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Venturing Beyond the Marathon: The Entrepreneurship of Ultrarunning and the IAU World Cup in Korea

by

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Venturing Beyond the Marathon:

The Entrepreneurship of Ultrarunning and the IAU World Cup in Korea

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Abstract: This article describes the entrepreneurial development and professionalism of ultradistance running (ultrarunning) in South Korea, culminating with the hosting of the IAU World Cup 100K in 2006. This case study-based research provides evidence of various macro-environmental and individual drivers of a grassroots entrepreneurial process, contextualised in Korea's sporting culture. Macro-environmental factors include the economic crisis and Korean cultural values of comradery, emotional expressiveness and entrepreneurial spirit. At the individual level, self-leadership, focus, persistence, team dynamics and access to resources explain the growth of ultrarunning and the commitment to hosting the IAU World Cup. Implications for sports entrepreneurship and grassroots-initiated mega-sporting events in Asia are discussed.

Keywords: Athletics, Entrepreneurship, Korea, Mega-Sporting Event, Self-Leadership, Ultramarathon, Ultrarunning

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Venturing Beyond the Marathon:
The Entrepreneurship of Ultrarunning and the IAU World Cup in Korea

INTRODUCTION

Korea[I] hosted the International Association of Ultrarunning (IAU) World Championships for the 100 kilometer (km) distance, the IAU World Cup, on October 7, 2006. The IAU World Cup is the world's leading ultrarunning championship and is sanctioned by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), the international governing body for the sport of athletics, which also authorizes athletics at the Summer Olympic Games. The 2006 IAU World Cup attracted over 300 athletes and managers from 24 countries and was covered by running media around the world. Ultrarunning was first introduced to Korea in 2000 and the sport has grown rapidly. Korea is home to an estimated 2,500 ultrarunners who participate regularly in many of the country's ultramarathons.

An ultramarathon is a footrace beyond the traditional marathon distance of 42.1 kilometer (km) (26.2 miles). Also termed 'ultradistance,' ultrarunning is one of the fastest growing grassroots sports in the world, particularly in Asia (interview Milroy). The origins of ultrarunning pre-date the use of tools, and can be traced back to human hunters running down animals, however the first modern-day ultradistance event was held on April 15, 1869 at London's Stamford Bridge. Contests in this Victorian time were sports ventures and generally considered a form of entertainment and gambling, providing a small income for a handful of the most talented men and women in England

and the United States (Milroy, 1988; Terjesen, 2005). Ultrarunning grew out of favour by the 1890s, but re-emerged in the 1920s and experienced a major resurgence in 1972, beginning in the United Kingdom and United States (Milroy, 1988; interview Milroy). Each year, over 70,000 people around the world complete an ultramarathon (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ultramarathon, last accessed November 30, 2007). The IAU was founded in 1984 as an umbrella organisation for the various initiatives around the world, and to enable high-caliber international competitions. The first IAU World Cup was held in 1987 in Belgium and was set to the most common ultrarunning distance, 100 km (62.1 miles). Other common ultrarunning distances include 50 km (31.1 miles), 50 mile (80.5 km), 100 mile (161 km) and 200 km (124 miles). Ultrarunning competitions are also staged over 24 hour, 48 hour and six-day time periods, in which athletes complete as much distance as possible, often on a one km or one mile circuit.

This study explores the macro-environmental and individual factors contributing to the entrepreneurial development and professionalisation of the sport, culminating in the hosting of a mega-sporting event, the IAU World Cup. Extant mega-sporting literature focuses on large-scale events such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup (e.g. Horne and Manzenreiter, 2002; Kasimati, 2003; Dolles and Söderman, 2005) in Anglo-Saxon countries (e.g. Gratton *et al.*, 2006). We follow Roche (2001: 1) in defining mega-events as "large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events, which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance." The IAU World Cup meets these criteria on the basis of the following: the signature event for the top

