the participants (P1-FGD) shared,

*“May mga pagkakataon na naiintindihan ng kakampi ko ng mali ang tono o paraan ng pagsasalita ko, at ang maliliit na hindi pagkakaunawaan ay nauuwi sa pagtatalo.”*

(There are moments when a teammate misunderstands my tone or the way I speak, and small disagreements escalate into arguments.)

Another participant (P5-FGD) mentioned,

*“Napapansin ko na mas madalas mangyari ang alitan sa mga kakampi na may matitinding personalidad. Minsan, sila ang nangingibabaw sa mga usapan o paggawa ng desisyon, kaya ang iba ay pakiramdam na hindi pinapansin.”*

(I notice that clashes happen more often with teammates who have strong personalities. Sometimes they dominate conversations or decision-making, which makes others feel ignored.)

A key informant (KI2) said,

*“May mga kakampi na hindi komportable magpahayag ng opinyon nang hayagan, kaya akala ng iba ay wala silang pakialam. Nagdudulot ito ng tensyon at nakaapekto sa pagtutulungan ng team.”*

(Some teammates don't like to express their opinions openly, so

others think they don't care. This often creates tension and affects teamwork.)

Similar narrative was emphasized by a key informant (KI5),

*"Minsan na-frustrate ako dahil may mga kakampi na sobrang direktso at prangka, habang ang iba naman ay tahimik at hindi nagsasabi ng kanilang mga ideya. Mahirap tuloy magkaintindihan, lalo na kapag training."*

(Sometimes I get frustrated because some teammates are very direct and outspoken, while others are quiet and don't express their ideas. It's hard to understand each other, especially during training.)

In essence, disrespect and misunderstandings due to tone and expressive differences highlight the complex social and relational dimensions of collegiate sports. They demonstrate that conflict in athletic teams is not always performance-related but can arise from the interplay of individual traits and interaction styles. Addressing these conflicts effectively involves both interpersonal awareness among athletes and structured guidance from coaches, ensuring that diverse personalities and communication approaches become a source of strength rather than division.

Communication quality has been identified as a crucial determinant of team dynamics. Izquierdo and Anguera (2021) demonstrated that systematic observation of in-game and training interactions reveals patterns that can either foster cohesion or trigger conflict, depending on clarity, structure, and style of communication.

Similarly, Karafil and Ulaş (2023) examined young athletes' perceptions of communication barriers caused by coaches. Using Q-methodology, they found that perceived lack of clarity, conflicting goals, and excessive expectations contributed to trust issues and strained relationships. These findings highlight that communication clashes are not limited to peer-to-peer interactions but extend to athlete-coach relationships, influencing motivation, engagement, and relational dynamics.

Personality differences further compound these communication challenges. Llanos-Muñoz et al. (2023) reported that athletes' responses to coaching styles and team interactions are mediated by individual traits such as assertiveness, proactivity, and emotional regulation.

The findings show that athletes' identities and relationships within the team are shaped by personality differences and communication patterns. Social Identity Theory explains that athletes form in-groups and out-groups—often based on assertiveness, communication style, or perceived status—which can heighten misunderstandings and tension. Contact Theory adds that frequent interaction alone does not resolve these conflicts; without equal status, shared goals, institutional support, and structured communication, personality clashes persist. From an SDP perspective, these tensions highlight both the challenges and opportunities within sports: while sports can foster cohesion and character development, unaddressed communication breakdowns and personality differences can instead create exclusion, rivalry, and stress. Overall, clashes arise when personality traits combine with unclear communication and lack of structured interaction.

### **Theme 3. Favoritism and Preferential Access to Resources**

Favoritism and Preferential Access to Resources emerged as a significant source of conflict within SUC athletic teams, particularly in the interactions between student-athletes and non-athletes. Respondents consistently reported perceptions of favoritism, preferential access, and differential treatment in terms of privileges, opportunities, and institutional support. These experiences not only caused frustration but also fostered feelings of resentment and division among students.

A recurring concern among respondents was the perception that student-athletes receive special treatment regarding access to training facilities, class scheduling, or participation in school events. For instance, athletes often receive priority registration for courses to accommodate practice and competition schedules, while non-athlete students may face limitations in class availability. Respondents noted that such policies, though intended to support athletic development, can inadvertently create tension by highlighting inequities.

Time management differences also contribute to perceptions of favoritism. Student-athletes often have demanding schedules that require flexibility from the institution, such as allowances for missed classes due to competitions or training sessions. Non-athlete students may perceive these accommodations as unfair, especially if they feel that their own academic responsibilities are less recognized or supported.

Respondents emphasized that addressing favoritism in campus resource allocation requires both structural adjustments and intentional

communication. Clear explanation of policies, equitable access to opportunities, and inclusive decision-making processes can mitigate negative perceptions.

According to one of the discussants (P6-FGD),

*“Pakiramdam ko minsan ay may espesyal na pribilehiyo ang mga atleta, tulad ng priority sa pagrehistro ng klase o paggamit ng training facilities, na nagdudulot ng tensyon sa mga estudyanteng hindi atleta.”*

(I feel that athletes sometimes receive special privileges, like priority in class registration or access to training facilities, which creates tension with non-athlete students.)

A respondent (P8-FGD) pointed out that,

*“May mga pagkakataon na pinapayagan ang mga kakampi ko na lumiban sa klase o exam dahil sa laro, at nakikita ito ng mga estudyanteng hindi atleta bilang hindi patas.”*

(There are times when my teammates are allowed to miss classes or exams for games, and non-athlete students see this as unfair.)

One key informant (K2) articulated that,

*“Minsan iniisip ng mga estudyanteng hindi atleta na mas madali ang buhay ng mga atleta sa paaralan dahil sa flexible na schedule, pero hindi nila nakikita ang hirap sa likod ng training.”*

(Sometimes, non-athlete students think athletes have an easier life in school because of flexible schedules, but they don't see the hard work behind training.)

A key informant (K3) recalled that,

I feel frustrated when decisions favor athletes over others, even when non-athletes work just as hard academically or socially.

In summary, favoritism in campus resource allocation within SUCs represents a multi-dimensional source of conflict. It arises from institutional policies, social perceptions, and the interaction of these factors with individual expectations.

A study by Van der Heijden et al. (2024) demonstrated that socio-economic resources, social capital, and cultural background significantly influence an individual's likelihood to engage in organized sports. Those with greater economic and social resources have more opportunities to participate, reflecting systemic disparities that predate institutional

intervention (Van der Heijden et al., 2024).

Within institutional settings, unequal treatment manifests in privileges provided to certain groups. Bouaziz and Amara (2025) found that access to sports clubs and programs is often biased based on gender, socio-economic status, and origin. Applicants from marginalized backgrounds were less likely to gain access to competitive sport programs, highlighting systemic discrimination even at the entry point to organized sports (Bouaziz & Amara, 2025).

Gender-based disparities remain a persistent form of unequal treatment. According to López et al. (2024), female athletes in collegiate sports often face unequal access to facilities, support services, and recognition compared with their male counterparts. These structural inequities affect performance, motivation, and overall well-being, indicating that institutional policies may inadvertently perpetuate gendered privilege (López et al., 2024).

In the context of student-athletes, favoritism is also linked to balancing athletic and academic commitments. Flores and Cruz (2024) reported that student-athletes often struggle with limited flexibility and inconsistent institutional support, leading to stress and a perception of unfair treatment compared with non-athlete peers who do not face similar constraints (Flores & Cruz, 2024).

Finally, sports have the potential to foster inclusion and social cohesion, but only when institutions actively promote equitable practices. A systematic review by Ahmad et al. (2024) emphasized that sport programs in higher education can support social integration and inclusion if policies ensure fair resource distribution, equal access, and supportive environments for all participants.

In principle, the sports environment should serve as a place for interaction and collaboration, a space where differences are minimized through shared goals and teamwork. But the participants' stories revealed that this ideal was not always achieved. Here, Contact Theory helps shed light on why. While athletes regularly practiced and competed together, the conditions necessary for bias-reducing contact—equal status, cooperation, shared goals, and support from authorities—were not consistently present.

This atmosphere also reflects a gap between the ideals of the Sports

for Development and Peace Framework and what athletes actually experienced. The SDP framework views sports as a powerful tool for fostering inclusion, peacebuilding, empowerment, and personal growth. But such outcomes only emerge when the sports environment is intentionally structured to promote fairness and equity.

#### **Theme 4. Resource and Facility Allocation Issues**

Resource and facility allocation emerged as a notable source of conflict within SUC athletic teams, reflecting both structural and operational challenges. Respondents consistently highlighted that limited access to sports facilities, equipment, and other institutional resources often creates tension among athletes and between athletes and non-athletes. These issues are particularly pronounced in institutions where demand for facilities exceeds availability, or where resource allocation policies are perceived as biased or insufficient.