ultrarunning talent, closely followed by the ultrarunning community around the world and sanctioned by the leading athletics body. Furthermore, the event showcases local and national culture through events for visiting athletes and spectators. The IAU World Cup is awarded by the IAU Executive Committee to the event team with the best proposal. Like other IAAF world championships, the IAU World Cup is an annual competition and has been held in Spain, France, USA, Japan, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia and Taiwan. The competitor-driven scope of the 2007 IAU World Cup is similar to other major sporting events such as those identified by Gratton et al. (2006), e.g. European Short Course Swimming and European Junior Swimming. In addition to an individual competition for the World Championship, the IAU World Cup incorporates a team competition for both men and women which is based on the combined times of the first three athletes to finish.Ultrarunning's grassroots nature is ripe for the exploration of the development from basic survival in ancient times to hobby sport to IAAF-sanctioned World Championship. Each mega-sporting event starts at some scale. For example, basketball's popularity in the Olympic Games has increased dramatically since its exhibition at the 1936 Los Angeles games.

Scholars have called for mega-events research which incorporates new theories and examines impacts on different people and places (e.g. Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006). Ultrarunning provides a natural experiment for studying bio-impacts of prolonged exercise. Extant ultramarathon research is confined to medical journals, focusing on issues such as fluid and nutrition replacement, internal bleeding and energy release

dynamics (see Noakes 2002 for a review of some of this research). The present study is believed to be the first to examine the sport of ultrarunning from a non-medical perspective.

This paper develops the view that Korea's rapid, grassroots growth and professionalisation of ultrarunning in Korea is an example of mega-sports entrepreneurship. Gartner (1985) defines entrepreneurship as the creation of a new organisation. In the case of Korean ultrarunning, emergent organisations include the establishment of a national ultrarunning governing body, the Korean Ultra Marathon Federation (KUMF), over three hundred unique local races and ultimately, the 2006 IAU World Cup. The comparative Global Entrepreneurship Monitor study of entrepreneurial activity in more than 40 countries reports that Korea has one of the world's most entrepreneurially active societies with an estimated 15 per cent of the population involved in some type of entrepreneurship, compared with a global average of 10 per cent (Reynolds *et al.*, 2004). The emerging Korean entrepreneurship research focuses on the growth of new firms (e.g. Shim and Steers, 2001; Hong *et al.*, 2005) but does not address entrepreneurial behaviour by individuals and non-firm entities in Korea.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, the case study methodology and the context of Korea's socio-cultural are described. Next, the case is framed in extent entrepreneurship theory on the role of macro-environmental and individual factors in the development of new ventures. Discussion and conclusions include the feasibility of mega-sporting events

as an environment to examine entrepreneurship, the lack of generalisability of traditional mega-sporting events research to grassroots initiatives and the future of ultrarunning and other mega-sporting events in Korea and abroad.

METHODOLOGY

As a scholarly field, entrepreneurship is characterised by heterogeneous phenomenon with a 'process' character requiring close-up analysis (Davidsson, 2004). The infrequent, unanticipated and extraordinary events in entrepreneurship merit qualitative approaches (ibid). This case study is based on interviews and archival data gathered between May 2006 and July 2007 from KUMF and IAU World Cup planning documentation, Korean and international ultrarunning publications. During this time period, interviews were conducted with twenty-one individuals, including key organisers in the Brussels-based IAU (5), Seoul-based KUMF leadership (2), KUMF members (4), Association of Road Running Statisticians member (1) and athletes from Asia (2), Europe (3), North America (2) and Oceania (2). Interviews with IAU and KUMF leaders were conducted twice before the event and twice after the event. Interviews varied in length from 30 minutes to two hours and were transcribed. In five cases, interview questions were e-mailed in advance.

Case material was analysed using the categorisation and sub-categorisation methods after an extensive literature review on the entrepreneurial process. Categories included

individual qualities and environmental trends; sub-categories included self-leadership and persistence. The IAU World Cup experience is framed in this theoretical background.

KOREA: SOCIOCULTURAL/ SPORTING CONTEXT AND GROWTH OF ULTRARUNNING

Context is critical when evaluating the behaviour or organisations (Johns, 2006), particularly in Asian environments (Meyer, 2006; Yang and Terjesen, 2007). This section contextualises Korea in terms of its sociocultural and sporting environment.

Sociocultural and Sports Environment

Korea's sociocultural environment for athletics is illustrated in the stories of two nationally-known distance runners, Ki-jung Son and Hyeong-jin Bae. A Korean athlete during Japan's colonial rule, Ki-jung Son won a series of trials for the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games and a spot on the Japanese team. Racing under the Japanese name "Kitei Son," he won the gold medal, later reflecting, "At that time, it was impossible for a Korean to gain fame, but sports was the only exception. I wanted the world to know that I am a Korean by winning the Olympics."[II] Ki-jung Son was sorrow-stricken when the Japanese flag was raised and the anthem played. Korean newspapers were closed after they depicted Son wearing an inserted Korean flag on his uniform. Son dedicated the rest of his life to athletics, often training young athletes at his own expense and later serving as the president of the Korea Athletics Federation and as a member of the Korean

Olympic Committee. In 1988, he carried the Olympic torch into the Seoul Olympic Games' opening ceremony. Upon Son's death, Korea's president Dae-jung Kim offered his deep condolences to the man "who inspired national spirit" (Park, 2002). More recently, Koreans rejoiced in the story of Hyeong-jin Bae, a twenty-year-old autistic man with the intellectual capacity of a five-year-old, who completed the Chuncheon Marathon in 2001. Based on Bae's story, the Korean film, *Marathon*, was an instant box office hit and won the nation's Best Picture award in 2005. The stories of Ki-jung Son and Hyeong-jin Bae illustrate the psyche of long distance running in Korea. In addition to the national athletics federations, Korea has a company team structure, whereby large corporations sponsor employee teams to compete in national and international events. These professional and semi-professional "corporate athletes" usually compete in races of marathon or shorter distance (interview Milroy).

Korea also has strong ties to other sports, as illustrated by its status as the first Asian country to field a professional soccer team and role as host to a number of mega-sporting events, including the 1986 Summer Asian Games, 1988 Summer Olympic Games, and the co-hosted 2002 FIFA World Cup.

Extant research on mega-sporting events in Korea focuses on large-scale, well-established sports, such as the FIFA World Cup (e.g. Matheson and Baade, 2004a) and the Summer Olympic Games, and the impact to the local and national economic development, growth and infrastructure. For example, the FIFA World Cup generated US

$8.9 billion, approximately 2.2 per cent of the Korean economy, however US $2.7 billion was spent on ten new soccer stadiums which were only 78 per cent occupied during the games (Beech, 2002). Only five of the ten stadiums are used regularly (Matheson and Baade, 2004b). Furthermore, there was no increase in tourists: the same number of foreign tourists (about 460,000) visited Korea in 2002 (the year of the FIFA World Cup) as the year before (Golovnina, 2002).

While research on the FIFA World Cup and other mainstream sporting events has vastly improved our understanding of the industry (e.g. Horne and Manzenreiter, 2002), the findings may not be generalisable to other sports of a more grassroots nature, such as ultrarunning. For example, in contrast to the FIFA World Cup and the Summer Olympic Games, the IAU World Cup did not require massive investments in new infrastructure, instead taking advantage of existing facilities constructed for previous sporting championships, such as the Misari Motorboat Stadium and athlete housing at the Olympic Village. Furthermore, while the FIFA World Cup could be considered a spectator-driven event (as defined by Gratton *et al.*, 2006), the IAU World Cup is a competitor-driven event where athletic participants' friends and family constitute the majority of the spectators. Furthermore, the IAU World Cup encourages local community participation as athletes (in a relay run), volunteers or spectators. In addition to the sporting context, Korea has a set of macro-environmental factors which contribute to the entrepreneurial growth of ultrarunning.