A primary concern raised by respondents was the competition for shared facilities. Athletic programs often require spaces for practice, training, and competitions, yet the number of available venues may be limited. Respondents reported situations where multiple teams are scheduled to use the same facility simultaneously, leading to conflicts over time slots and priority access. These dynamics contribute to a sense of inequity and can hinder the effective functioning of sports programs.

Allocation of equipment and resources was another significant point of contention. Respondents noted that some teams or athletes have better access to quality sports equipment, uniforms, or medical support, while others must make do with outdated or insufficient materials. This unequal distribution not only affects performance but also creates resentment among students, as resource disparities are often interpreted as favoritism or institutional bias.

Additionally, respondents highlighted the impact of resource limitations on training and performance. Inadequate facilities and equipment can compromise the quality of practice, increase the risk of injury, and limit the ability of teams to prepare effectively for competitions. Non-athletes, on the other hand, sometimes feel marginalized when facilities are prioritized for sports programs, even if these spaces could also support academic or recreational activities for the broader student population.

These insights were clearly reflected in the informants' responses

during the FGDs and interviews.

One participant (P1-FGD) observed that,  
*“Minsan, napuputol ang aming practice schedule dahil maraming teams ang gumagamit ng parehong facility, kaya nahihirapan kaming mag-ensayo nang maayos.”*

(Sometimes, our practice schedule gets cut short because multiple teams are using the same facility, which makes it hard for us to train properly.)

In the words of another respondent (P9-FGD),  
*“Hindi laging sapat ang kagamitan namin, tulad ng basketball o training gear, kaya kailangan naming mag-share at naapektuhan ang kalidad ng aming practice.”*

(We don't always have enough equipment, like basketballs or training gear, which forces us to share and limits the quality of our practice.)

As highlighted by a key informant (KI1),  
Sometimes, non-athlete students complain that we get special privileges for facilities, but they don't see how limited the resources are or how difficult it is to schedule everything.”

One key informant further said,

*“Ang sobrang dami ng tao at kakulangan sa tamang kagamitan minsan ay nagiging delikado sa practice, at nag-aalala ako dahil maaaring magdulot ito ng injury.”*

(Overcrowding and lack of proper equipment sometimes make it unsafe to practice, and that worries me because it can lead to injuries.)

A study in central China found that although new sports venues were constructed under national initiatives, their distribution remained uneven across urban and rural areas, limiting access for certain populations and increasing competition for available facilities (Zhang, Li, & Chen, 2025). Similarly, research in Fuzhou revealed that older districts and peripheral neighborhoods suffered from a pronounced shortage of sports facilities, creating unequal opportunities for participation (Liu & Wang, 2024).

Even in well-resourced urban settings, facility clustering creates “spatial inequity,” where athletes in underserved zones are disadvantaged compared to peers in facility-rich areas (Sun & Gao, 2020).

The findings show that unequal access to sports facilities in SUCs creates intergroup tension. Social Identity Theory explains that athletes and non-athletes, or athletes from differently resourced programs, form distinct identity groups, leading to social comparison, resentment, and perceptions of favoritism. Contact Theory suggests that these tensions can be reduced through structured, cooperative interactions—such as shared facility management or joint training sessions—where groups meet under equal and supportive conditions. The SDP Framework highlights that fair and inclusive resource allocation is essential because sports function not only for performance but also for social inclusion, skill development, and community cohesion.

## **Part 2. Athletes' Perceived Role in Fostering Conflict Resolution within their Campus Communities**

Examining athletes' perceptions of their role in fostering conflict resolution within campus communities offers critical insight into how sports contribute to social cohesion in higher education settings. As visible and influential members of the student body, athletes often occupy positions where their actions, communication, and interpersonal interactions shape broader campus norms.

This section presents the themes that emerged from focus group discussions and interviews, capturing the athletes' collective understanding of their role in supporting conflict resolution on campus.

### **Theme 1. Role Models for Peaceful Behavior**

The informants consistently highlighted the belief that athletes occupy a unique and influential position within the campus community, allowing them to serve as powerful role models for peaceful behavior. As highly visible figures, student-athletes often attract the attention of their peers, making their conduct both on and off the field a point of reference for others. Their daily interactions and public presence shape how students view teamwork, discipline, and respect—qualities central to building a peaceful campus environment.

Participants emphasized that athletes are not only admired for their physical abilities but are also perceived as embodiments of values such as respect, fair play, and empathy. One respondent noted that when athletes consistently demonstrate respectful behavior or good sportsmanship, they “model behavior that helps reduce tension among students.” Through

their actions, athletes are able to signal appropriate ways of handling interpersonal disagreements, whether those conflicts arise in academic settings, student organizations, or informal social interactions.

The student-athletes also acknowledged their responsibility in shaping the campus environment. They believe that their role extends beyond the athletic arena and contributes to promoting unity and harmony among students. Their visibility gives them the platform to influence how peers respond to disagreements, encouraging a culture where differences are addressed peacefully. In this sense, athletes do not merely participate in conflict resolution; they help cultivate an atmosphere where conflicts are less likely to escalate in the first place.

These statements were corroborated by the responses of the informants during the focus group discussions and interviews as follows:

According to one of the participants (P10-FGD),

*“Opo, malaki ang maitutulong ng mga atleta sa pagtataguyod ng kapayapaan at paglutas ng alitan sa mga estudyante dahil sa kanilang impluwensya at pagiging huwaran.*

(Yes, athletes can play a significant role in promoting peace and resolving conflict among students due to their influence and role model status.)

Another participant (P2-FGD) recounted,

*“Sa pamamagitan ng pagpapakita ng respeto, patas na laro, at pagtutulungan, maipapakita namin ang pagkakaisa, malasakit, at positibong pagpapahalaga sa aming mga kaklase.”*

(By showing respect, fair play, and teamwork, we can inspire unity, empathy, and positive values among our peers.)

A key informant (KI3) described,

*“Madalas na nakikita ang mga atleta, at sa pamamagitan ng disiplina at respeto sa ating kilos, maipapakita natin ang tamang gawi na nakakatulong sa pagbabawas ng tensyon sa mga estudyante.”*

(Athletes are often visible, and by conducting ourselves with discipline and respect, we can model behavior that helps reduce tension among students.)

It was also revealed by a key informant (KI4),

... athletes can be empowered to promote unity by leading initiatives, projects, or campaigns that encourage inclusivity.

Overall, the theme “Role Models for Peaceful Behavior” reflects the perception that athletes’ everyday actions serve as subtle but powerful tools for fostering peace and reconciliation within the campus community. By embodying positive values, student-athletes act as living examples of the respectful and cooperative behaviors that help sustain a harmonious school environment.

Bedan (2020), in a study of collegiate athletes in the Philippines, reported that sports participation contributed to human development and facilitated peacebuilding initiatives within the campus. The study emphasized that while sports can promote positive interactions, sustainable peace requires engagement from multiple stakeholders and supportive institutional frameworks. Complementing this, the review by Mdpi (2024) highlighted that school-based team sports not only improve emotional and psychological wellness, such as reducing stress and enhancing self-esteem, but also strengthen social integration, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging among participants.

At a broader institutional and community level, sports have been framed as mechanisms for social inclusion and peacebuilding. Bedan (2020) noted that sports provide a neutral and inclusive space where students from diverse backgrounds can interact, build trust, and develop a shared identity. This aligns with the “sport-for-peace” framework, which emphasizes the use of sports to bridge social divides, foster empathy, and cultivate cooperative relationships (Social Cohesion Info, 2023). Such spaces offer athletes a platform to demonstrate and advocate for peaceful behavior, making them potential agents of conflict prevention and reconciliation within their campuses.

Despite the documented benefits, studies caution that the positive influence of sports on behavior is not automatic. Institutional support, peer influence, and structured opportunities for engagement are necessary for translating cohesion and mental wellness into actual peacebuilding and conflict resolution outcomes (PubMed, 2022). Without formal structures, such as inclusion in committees, leadership roles, or platforms for advocacy, the potential of athletes to act as role models for peaceful behavior may remain underutilized (Bedan, 2020).

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) provides insight into how athletes' group membership affects their capacity to influence others. As members of the athletic community, student-athletes occupy a socially recognized in-group whose behaviors are closely observed by other students. By consistently exhibiting cooperative and respectful behavior, athletes can reduce intergroup tensions, challenge stereotypes, and encourage inclusive attitudes among the wider student population.

Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) further explains how athletes, as role models, facilitate meaningful intergroup interactions. Through team activities, leadership roles, and collaborative initiatives, athletes create structured opportunities for positive contact between students of diverse backgrounds. These interactions, especially when characterized by cooperation, mutual respect, and shared goals, can reduce prejudice, enhance understanding, and promote reconciliation.