Macro-Environmental Factors Contributing to the Growth of Ultrarunning in Korea

Many of Korea's ultramarathoners report that their interest in the sport was ignited during the 1997-8 Asian financial crisis. The crisis was followed by a recession and two major rounds of restructuring, resulting in the collapse half of the large chaebols. South Korean firms also lost much of their sovereignty due to the need to borrow heavily from the International Monetary Fund to avoid bankruptcy (Ismail, 2002). In the interview, Yongsik Lee, a corporate strategic planner at a major chaebol recalls how the country's financial crisis triggered a personal life change,

> *"The crisis generated great stress at work. I thought I might die sitting in my chair someday. I started running around a small playground in a primary school near my house. I was forty years old and actually Korea is very famous for the high rates of death of men in their forties. I challenged myself to run a half marathon and then a full marathon within two months of starting. Certainly, I risked my life. I began to doubt that Pheidippides [according to Greek legend, a soldier who ran from Marathon to Athens to announce the Persians' defeat at the Battle of Marathon] died after completing his marathon. I wanted to try a longer distance challenge and became the first 100km finisher in Korea in 2000."*
> (interview)

Lee reported quickly "discovering a passion for trail running" and organised the 'Trans Korea 315km: West to East Sea' race and founded the Korean Ultra Marathon Federation

(KUMF) in December 2000. Lee is modest about his efforts to encourage an estimated fifteen percent of Korea's 20,000 new marathoners to try ultrarunning,

> *"What I did was just to play a major role in converting marathoners to longer distances. The longer they run, the better they feel. Most ultrarunners are in their forties or fifties, a time when people want to be free of their egos. Despite their stronger bodies, younger people have more difficulty with the longer distances. I think this is due to their lack of spirit. Nobody anticipated that ultrarunning in Korea would be in full bloom within such a short period."* (interview)

Lee persevered in the face of more serious marathoners whom he says attempted to hinder his plans as he was "not of athlete origin and the ultrarunning I promoted was far beyond their common sense acceptance." Lee found a comrade in Bokjin Park, an experienced marathon and soon ultramarathon runner who has worked in the athletic footwear industry for over 35 years. Park had recently started his own shoe company, "faab," short for "free as a bird," which he describes as "probably Korea's number one shoe for serious runners." (interview) Park regularly contributes ultrarunning articles to Webzine, Run114 and other websites devoted to Korean running. During this period of ultrarunning growth, Korea's economy also improved[III]. Park described how the improved economy favoured the sport's development, "Once the GNP [per capita] reaches US $10,000, people start thinking about running. They have more disposable income to invest in sports, so they get off the couch." (interview)

Culture

The sport of ultrarunning grew, in part, due to its close alignment with a number of aspects of Korean culture including hard work, collectivism, emphasis on family, emotional expressiveness, pioneering spirit and high-energy food. In the interview, Dave Deubelweiss, a Canadian-born schoolteacher based in Korea shared,

> *"Koreans, more than other cultures I have observed, understand discipline and perseverance. They will just keep on trying. Ultrarunning is a very mental game, not just physical, and this cultural mindset is closely allied to the Korean personality. That's why ultrarunning appeals to them".* (interview)

In parallel, the Korean culture has been described as collective in nature and team-oriented, especially compared to Western societies (Gannon, 2004). At KUMF ultrarunning races, Lee emphasises the importance of "treating all finishers as winners, especially the last one, as 'hero of the day'" (interview). Korean ultrarunners adapted the sport of ultrarunning to favour team- as opposed to individual- efforts, and organise large group celebrations following a race.