The Sports for Development and Peace (SDP) Framework (Levermore & Beacom, 2009) situates sport as a strategic platform for promoting social cohesion and behavioral modeling. Athletes' routine training, discipline, and public visibility make them effective conduits for peaceful behavior. The SDP Framework emphasizes that sport is not only a physical activity but also a medium for education, leadership, and community engagement, which aligns with participants' views of athletes as agents of peace.

## **Theme 2. Active Agents in Conflict Prevention**

The informants perceive athletes not only as role models and preventive agents but also as active participants in resolving conflicts that arise within the campus community. According to the responses during focus group discussions and interviews, student-athletes often occupy positions of visibility and influence, which places them in a unique position to mediate disputes and guide their peers toward reconciliation.

Informants highlighted that the structured discipline and teamwork inherent in sports training equip athletes with the skills necessary to manage interpersonal conflicts. Through experiences in coordinating schedules, following rules, and working with diverse team members, athletes develop patience, empathy, and negotiation skills.

Moreover, participants suggested formal mechanisms to enhance athletes' involvement in conflict resolution. By including athletes in governance structures, councils, or committees that handle student conduct, their role becomes institutionalized, giving them authority and clear responsibilities in addressing conflicts.

The participant (P5-FGD) shared, *"Bilang isang student-athlete, ang aking papel sa paglutas ng alitan at muling pagkakaisa ay nakabatay sa pamumuno at mediation."*

(As a student-athlete, my role in conflict resolution and reconciliation is guided by leadership and mediation.)

Participant (P11-FGD) indicated,

*"Ang aming pagsasanay, disiplina, at pagtutulungan ay nakakatulong sa amin na lapitan ang mga alitan nang patas. Ang mga katangiang ito ay nagbibigay-daan sa amin upang mamagitan sa mga hindi pagkakaunawaan, hikayatin ang pagtutulungan, at itaguyod ang muling pagkakaisa sa mga estudyante."*

(Our training, discipline, and teamwork help us approach conflicts objectively. These qualities allow us to mediate disagreements, encourage collaboration, and promote reconciliation among students.)

Key informant (KI3) emphasized,

*"Ang pagsasama ng mga atleta sa mga konseho o komite na humahawak sa mga alitan ng estudyante ay nagbibigay sa kanila ng pormal na papel sa medasyon at muling pagkakaisa, na tinitiyak na ang mga alitan ay naaayos nang patas at maayos."*

(Involving athletes in councils or committees that handle student conflicts gives them a formal role in mediation and reconciliation, ensuring that conflicts are addressed fairly and constructively.)

In summary, the informants perceive athletes as agents in conflict resolution who actively contribute to addressing disputes within the campus. Their visibility, leadership experience, and skills in teamwork and discipline enable them to mediate conflicts effectively, while formal avenues of participation ensure that their interventions are recognized and structured.

Rodríguez et al. (2024) emphasize that sports environments—when

structured intentionally—promote communication, trust, and cooperation, positioning athletes as early responders who can de-escalate tensions before they develop further. Woods (2021) further supports this by noting that athletes with strong interpersonal communication skills are more capable of recognizing emotional cues, anticipating misunderstandings, and guiding peers toward constructive dialogue.

Team culture also influences athletes' ability to prevent conflicts. Harwood et al. (2020) report that when teams establish norms emphasizing respect, inclusion, and shared responsibility, athletes naturally assume mediating roles, helping peers navigate differences peacefully. Complementing this, Newman et al. (2022) demonstrate that leadership behaviors—especially from senior athletes—create ripple effects that promote cooperation and discourage rivalry-driven conflicts.

Through the lens of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), athletes' in-group membership provides them with both visibility and influence. As recognizable members of the athletic community, their behavior sets norms that other students often observe and emulate. When athletes consistently demonstrate discipline, fairness, and teamwork, they create expectations for pro-social behavior that extend beyond their immediate team, reducing the likelihood of conflicts emerging in intergroup interactions.

Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) also helps explain athletes' preventive role. Structured interactions, such as team-building exercises, collaborative campus initiatives, and peer mentoring, provide opportunities for positive engagement across diverse student groups. These interactions allow athletes to mediate tensions informally, foster mutual understanding, and encourage empathy among students.

The Sports for Development and Peace (SDP) Framework (Levermore & Beacom, 2009) further supports the idea of athletes as active agents in conflict prevention. Sport emphasizes training, discipline, and adherence to rules—qualities that can be applied to broader social interactions.

### **Theme 3. Empowerment through Leadership**

The responses of the informants reveal that athletes perceive leadership as a powerful avenue through which they become empowered to influence peace, unity, and conflict resolution within the campus. According to the participants, leadership is not limited to formal positions but is deeply rooted in the discipline, responsibility, and visibility that come

with being a student-athlete.

Several informants expressed that student-athletes often take on leadership roles because of the respect and recognition they receive from other students. One informant noted that their involvement in team dynamics—where communication, coordination, and decision-making are essential—equips them with leadership competencies that extend beyond sports.

The informants also emphasized that leadership empowers athletes by giving them a sense of responsibility and purpose. They feel that their actions, both on and off the field, can shape the attitudes and behaviors of others.

One participant (P4-FGD) said,

*“Nananiniwala ako na nagkakaroon ng kapangyarihan ang mga atleta dahil sa mga tungkuling pamumuno na natural nilang ginagampanan. Dahil dito, mas nagiging responsable kami at handang gumabay sa iba, lalo na sa pagtataguyod ng pagkakaisa at mabuting asal.”*

(I believe athletes become empowered through the leadership roles they naturally take on. This pushes us to act responsibly and to guide others, especially when promoting unity and positive behavior.)

Followed by another participant (P12-FGD) mentioned,

*“Tinuturuan kami ng sports ng pagtutulungan, komunikasyon, at disiplina. Dahil dito, nagiging tiwala kami sa sarili na gumanap ng mga tungkulin sa pamumuno.”*

(Our experience in sports teaches us teamwork, communication, and discipline. These skills make us confident to take on leadership roles.)

A key informant (KI6) expressed,

*“Kapag naisama ang mga atleta sa mga komite o konseho, nagkakaroon sila ng pormal na boses. Mas nararamdaman nilang may kapangyarihan sila dahil nakakapagbahagi sila sa pagbuo ng mga desisyon at sa mga programang nagtataguyod ng kapayapaan at pagkakasundo.”*

(If athletes are included in committees or councils, it gives them a formal voice. This helps them feel more empowered because the

can participate in decision-making and contribute to programs that promote peace and reconciliation.)

One more informant (KI3) narrated,

*“Ang pamumuno para sa kanila na mga atleta ay hindi lang titulo. Nagmumula ito sa disiplina at pananagutan.”*

(Leadership for them athletes is not just a title. It comes from being disciplined and responsible.)

In essence, the theme Empowerment through Leadership highlights how athletes become influential actors in the campus community by embodying leadership qualities rooted in discipline, teamwork, responsibility, and visibility. The informants believe that these leadership roles empower athletes not only to inspire their peers but also to participate actively in conflict prevention, mediation, and peace promotion.

Leadership empowerment among athletes is strengthened through intentional training and structured development programs. Cotterill (2022) emphasizes that leadership skills grow when athletes are given opportunities to practice decision-making and reflection through workshops and rotating leadership roles, helping them gain confidence and influence within their teams (Cotterill, 2022).

Research on shared leadership also highlights its empowering effect. Fransen et al. (2020) show that when leadership responsibilities are distributed across team members, athletes develop stronger group identity, higher self-belief, and greater readiness to guide peers—demonstrating that leadership capacity expands beyond traditional captains (Fransen et al., 2020).

Coaching behaviors significantly shape leadership empowerment. Liu (2023) notes that transformational coaching enhances athletes' communication and problem-solving abilities, while Mach et al. (2022) found that supportive coaching builds leadership self-efficacy and encourages athletes to take initiative in peer interactions (Liu, 2023; Mach et al., 2022).

Haddad et al. (2022) and Mertens et al. (2021) report that athletes learn to lead through micro-interactions—such as calming teammates or resolving misunderstandings—which strengthen their sense of agency over time (Haddad et al., 2022; Mertens et al., 2021).

The role of athletes in fostering conflict resolution and reconciliation within campus communities can be better understood by examining the findings through the combined lens of Social Identity Theory, Contact Theory, and the Sports for Development and Peace Framework. Together, these theories explain how athlete leadership emerges, why it influences student behavior, and how institutions can strengthen this influence through intentional programming and policy support.

Social Identity Theory provides a foundation for understanding why athletes hold significant influence in university settings. As a highly visible and cohesive group, student-athletes form a distinct social category that others easily recognize. Their identity as athletes carries norms of discipline, teamwork, and sportsmanship that shape how they are perceived by the broader student body.

While Social Identity Theory explains how influence develops, Contact Theory clarifies how this influence is translated into improved intergroup relations. Sports naturally facilitate repeated and meaningful interactions among individuals from diverse backgrounds, offering a shared space where cooperation, equal status, and common goals are emphasized.

The Sports for Development and Peace (SDP) Framework further strengthens this explanation by highlighting the importance of deliberate and structured programming. SDP emphasizes that sport becomes a tool for peace not automatically but through intentional design, training, and institutional support. Leadership development programs, conflict mediation workshops, mentorship schemes, and values-based initiatives align closely with SDP principles by ensuring that athletes' contributions to peace are purposeful and sustainable.

#### **Theme 4. Advocates for Unity Platform**

The theme "Advocates for Unity Platform" captures the ways in which student-athletes, coaches, and sports leaders intentionally use sports as a platform to promote unity, solidarity, and cohesive relationships within their academic communities. The informants described how sports programs within State Universities and Colleges do not only cultivate athletic performance but also serve as social spaces where harmonious interaction is fostered, cultural divisions are softened, and collective identity is strengthened.

Across the focus group discussions and interviews, participants emphasized that the shared goals inherent in sports—such as teamwork, discipline, and mutual respect—naturally create an environment where diverse individuals can find common ground.

Several informants narrated that their teams often become micro-communities characterized by strong interpersonal bonds. Through constant interaction during training, games, and team-building activities, they learn to appreciate each other's differences while working to achieve a collective victory.

The theme also reflects how coaches and team leaders actively advocate for collaborative values, highlighting fairness, open communication, and non-discriminatory treatment. Coaches mentioned that they deliberately integrate messages of unity in their pre-game talks, conflict mediation, and leadership approaches.

A key informant (KI2) shared,  
*"Para sa akin, nagiging totoo ang pagkakaisa kapag may respeto at sportsmanship kahit magkaiba ang team. Kapag patas kang maglaro kahit panalo o talo, mas napapakita mo na mas mahalaga ang pagkakaisa kaysa kompetisyon."*

(Unity becomes real when athletes intentionally promote respect and sportsmanship regardless of team affiliation. The athletes who model fairness in both victory and defeat inspire others to stay united and focus on shared goals within the institution.)

Another key informant (KI5) explained,  
*"Kailangan talaga ng patuloy na komunikasyon at pag-uunawa. Minsan nagkakaproblema dahil walang nagsasalita, pero kapag may atleta na nangunguna sa pag-uusap, mas nagkakaintindihan at nababawasan ang alitan."*

(Unity requires consistent communication and mutual understanding among athletes. According to this informant, misunderstandings often arise from silence or assumptions, but when athletes take the lead in initiating dialogue, collaboration strengthens and conflicts are reduced.)

According to one Participant (P7-FGD),  
*"Malaki ang impluwensya ng mga atleta kaya kaya nilang paglapitin ang mga estudyante. Kapag sila mismo ang nangunguna sa mga gawain para sa pagkakaisa, napapasunod din ang iba at mas*

*nagkakaroon ng respeto sa pagkakaiba-iba.”*

(Athletes have the influence to bridge differences among students because they are visible figures on campus. I believed that when athletes advocate unity—whether through team initiatives, campus events, or mediation—they encourage other students to cooperate and respect diversity.)

One more participant (P11- FGD) highlighted,

*“Mas tumitibay ang pagkakaisa kapag marunong magpigil ang atleta ng personal na sama ng loob para sa kabutihan ng team. Kapag marunong kang magpakumbaba at magbigay-daan, mas nagiging maayos ang samahan.”*

(Unity is strengthened when athletes set aside personal issues for the good of the team and the institution. Showing humility and openness to compromise allows athletes to create a more harmonious environment.)

In essence, “Advocates for Unity Platform” illustrates how sports become a conduit for fostering peaceful interactions and collective identity within SUCs. It emphasizes that unity is not merely an abstract value but a lived experience—cultivated, expressed, and advocated through the everyday practices of sports communities. Through their participation, informants demonstrate how athletes and coaches can transcend competition and become influential agents of unity within their institutions.

Burnett (2020) notes that Sport for Development and Peace programs create intentional spaces where diverse groups build teamwork, respect, and intercultural understanding. Likewise, Lyras and Welty Peachey (2021) highlight that unity grows when sports programs are purposefully designed with peacebuilding goals and values-based leadership.

Sports function as a unity platform because they shape shared identities and positive interactions. Social Identity Theory shows that team membership creates strong group identities, allowing inclusive norms—like fair play, respect, and collaboration—to spread beyond the team to the wider campus community. Contact Theory explains that well-structured sports activities naturally provide the conditions for unity: equal status, shared goals, cooperation, institutional support, and meaningful interaction. The Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) framework

connects these psychological processes to intentional program design, emphasizing that sport promotes unity most effectively when guided by clear objectives, trained facilitators, and strong institutional support.

### **Part 3. Existing Programs that Support the Involvement of Athletes in Conflict Resolution**

To better understand how athletes are supported in promoting peace and unity, it is important to examine the existing programs that engage them in conflict resolution. These programs offer structured avenues for athletes to participate actively in fostering understanding, cooperation, and dialogue among their peers. The following section presents the key themes that emerged from an analysis of these programs, highlighting the strategies and approaches that enhance athletes' involvement in creating a harmonious environment within State Universities and Colleges.

#### **Theme 1. Formal and Informal Programs for Conflict Resolution**

The informants revealed that universities implement a combination of formal and informal programs that involve athletes in conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts. These initiatives aim to develop both the personal and social capacities of student-athletes, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to campus harmony. Formal programs, such as Right to Play, provide structured sport-based activities integrated with psychoeducational components. These programs foster emotional resilience, prosocial behaviors, and cooperative skills among participants, equipping them with tools to navigate interpersonal conflicts and promote peaceful interactions, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

In addition to formal programs, informal approaches are widely practiced within the university athletic environment. Coaches and sports coordinators often engage in mediation or dialogue whenever misunderstandings arise among team members. Short sessions embedded in training camps—such as the Sportsmanship and Values Formation Seminars—emphasize teamwork, communication, respect, and conflict management during games and practices.

Key informants also highlighted programs like the Student-Athlete Leadership Council, where selected athletes are trained and mentored to assist peers in addressing minor conflicts within teams or student groups.

The Athlete Mentorship Program, another initiative, pairs senior athletes with juniors to help them adjust to academic and social challenges while fostering positive interpersonal behavior. These programs, whether formally structured or informally integrated into athletic routines, demonstrate how universities utilize both visible and subtle mechanisms to engage athletes in promoting peace on campus.

One key informant (KI1) elaborated,

Yes, there are programs and initiatives that involve athletes in conflict resolution or reconciliation. For example, the Right to Play program provides sports with psychoeducational activities to foster emotional resilience and prosocial behaviors, especially in conflict-affected areas.

Another informant (KI5) stated,

*“Oo, may mga programang pang-pamumuno at pagsasanay sa kakayahan para sa mga atleta na kinabibilangan ng meditasyon at pamamahala ng alitan. Tinutulungan ng mga programang ito ang mga atleta na mapaunlad ang mga kasanayang pang-buhay tulad ng kontrol sa emosyon, tibay ng loob, at epektibong komunikasyon.”*

(Yes, our school has leadership and skills training for athletes that include meditation and conflict management. These programs help athletes develop life skills such as emotional control, resilience, and effective communication.)

An informant (KI3) from CSU shared,

At CSU, there are several ways students—including athletes—can contribute to conflict resolution and reconciliation on campus. These efforts may not always be officially documented but can be observed through initiatives, leadership, and campus programs.

According to the key informant (KI5) from COTSU,

In COTSU, we practice informal approaches to conflict resolution among athletes. Coaches conduct mediation or dialogue whenever misunderstandings occur, and we include short sessions on sportsmanship, respect, and communication during training camps.”

As narrated by the key informant (KI7),

*“Mayroon kaming mga programa tulad ng Athlete Mentorship Program, kung saan ang mga senior athletes ay ginagabayan ang junior athletes upang matulungan silang mag-adjust sa paaralan at sa kanilang mga kurso.”*

(We have programs like the Athlete Mentorship Program, where senior athletes mentor junior athletes to help them adjust to school and courses.)

Research suggests that sport-based programs can foster teamwork, empathy, and mutual respect, which are essential components for creating peaceful and inclusive environments (Clarke, Jones, & Smith, 2021; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2021). In particular, the structured interaction inherent in sports provides opportunities for students to engage in collaborative activities, develop communication skills, and practice conflict management in real-life scenarios (Matitu, 2020; Pasagui & Langcoy II, 2023).