Korean society places a high value on spending time with family and Korean ultramarathons are scheduled accordingly. In contrast to Korean marathons (and also Western countries' ultramarathons) which are held between mid-morning and mid-afternoon on a Saturday or Sunday, Korean ultramarathons are usually held on a Friday or Saturday night. According to Lee (interview), the evening race schedule enables

runners to “enjoy their free time without hurrying” and spend the day with their families. A typical Korean ultramarathon attracts some 500-600 runners to a 7 pm start. Given the mountainous and fast-changing temperatures, most races require participants to wear a headlamp and carry raingear in a backpack decorated with reflecting lights. As in other ultramarathons around the world, Korean ultrarunners often stick together, sharing drinks, water, conversation and laughter throughout their journey. Described as “the Irish of Asia” (Gannon, 2004: 128), the Korean culture favours such emotional expressiveness.

Entrepreneurship in Related Industries

The growth of the Korean ultrarunning phenomenon was further aided by one ultramarathoner who established an “ultra restaurant,” called “Green Fork House” in downtown Seoul. The restaurant is decorated with ultrarunning photographs and memorabilia and has become an official and unofficial social gathering spot for ultrarunners. Park also publicises the growing sport through faab, his athletics shoe company.

Deubelweiss attributes the growth of the sport and the new events added to the calendar each year to Korean’s entrepreneurial spirit, “Everywhere you look, there are lots of small businesses, people doing everything for themselves. That entrepreneurial spirit goes over into ultrarunning. They just throw it all together and do an event.” (interview) He cautions, though, that Korea is also the land of “pali pali,” a Korean expression which

means to hurry up with last minute preparation. Finally, Deubelweiss commented on the connection between Korean food and the sport,

> *"Korea has lots of good, quick high energy foods that you can easily take in while you are running long distances. One of my favourites, 'kimbab,' costs about a dollar, comes in tin foil, and is like a big sushi. They sell them along the courses while you are running. You just run into the local family mart, throw your bills down, grab your whatever and keep on going. After training, a lot of people go for 'maekoli,' a mild, milky rice wine".* (interview)

Individual-Level Factors Contributing to the Growth of Ultrarunning in Korea

Entrepreneurial activities are initiated by individuals. The individuals involved in establishing the ultrarunning community and organising the IAU World Cup were all ultrarunners who likely developed some key entrepreneurial skills through their ultrarunning. At an individual level, the connection between ultrarunning and entrepreneurial activity is suggested in several strands of the literature.

Self Leadership

First, the principles of self-leadership associated with persistence in the entrepreneurial process (Neck *et al.*, 1999) are also linked to the decision to run ultramarathons and the ability to finish (Allison, 2003). Self-leadership is "the process of influencing oneself to establish the self-direction and self-motivation needed to perform" (Neck *et al.*, 1999: 478). The concept describes a higher level of self-influence beyond the scope of self-

management and encompasses monitoring as well as strategising toward optimal outcomes (Manz, 1986). Individuals with strong self-leadership skills often engage in self-dialog through their daily work and project mental images of success (Manz, 1992). Neck *et al.* (1999) developed a perspective of entrepreneurial thought self-leadership, focusing on specific behaviours exhibited by entrepreneurs and athletes. For example, both entrepreneurs and athletes engage in self-dialog and self-verbalisations which are linked to performance improvements.

KUMF's entrepreneurial organisers also report practicing self-dialog. As quoted earlier, KUMF President Lee thought he might die in his office chair, and challenged himself to run a half-marathon. After meeting this challenge, he reported asking himself if he might be able to run a marathon, and then subsequently an ultramarathon. Lee also alluded to visualisation, "I imagined that many people would enjoy the feeling that you get from finishing an ultramarathon. I knew that we could start sharing this." (interview) Lee's internal visualisations of success continues today, "I will make KUMF the world's best ultrarunning organisation by giving my members more chances to challenge such world class races as Spartathlon [Greece], Sakura Michi Nature Run [Japan], Trans-Australia, and Across America." (interview)

The KUMF team also had experience with self-leadership through their ability to create mental imagery during challenging ultramarathons. Lee and other KUMF members described how these visualisation techniques helped see them through the challenges of

races in excess of 600 km. Lee recalls his visualization of hosting the IAU World Cup in his country,

> *"I was very impressed at Winschoten [2004 IAU World Cup]. I thought that the European organisers had made a real mark in ultrarunning. I knew that we here in Korea could do it too. This would be our next goal."* (interview)

The KUMF team then invited IAU leadership to Korea to consider the country's suitability as a venue for a future IAU World Cup. During his visit, IAU President Strumane met with members and reported being astonished by the Koreans' vast knowledge of the history of ultrarunning and their drive to organise a world class event.