Sport-for-Development-and-Peace initiatives have been widely studied as mechanisms to integrate social learning into athletic activities. These programs intentionally combine physical training with psychoeducational components designed to foster emotional resilience, prosocial behavior, and leadership capacities among participants (Clarke, Jones, & Smith, 2021; Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2023).

Intergroup Contact Theory also provides insight into the effectiveness of sport-based interventions. Structured, cooperative interactions in sports settings—when guided by principles of equal status, common goals, and institutional support—reduce prejudice and increase empathy among participants (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2020; Linklater, Harwood, & Barker, 2022).

Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2020) emphasizes that structured and cooperative interactions among diverse groups reduce prejudice, foster empathy, and improve intergroup relations. Sport inherently provides opportunities for these types of contact: team practices, tournaments, and collaborative campus initiatives require students from different backgrounds to cooperate toward common goals. The responses of informants show that athletes engage in informal mediation and dialogue, and participate in mentorship programs that encourage cooperative problem-solving.

Social Identity Theory further explains how team membership and shared athletic goals contribute to the development of inclusive identities that transcend narrow in-group/out-group distinctions (Evans et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2024). Student-athletes who internalize team values such as fairness, respect, and cooperation are better positioned to model these behaviors for peers, thereby promoting reconciliation and unity in the broader campus community.

## **Theme 2. Leadership Development as a Mechanism for Peacebuilding**

The theme Leadership Development as a Mechanism for Peacebuilding highlights how the cultivation of leadership skills among student-athletes strengthens their capacity to contribute to conflict resolution and reconciliation within campus communities. Informants consistently emphasized that leadership training and structured programs provide athletes with opportunities to develop emotional intelligence, communication skills, and decision-making capabilities, which are critical for addressing interpersonal tensions and fostering unity among students.

Athletes occupy a highly visible position on campus, and their behavior often sets a standard for peers. Through leadership development programs, such as the Student-Athlete Leadership Council or mentorship initiatives, senior athletes are trained to guide junior teammates, mediate disputes, and model collaborative behavior. Key informants described these programs as not only enhancing the technical and tactical aspects of sports but also embedding lessons on empathy, accountability, and conflict management, thereby linking athletic participation to broader social and ethical responsibilities.

One participant (P10-FGD) mentioned,  
*“Ang pagiging mentor ng mga junior athletes ay nakatulong sa akin na magkaroon ng pasensya at mahusay na komunikasyon. Ngayon nakikita ko kung paano ang pamumuno sa aming koponan ay makakaiwas sa paglala ng mga alitan.”*

(Mentoring junior athletes has helped me develop patience and communication skills. I now see how leadership within our team can prevent conflicts from escalating.)

A key informant (KI5) highlighted that,

*“Ang aming Student-Athlete Leadership Council ay nagbibigay ng*

*nakabalangkas na pagkakataon para sa mga atleta na mamuno sa mga inisyatiba tungkol sa teamwork at pamamahala ng alitan. Ito ay nagbibigay kapangyarihan sa kanila na maging tagapamagitan at huwaran sa komunidad ng campus.”*

(Our Student-Athlete Leadership Council provides structured opportunities for athletes to lead initiatives on teamwork and conflict management. This empowers them to act as mediators and role models in the campus community.)

One key informant (KI8) replied,

*“Hinihikayat namin ang mga atleta na gampanan ang mga papel ng pamumuno sa panahon ng training at kompetisyon. Kapag ginabayan nila ang iba nang may respeto, nababawasan ang hindi pagkakaunawaan at napapalaganap ang kultura ng pagkakaisa.”*

(We encourage athletes to take leadership roles during training and competitions. When they guide others respectfully, it reduces misunderstandings and promotes a culture of unity.)

Recent studies underscore the pivotal role of leadership development in enabling athletes to contribute to peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and social cohesion within campus and community settings. Research indicates that athletic participation alone is insufficient for fostering socially responsible leadership; rather, structured programs that intentionally cultivate leadership skills are necessary to translate sports involvement into positive social impact (Frontiers in Sports and Active Living, 2025).

Such models provide student-athletes with opportunities to mediate conflicts, mentor peers, and model prosocial behaviors, thereby reinforcing their capacity as agents of reconciliation and peace within educational environments (ResearchGate, 2022). Moreover, coaching approaches that emphasize autonomy, trust, and supportive feedback have been shown to improve athletes’ emotional resilience, optimism, and social responsibility—traits that are essential for conflict management and peacebuilding initiatives (PMC, 2023).

From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, leadership development reinforces athletes’ group identities while promoting prosocial norms. As athletes internalize team values such as fairness, cooperation, and respect, they are more likely to influence peers positively, extending these behaviors beyond the team to the wider campus

environment. This aligns with the role of athletes as role models for peaceful behavior, demonstrating that leadership is both symbolic and practical in encouraging conflict resolution.

Contact Theory further supports the importance of leadership roles in peacebuilding. Structured leadership opportunities provide contexts for cooperative intergroup interaction, mentorship, and team-based problem-solving. When student-athletes engage in these activities, they facilitate meaningful contact between diverse student groups, reduce misunderstandings, and foster empathy—all critical for reconciliation and social cohesion.

The Sports for Development and Peace Framework emphasizes that effective programs require intentional design, capacity building, and institutional support. Leadership programs for athletes exemplify this principle by combining skill development, experiential learning, and structured responsibilities that allow student-athletes to actively participate in peacebuilding. Informants noted that workshops, seminars, and training sessions in conflict resolution, mediation, and communication are particularly effective when tailored to the schedules and needs of athletes, allowing them to integrate these skills into everyday team and campus interactions.

### **Theme 3. Skill Development and Life Skills Training**

The theme Skill Development and Life Skills Training reflects the crucial role of structured programs in equipping student-athletes with competencies that extend beyond athletic performance, fostering personal growth, resilience, and the ability to contribute to a harmonious campus environment. Informants consistently emphasized that training programs not only enhance physical skills but also integrate life skills such as emotional regulation, effective communication, problem-solving, leadership, and teamwork—all of which are vital for conflict resolution and reconciliation.

Student-athletes reported that participating in workshops, mentorship programs, and leadership seminars improved their ability to navigate interpersonal challenges. One informant highlighted that learning active listening and stress management allowed them to anticipate conflicts, mediate disputes among peers, and respond to tensions thoughtfully. Another emphasized that teamwork-oriented activities taught them to value cooperation, respect diverse perspectives,

and encourage inclusivity within the team.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of skill development and life skills training in athletic programs, highlighting how structured sports engagement fosters personal growth, social-emotional competencies, and prosocial behaviors that contribute to conflict resolution and community cohesion. Participation in sports is associated with enhanced self-confidence, teamwork, communication, and emotional regulation, which are foundational for navigating interpersonal challenges and fostering harmonious relationships among peers (Pasagui & Langcoy II, 2023).

Research in the Philippine context confirms that student-athletes who participate in sports with integrated life skills training develop higher levels of social, personal, and self-management competencies compared with their non-athlete peers (Pasagui & Langcoy II, 2023).

Additionally, research on adaptive sports demonstrates that inclusive and cooperative sporting activities enhance empathy, cognitive flexibility, and social integration among participants, emphasizing the broader social impact of skill development through sport (BMC Psychology, 2025). Team-based sports also strengthen group cohesion, shared identity, and collaboration, which reduce interpersonal tension and provide a platform for fostering unity and reconciliation (Frontiers in Sports and Active Living, 2025).

From a theoretical standpoint, Social Identity Theory explains that skill development strengthens athletes' sense of belonging and shared purpose within their team and the campus community. As athletes internalize team values like fairness, respect, and cooperation, they are more likely to influence peers positively, supporting conflict prevention and resolution efforts (Evans, Smith, & Johnson, 2024). Meanwhile, Contact Theory highlights that structured collaboration during skill-building activities provides repeated and meaningful interactions, which help reduce prejudice, build empathy, and establish mutual trust among diverse student groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2020).

The Sports for Development and Peace framework underscores the importance of integrating life skills into athletic programs to promote prosocial behavior and leadership capacities (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2021; Clarke, Jones, & Smith, 2021). Informants described how mentorship programs and leadership councils allow senior athletes to guide juniors, mediate conflicts, and instill positive norms, illustrating how skill

development can function as both a personal and community-level peacebuilding mechanism.

#### **Theme 4. Athletes as Role Models and Peer Mediators**

The theme "Athletes as Role Models and Peer Mediators" captures the perception that student-athletes naturally occupy influential social positions within their campus communities. Their visibility in competitions, training sessions, and school events positions them as figures whom other students often look up to, consciously or unconsciously. As such, their behavior, attitudes, and interpersonal interactions become templates through which peers interpret norms of discipline, cooperation, and respect.