Self-leadership also involves thinking about opportunities rather than obstacles (Neck and Manz, 1992). "Opportunity thinking" describes a focus on potential challenges and ways of dealing with these situations. In contrast, "obstacle thinking" focuses on negative hurdles, and provides a cause for retreat. Ultramarathons can be viewed as an extended and real exercise in opportunity focus. While the distance from the start can be daunting, runners also confront a variety of challenges throughout the race such as fluid and nutrition intake and maintaining energy levels.

Focus is another key component of self-leadership and entrepreneurs often pursue their goals single-mindedly. Lee reports spending all of his spare time on KUMF at the expense of other parts of his life, "My wife has asked for a divorce four times. I haven't

visited my parents and relatives in Busan for the last seven years. Now they call me a bastard." (interview)

Persistence

Another important characteristic demonstrated by entrepreneurs and athletes is persistence. Individuals who attain their goals are likely to stay motivated and continue to follow their entrepreneurial drive (Kuratko *et al.*, 1997). Su-cheol Choi, a 44-year old car salesman in Busan, shared his perspective on ultrarunning, "I found it challenging compared to a regular marathon. There is nothing in my life that can replace the sense of achievement that I have in completing the race. It's like being a Don Quixote" (Limb, 2005: 1). Lee, Park and the other KUMF leaders' early successes motivated them to seek additional challenges. The link between individuals' fitness and various measures of entrepreneurs' and business owners' performance is well-established (Goldsby *et al.*, 2005; Neck and Cooper, 2000), suggesting a virtuous cycle of entrepreneurial activity.

Team Dynamics

Entrepreneurial ventures are often the product of teams of individuals who provide a balance of complementary resources and indicate a willingness to expand entrepreneurial efforts (Vesper, 1990; Timmons, 1999). Most successful new venture teams are composed of individuals who provide access to a breadth of resources, such prestige and legitimacy, useful information, and financial capital. KUMF has a very complementary leadership team. IAU World Cup lead organiser Yongsik Lee is the President of KUMF.

He holds a Master's degree in Environment Planning from Seoul National University and is a senior manager in a major chaebol. Lee has been described by running club members as a "very behind the scenes type of guy" who is "very much in control and professional" and "good at planning" (interview). His competence in structure and organisation are balanced by the dynamic entrepreneur Bokjin Park, KUMF's Director of Planning. Park, an experienced marathon and ultramarathon runner, shoe company entrepreneur and running magazine columnist, is described by others as a "dynamic, outgoing person" with "a lot of ideas" and "who isn't afraid of taking risk" and "provides spirit and high energy" to take the project forward. One KUMF member described the team,

> *"We have in common that we are all ultrarunners. We are all volunteers and we have our own jobs. We do not keep track of each others' educational backgrounds or social statuses as these are not related to running, but I would say that we come from all walks of life but we run together. We are cooperative and we will do whatever it takes."* (Park, 2007)