Participants emphasized that athletes, by virtue of their routine exposure to structured team environments, develop essential values such as teamwork, patience, emotional regulation, and sportsmanship. These qualities enable them to model constructive responses to tension or conflict. When athletes demonstrate calmness during disagreements, fairness in competitive situations, or empathy toward peers, they serve as living examples of peaceful conduct. In many instances, fellow students approach athletes not only for social reasons but also for guidance, particularly in situations involving misunderstandings among student groups.

Moreover, the data revealed that athletes do not only influence others through example, but also serve as peer mediators in actual conflict situations. Participants noted that athletes often intervene during minor disputes, diffuse tensions in group settings, or help clarify misunderstandings within student circles. Their credibility stems from their established leadership within teams, as well as the trust they hold as individuals accustomed to maintaining cohesion under competitive pressure. In some academic environments, coaches and school officials even encourage athletes to play this informal mediating role, recognizing their potential to settle disagreements before they escalate into formal disciplinary concerns.

A participant (P8-FGD) narrated,

*"Kapag nakikita ko ang mga senior athletes namin na kalmado kahit sobrang pressure na, napapaalala sa akin na hindi kailangang puro init ng ulo ang sagot sa problema. Ipinapakita nila na mas mahalaga ang*

*disiplina at respeto kaysa sa panalo sa isang away."*

(When I see our senior athletes handle pressure with calmness, it reminds me that we don't always have to react with aggression. They show us that discipline and respect are more important than winning an argument.)

One of the participants (P5-FGD) expressed,

*"Hinahangaan namin sila dahil sila ang nagrerepresenta ng kung ano ang pinaninindigan ng team. Kaya kapag sila mismo ang mahinahon na umaayos ng alitan, nagiging pamantayan iyon para sa aming lahat."*

(We look up to them because they represent what our team stands for. So when they settle conflicts peacefully, it becomes the standard for all of us.)

Participant (P12-FGD) also said,

*"Kapag may nagtatalo na teammates, madalas ang mas beteranong atleta ang pumapagitna. Hindi sila kumakampi—tin tutulongan lang nila kaming makinig sa isa't isa. Para bang pagdating pa lang nila, gumagaan na ang tensyon."*

(When teammates argue, it's usually the more experienced athletes who step in. They don't take sides—they just help us listen to each other. Somehow their presence already calms the situation.)

One mote participant (P8-FGD) narrated,

*"Mas napalapit kami sa ibang grupo sa campus dahil sa sports. Hinikayat kami ng mga athlete-leaders na mag-training nang magkakasama, at dahil doon nabawasan ang mga pader sa pagitan ng iba't ibang organisasyon."*

(Sports brought us closer to other groups on campus. Our athlete-leaders encouraged us to train together, and that helped break the barriers between different organizations.)

This theme therefore reflects a dual function: athletes represent behavioral models that shape campus norms, and they also serve as active mediators who help maintain harmony among peers. Although these roles are not always formally acknowledged by institutional policies, they remain vital contributions that support the broader goals of conflict resolution and reconciliation on campus.

Beyond role-modelling, recent research supports the idea that athletes also serve as peer mediators, especially in team-based environments where interpersonal conflicts naturally occur. Communication skills, empathy, and team cohesion are repeatedly cited as core competencies that enable athlete-leaders to manage conflicts. Bedir et al. (2023) demonstrated that communication skills significantly mediate the relationship between empathy and team cohesion, meaning that athletes with strong empathic awareness and interpersonal abilities are more effective in resolving misunderstandings and restoring positive team dynamics.

Intervention studies further emphasize the value of structured athlete-led programs. Kelly (2023), in a systematic review of sporting role-model interventions, found that well-designed initiatives involving trained athlete role models can significantly influence adolescents' behavioural outcomes, especially in terms of participation, confidence, and positive social norms. However, success depends on program structure, athlete training, and clear messaging.

The findings show that athletes significantly shape team norms and social dynamics. Social Identity Theory explains that high-status athletes—such as captains or star players—serve as prototypes whose behavior sets standards for how teammates should act, influencing norms around cooperation, conflict, and conduct.

On the other hand, Contact Theory highlights that well-structured sports environments can strengthen relationships by providing repeated, cooperative interactions under conditions that reduce prejudice and build trust. The SDP Framework further emphasizes that athletes can be intentional agents of positive change: with proper training and program design, they can support peers, mediate conflicts, and promote broader developmental and civic values.

#### **Part 4. Proposed Strategies to Enhance the Role of Athletes in Institutional Conflict Resolution Initiatives**

This section presents the proposed strategies identified by student-

athletes, coaches, and school officials during interviews and focus group discussions. Their perspectives highlight the institutional conditions, capacity-building needs, and policy mechanisms necessary to optimize the role of athletes as partners in promoting unity, managing conflict, and fostering reconciliation across State Universities and Colleges (SUCs). The themes that emerged offer concrete and actionable directions for strengthening athlete engagement in peace-oriented initiatives within campus communities.

### **Theme 1. Leadership Opportunities for Athletes**

The theme Leadership Opportunities for Athletes highlights the critical role of structured leadership roles in enabling student-athletes to contribute to conflict resolution, reconciliation, and social cohesion within campus communities. Informants emphasized that athletes are highly visible figures whose actions and decisions can influence peers, promote positive behavior, and foster a culture of unity. Providing leadership opportunities allows athletes to leverage their influence both on and off the field, modeling respect, teamwork, and ethical decision-making.

Informants identified multiple forms of leadership engagement, including membership in student councils, participation in mentorship programs, and appointments to committees or councils focused on campus harmony. Such platforms give athletes the authority and responsibility to mediate conflicts, facilitate dialogue, and encourage inclusivity.

A key informant (KI9) replied,

*"Ang pagbibigay sa mga atleta ng mga tungkulin sa pamumuno sa student council o komite ng koponan ay nagbibigay-daan sa amin na gabayan ang aming mga kapwa estudyante at mamagitan sa mga alitan bago ito lumala."*

(Providing athletes with leadership roles in student councils or team committees allows us to guide our peers and mediate conflicts before they escalate.)

On of the participants (P15-FGD) mentioned,

*"Ang pagiging kapitan ng koponan ay nakatulong sa akin na matutong makipag-ugnayan nang mas maayos sa aking mga kasamahan at lutasin ang mga hindi pagkakaunawaan nang mahinahon."*

(Being a team captain has helped me learn how to communicate

better with my teammates and resolve misunderstandings calmly.)

Followed by another participant (P7-FGD) shared,

*"Itinuturo sa amin ng mga tungkulin sa pamumuno ang pagiging responsable at pananagutan, na mahalaga sa pagtataguyod ng kapayapaan at pagkakaisa sa campus."*

(Leadership roles teach us responsibility and accountability, which are important when promoting peace and unity on campus.)

One key informant (KI2) expressed,

*"Kung bibigyan ng pormal na posisyon ang mga atleta, maaari nilang maging halimbawa ng respeto, pagiging makatarungan, at pagtutulungan na susundan ng ibang estudyante."*

(If athletes are given formal positions, they can set examples of respect, fairness, and teamwork that other students can follow.)

A comprehensive scoping review titled *Playing for peace: scoping review of sports programs as agents of peace* (Rodríguez et al., 2024) mapped global sports-based peace initiatives and concluded that sport has evolved beyond competition: it now functions as a powerful vehicle for social change, community cohesion, and intergroup peace. The review found numerous programs—especially in conflict-affected contexts—where sport facilitated intercultural contact, promoted shared values, and enabled dialogue across divided communities.

Similarly, *Building Peace through Sports Projects: A Scoping Review* (Clarke, Jones & Smith, 2021) argued that the principles of SDP can be systematically applied through sport-for-development projects that emphasize inclusion, social learning, and community engagement. The authors highlight that when sport is combined with structured pedagogical elements, it helps build social trust, reduce prejudice, and foster cross-group cooperation—outcomes that strongly correspond to peacebuilding objectives.

From the education and student-athlete perspective, *The Role of Sports in Peace-Building: Insights from NCAA Community* (Matitu, 2020) provides empirical evidence that participation in collegiate sports correlates with perceptions of human development and peacebuilding tendencies among athletes and coaches.

In terms of psychosocial and social-emotional development, research on school-based team sports also supports the role of sport in building social wellness. The narrative review *School-Based Team Sports as Catalysts for Holistic Student Wellness: A Narrative Review (2023)* documents how team sports in school settings enhance community belonging, foster social skills, and improve relationships among students.

Finally, international policy documents have reinforced the institutional significance of sport for peace and social inclusion. The United Nations (UN) 2024 report on Sport for Development and Peace emphasizes sport's role in achieving sustainable development, crime prevention, social inclusion, and peacebuilding. The report encourages Member States and stakeholders to integrate sport into national strategies for social cohesion and conflict prevention.

The integration of the Sports for Development and Peace framework emphasizes that sports can serve as intentional platforms for fostering life skills, ethical leadership, and social responsibility. By embedding leadership opportunities within sports programs, universities create structured environments where athletes can develop mediation, communication, and conflict resolution competencies, which are central to peacebuilding objectives (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2021; Clarke, Jones, & Smith, 2021). The SDP framework also underscores the potential of sports-based leadership to bridge social divides, enhance intergroup contact, and strengthen community cohesion, aligning closely with the principles of Social Identity Theory and Contact Theory.

## **Theme 2. Awareness and Capacity-Building Programs**

The theme Awareness and Capacity-Building Programs highlights the importance of equipping student-athletes with the knowledge, skills, and consciousness necessary to actively contribute to conflict resolution and reconciliation within campus communities. Informants emphasized that while athletes are often visible and influential figures on campus, many are unaware of the critical role they can play in promoting peace, managing disputes, and fostering unity. Awareness programs and capacity-building initiatives, therefore, serve as essential tools to bridge this gap by sensitizing athletes to their social responsibility and preparing them to act effectively in conflict situations.

Informants suggested that awareness programs could include seminars, workshops, and training sessions on leadership,

communication, emotional management, conflict resolution, and mediation skills. These initiatives are intended to provide athletes with practical strategies for handling disagreements, both within their teams and among the broader student population.

Participant (P4-FGD) expressed,

*"Ang mga workshop at seminar ay tumutulong sa mga atleta na maunawaan na maaari silang gumanap ng papel sa paglutas ng mga alitan at pagtataguyod ng kapayapaan sa campus."*

(Workshops and seminars help athletes realize that they can play a role in resolving conflicts and promoting peace on campus.)

Participant (P13-FGD) highlighted,

*"Kung tayo ay sanayin sa komunikasyon at kontrol sa emosyon, maaari nating harapin ang mga hindi pagkakaunawaan nang mahinahon at maiwasan ang paglala nito."*

(If we are trained in communication and emotional control, we can handle disagreements calmly and prevent escalation.)

Kay informant (KI7) said,

*"Ang mga awareness program ay nagtuturo sa amin ng kahalagahan ng pagtutulongan, respeto, at empatiya hindi lamang sa larangan ng sports kundi pati sa pang-araw-araw na buhay."*

(Awareness programs make us understand the importance of teamwork, respect, and empathy beyond the sports field.)

According to key informant (KI11),

*"Ang pagiging bahagi ng leadership training o conflict management workshops ay nagbibigay sa amin ng kumpiyansa na mamagitan at gabayan ang aming mga kapwa estudyante sa mga tensyonadong sitwasyon."*

(Being part of leadership training or conflict management workshops gives us confidence to mediate and guide our peers during tense situations.)

A landmark contribution is the scoping review *Playing for peace: scoping review of sports programs as agents of peace* (Rodríguez et al., 2024). This review analyzes 17 empirical studies worldwide and concludes that sport-based programs have effectively served as "agents of peace," especially in conflict-affected and divided communities.

Further supporting the role of organized sport in fostering social cohesion, the study *Sport as a Catalyst for Social Justice and Inclusion: A Case Study of the Gaelic Athletic Association's Role in Community and Youth Development* (2023) observes that community-based sport programs provide structured and symbolic arenas for dialogue, empathy, and reconciliation.

In educational contexts, recent empirical evidence affirms the psychosocial and social-developmental benefits of sport participation. The study *Cultural moderation in sports impact: exploring sports-induced effects on educational progress, cognitive focus, and social development in Chinese higher education* (2024) finds that engagement in sports among university students significantly correlates with enhanced social development, mental well-being, and interpersonal competence.

Finally, empirical evidence from peace-oriented sport-for-development programs — such as the case described in *How sport changed my life? Description of the perceived effects of the experiences of young Colombians throughout a sport for development and peace program* (Gadai et al., 2023) — shows that participants report improved psychosocial well-being, sense of belonging, and social connectedness as a result of their involvement.

The findings show that awareness and capacity-building programs strengthen athletes' roles as positive influencers on campus. Social Identity Theory explains that these initiatives help athletes recognize their dual identity as team members and community actors, encouraging them to internalize values like respect, fairness, and cooperation—behaviors that reduce tension and promote unity. Contact Theory highlights that structured activities, such as joint trainings and collaborative projects, create meaningful intergroup interactions that build empathy and mutual understanding. The SDP Framework reinforces that sports can be intentionally used for social and personal development; through well-designed programs, athletes gain leadership and life skills that enable them to contribute to social cohesion and peacebuilding beyond the playing field.

### **Theme 3. Integration of Values-Based Leadership in Sports**

The theme *Integration of Values-Based Leadership in Sports* underscores the critical role of ethical, principled, and socially conscious leadership within athletic contexts. Informants highlighted that athletes, especially those in leadership positions such as team captains or student-

athlete representatives, can influence their peers not only through performance but through the demonstration of core values such as integrity, fairness, empathy, respect, and accountability. These values are central to fostering a culture of unity, reducing conflicts, and promoting reconciliation on campus.

Values-based leadership within sports involves more than setting personal performance goals; it emphasizes guiding teammates toward collective goals while modeling ethical behavior. Informants noted that athletes who exemplify respect for rules, fair play, and cooperation often inspire peers to emulate these behaviors, leading to a more harmonious and collaborative team environment. This role extends beyond the sports field, as athletes serve as visible figures whose actions set social norms for broader student interactions.

As narrated by a key informant (KI8),

*"Bilang kapitan ng koponan, sinisikap kong ipakita ang respeto at patas na pagtrato sa bawat training session upang tularan ito ng aking mga kakampi."*

(As a team captain, I try to show respect and fairness in every training session so my teammates can follow the same behavior.)

Similar narration by another informant (KI4),

*"Kapag pinapakita ng mga atleta ang disiplina at pagtutulungan, nagiging halimbawa ito sa buong komunidad ng campus kung paano lutasin ang mga alitan nang mapayapa."*

(When athletes practice discipline and teamwork, it sets an example for the whole campus community to resolve conflicts peacefully.)

Participant (P4-FGD) reported,

*"Ang pamumuno ay hindi lang tungkol sa pagkapanalo sa laro; ito ay tungkol sa paggabay sa mga kakampi gamit ang mga pagpapahalaga tulad ng katapatan, respeto, at empatiya."*

(Leadership is not only about winning games; it is about guiding teammates with values like honesty, respect, and empathy.)

Followed by another participant (P10-FGD) mentioned,

*"Natutunan ko sa mga workshop na ang pagpapakita ng etikal na pag-uugali at kontrol sa emosyon sa laro ay nakakatulong maiwasan ang mga alitan at hindi pagkakaunawaan."*

(I have learned through workshops that showing ethical behavior and emotional control during games helps prevent conflicts and misunderstandings.)

According to Rodríguez et al. (2024), sports programs designed with social objectives can act as “agents of peace,” fostering shared values, ethical behavior, and mutual respect among participants. These programs provide structured environments in which athletes can practice leadership grounded in fairness, integrity, and cooperation, extending their influence beyond the sports field to the broader campus community.

Empirical evidence also highlights the link between emotional intelligence and effective sports leadership. A study by Berengüí, Parra-Plaza, and Castejón (2024) found that student-athletes with higher emotional regulation, empathy, and clarity exhibited stronger leadership skills, including decision-making, social support, and ethical conduct toward teammates.

Coaches play a critical role in modeling values-based leadership. Soto-Garcia, García-Herrero, Carcedo, and Sánchez-García (2021) observed that authentic leadership training for coaches improved perceived justice, collective efficacy, and team cohesion among athletes. When coaches embody and reinforce core ethical values, athletes are more likely to internalize these behaviors, creating a culture of respect, cooperation, and social responsibility that supports conflict prevention and peaceful interactions.

Values-based leadership among athletes strengthens their influence both within their teams and across the wider campus community. Social Identity Theory shows that when athletes internalize ethical norms, they shape group identity and promote cohesion by modeling positive behavior. Contact Theory adds that such leaders foster constructive interactions among diverse student groups, helping reduce prejudice, build trust, and resolve conflict through fairness and inclusivity. The SDP Framework reinforces that sports can intentionally develop these capacities: by integrating leadership training with ethical and social learning, institutions can cultivate athletes who not only excel in sport but also mediate disputes, model integrity, and promote a culture of peace and inclusion.

#### **Theme 4. Policy Support and Formal Recognition**

The theme Policy Support and Formal Recognition reflects the need

for institutional structures that officially acknowledge and strengthen the role of athletes in conflict resolution and reconciliation within State Universities and Colleges. Informants highlighted that while athletes informally contribute to mediating disputes, promoting sportsmanship, and fostering unity among peers, these contributions often remain unrecognized because they are not embedded in university policies or formal programs. As a result, their peacebuilding roles are inconsistent, dependent on individual motivation rather than guided by institutional expectations or frameworks.

Policy support involves creating clear guidelines, programs, and mechanisms that empower athletes to participate in campus peace efforts. This includes integrating conflict resolution roles into existing student-athlete leadership structures, such as the Student-Athlete Council, or including peacebuilding modules in athletic training programs. Formal recognition, meanwhile, gives legitimacy to these roles by acknowledging athletes as partners in promoting campus harmony.

Informants noted that existing initiatives—such as sportsmanship seminars, NSTP Culture of Peace modules, and socio-cultural integration events—already provide entry points for institutionalizing athletes' peace roles. However, without formal policy backing, these efforts are fragmented and temporary.

According to participant (P5-FGD),

*“Malaking tulong kung gagawa ang unibersidad ng malinaw na polisiya na naglalarawan sa papel ng mga atleta sa peacebuilding. Sa ngayon, tumutulong naman ang mga atleta pero hindi ito nakasaad o kinikilala nang pormal.”*

(One thing that would really help is if the university created clear policies that define the role of athletes in peacebuilding. Right now, athletes help informally, but nothing is written or officially recognized.)

As reported by one of the coaches participant (P9-FGD),

*“Sa school namin, mayroon nang mga programa tulad ng socio-cultural at sports integration na nagpo-promote ng pagkakaisa. Pero sa tingin ko dapat gumawa ang mga SUCs ng opisyal na guidelines na kumikilala sa mga atleta bilang katuwang sa pagpapanatili ng kapayapaan.”*

(In our school, we already have some programs that promote unity, like socio-cultural and sports integration events. But I think SUCs

should create official guidelines that recognize athletes as partners in promoting peace.)

A key informant (KI7) narrated,

*“Kailangan talaga ng mga atleta ng suporta mula sa institusyon. Kung isasama ng administrasyon ang conflict resolution sa mga polisiya ng athletic department, mas bibigyang-pansin ito ng coaches at athletes.”*

(Athletes need institutional support. If the administration formally includes conflict resolution in the athletic department’s policies, coaches and athletes will take it more seriously.)

Another informant (KI10) mentioned,

*“Sa tingin ko, dapat gumawa ang mga SUCs ng isang formal na programa na nag-uugnay sa sports at peace education. Sa ngayon, sumasali ang mga atleta sa peace activities kung iniimbitahan lang sila.”*

(I think SUCs should establish a formal program that links sports with peace education. Right now, athletes participate in peace activities but only when they are invited.)

Ultimately, Policy Support and Formal Recognition strengthens the sustainability of peace initiatives within SUCs. By formally acknowledging athletes as contributors to conflict resolution and campus harmony, institutions create a stable, predictable environment where peace leadership can flourish. This ensures that the positive influence of athletes is not circumstantial but systematically cultivated, implemented, and evaluated across all academic years.

Similarly, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD, 2023) highlights that sports-based interventions thrive when organizations adopt clear frameworks for athlete participation in social development initiatives. Their assessment shows that schools and youth institutions benefit significantly when policies explicitly mandate athlete engagement in leadership, mediation, and community-building programs, ensuring that peace-oriented activities are not dependent solely on the willingness of coaches or administrators (AFD, 2023). This aligns with broader findings from sports development practitioners suggesting that institutional mandates create a more consistent environment for athlete participation

in peacebuilding roles (AFD, n.d.).

Bairner and Liston (2023) found that when sports institutions formally embed values such as teamwork, respect, and cultural inclusion into their policies, athletes internalize these norms more effectively, resulting in stronger community engagement.

Zheng, Chen, and Houlihan (2023) underscore that sports-based programs aligned with SDG frameworks demonstrate higher legitimacy and receive greater institutional backing, which strengthens their role in addressing conflict, public health, and social integration. In this view, formal policy recognition does not merely validate existing programs but also helps integrate peace-oriented initiatives into the broader educational and institutional mandates.

Moreover, peacebuilding scholars emphasize that policies that institutionalize training, leadership development, and cultural understanding among athletes are crucial for ensuring their effective participation in conflict resolution initiatives. A scoping review by Cárdenas and Itani (2024) concludes that sports can only function as peace agents when supported by governance frameworks that formalize responsibilities, define stakeholder roles, and provide structured opportunities for engagement.

## Summary of Findings

This study sought to understand how athletes contribute to fostering conflict resolution within the campus environment, drawing from their everyday interactions, leadership roles, and participation in organized sports programs. The following themes capture these core insights and illustrate the various ways athletes become active agents in promoting peace and unity.

1. The study revealed four primary sources of conflict among student-athletes and non-athletes: 1) Competition for Playing Time like limited opportunities to participate in games that generates tension, rivalry, and emotional strain within teams; 2) Disrespect and Misunderstandings Due to Tone and Expressive Differences leading to misunderstandings and informal divisions among team members. 3) Favoritism and preferential access to resources or privileges; and 4) Resource and facility allocation issues, such as uneven distribution of sports facilities, equipment, and institutional resources.

2. Student-athletes viewed themselves as central contributors to campus peace through four interconnected roles: a) Role Models for peaceful behavior, demonstrating respect, discipline, and empathy both on and off the field; b) Active agents in conflict prevention like mediating tensions and preventing disputes from escalating;



c) Empowerment through Leadership to guide peers toward positive and collaborative behaviors; and d) Advocates for unity platform to bridge differences, foster cohesion, and strengthen inclusive interactions among students.

3. The study identified existing programs supporting athletes involvement in conflict resolution and reconciliation: a) Formal and informal programs for conflict resolution, such as combine sports with psychoeducational components, teaching emotional resilience, prosocial behaviors, and cooperative skills, as well as mentorship, and team-building; b) Leadership development as a mechanism for peacebuilding; c) Skill and leadership development that equip athletes with emotional regulation, communication, and problem-solving abilities; and d) Enabling them to act as peer mediators and role models within the campus community;

4. The proposed strategies to optimize athlete engagement in conflict resolution, include: a) Leadership opportunities for athletes, that institutionalize leadership roles in councils, committees, and mentorship programs; b) Awareness and capacity-building programs through conduct of seminars and workshops on conflict; c) Integration of values-based leadership in Sports that encourage ethical, principled, and socially conscious behavior among athletes; and d) Policy support and formal recognition that establish clear institutional policies and recognition mechanisms to legitimize and sustain athletes' contributions to conflict resolution.

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights the significant role of student-athletes in fostering conflict resolution within State Universities and Colleges (SUCs). Conflicts in SUCs—arising from competition for playing time, personality and communication clashes, unequal treatment, and resource allocation challenges—reflect both structural constraints and interpersonal dynamics. Student-athletes, due to their visibility, leadership roles, and influence among peers, are uniquely positioned to contribute to a culture of unity, cooperation, and peaceful engagement within their campus communities.

These findings can be understood through several theoretical perspectives. Social Identity Theory explains how athletes' group membership and visibility shape peer perceptions and campus norms. By consistently modeling cooperation, respect, and fair play, athletes influence others' understanding of inclusive behavior, helping to reduce intergroup tensions. Contact Theory further clarifies the value of

structured, positive interactions among students from diverse backgrounds. Through training, competitions, and team activities, sports create opportunities for meaningful engagement, mutual understanding, and empathy, which contribute to conflict reduction. Finally, the Sports for Development and Peace Framework positions athletic participation as a powerful mechanism for broader social transformation.

The proposed strategies identified in this study align closely with these theoretical perspectives. They aim to strengthen athletes' ability to serve as both exemplars and active facilitators of peace. When empowered through structured programs, ethical leadership, and institutional support, student-athletes extend their influence beyond sports, cultivating inclusive, harmonious, and resilient campus communities consistent with the principles of Social Identity Theory, Contact Theory, and the SDP Framework.

## Recommendations

1. Integrate student-athletes into councils, committees, and mentorship programs to mediate conflicts and promote campus harmony.
2. Conduct regular seminars and workshops on conflict management, emotional regulation, communication, mediation, and teamwork.
3. Sensitize athletes to their role as peacebuilders and equip them with practical skills to handle disputes.
4. Emphasize ethical behavior, fairness, empathy, respect, and accountability in athletic training and leadership development.
5. Encourage coaches and mentors to model and reinforce these values to promote inclusivity and cooperation.
6. Design programs that foster engagement between athletes and non-athletes from diverse backgrounds.

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