Access to Resources

Mega-projects require vast stocks of human, financial and physical capital from the local community (Kidd, 1992). The entrepreneurial process of creating new organisations also requires considerable and complementary resources (Timmons, 1999). Resource acquisition was a particularly daunting proposition for IAU World Cup hosts as the event costs at least US $150,000 to host in Europe and US $250,000 to host outside of Europe, mostly due to increased athlete travel (interview Milroy). Furthermore, although there is

little need to develop new infrastructure, the physical resource requirements can be burdensome: the IAU and the IAAF stipulate that the competition must be organised in a state-of-the-art facility with first class accommodation located nearby. Furthermore, Lee was conscious of the athletes' desire for a flat, fast course, "I wanted a long loop course with no bumps or hills so that the runners might set personal bests." (interview) KUMF paid US $7,000 for the use the Motorboat Race Stadium in Misari, 20 km east of Seoul. The stadium did not require any modifications, and previously hosted events for the 1986 Summer Asian Games, 1988 Summer Olympic Games and 2004 Formula One Powerboat Grand Prix. Athletes were housed at the Olympic Village Parktel, also the venue for the 1988 Summer Olympians. KUMF members also opened their homes to international athletes who requested family homestays.

Making use of resources at hand also means relying upon knowledge and skills acquired during previous experience. Members of the KUMF team leveraged project management experience honed in their regular jobs and volunteered for tasks in the following six teams: greeting, welcome, venue, records, medical and transportation. Most KUMF committee members had experience organising ultramarathons, although on a smaller, national scale. These skills came in handy, as did the supplies from these races for course marking and administration. The team leveraged their social networks to bring in additional volunteers, including fluent English speakers to welcome the athletes and children to carry flags and lead athletes' national teams in a parade around the Olympic Park.

Like most entrepreneurial teams who face a gap between needed and available financial resources (Timmons, 1999), the KUMF team were most resource-challenged by the lack of financing. The 2006 IAU World Cup cost approximately US $300,000 and is still being paid off. Lee, Park, and the KUMF team did not receive any support from Korea's Ministry of Sports or the Korean Sports Council which, according to Lee, "take a conservative approach to the new trends of sports such as ultradistance running." (interview) Most entrepreneurs are unable to access formal sources of capital (Timmons, 1999), and the KUMF was no exception as they were unable to access formal sources of capital and raised all of the funds themselves. The organisers' last-minute preparations made it difficult to secure resources from corporate sponsors. Korean media attention was generated through running magazines and television shows about ultrarunning. Internationally, various internet media followed the IAU World Cup.

DISCUSSION

Although the IAU World Cup brought a number of international athlete delegation visitors to Korea, it did not have the economic impact of other mega-sporting events. The best measurement of success of this grassroots mega-sporting event is likely at the individual level, captured in the views of organisers and athletes. In his closing ceremony speech, Lee shared,

> *"We would like to say a big thank you to the runners from the 24 countries from around the world for their excellent performances. Thank you above all to the*

helpers who worked very hard and contributed to the unforgettable atmosphere at the race. They are the real winners." (interview)

IAU President Dirk Strumane shared his assessment of the event in an open letter to the KUMF,

"As international governing body, we are extremely glad that we can look back at a very successful edition of our 100 km World Cup. At the same time I hope that the ultrarunning movement in your country will benefit from your efforts in terms of further development." (interview)

American athlete and fifth place finisher Howard Nippert shared,

"The race committee, the people, the hospitality, the race venue were all outstanding. It wasn't the most scenic race, but I don't look at scenery when I'm racing anyway. I look at the competitors. The Olympic Parktel accommodation was fantastic and the people were very hard working. I never saw an unfriendly face. The whole experience was great." (interview)

Stirred by the IAU World Cup, Park returned alone to the empty course of Korea's most famous ultramarathon, the 537km Trans Korea, to complete a race he had dropped out of thirteen weeks earlier,

"I had given up on July 15, 2006 at 220km. It was my first DNF [did not finish] in seven years of marathoning and hard to accept. One week after the IAU World

> *Cup, on October 14, 2006, I challenged myself to finish. I took a bus to the 220 km point and waited until 3am when it is most dark, and the exact time when I had declared 'I give up.' Then I re-started running alone, completely alone. There was no one who checked my qualifying time at each 50 km, no race organiser to give me water at 100 km, no volunteer to look after my blisters and hamstring aches, or to provide support. Finally, I made it- the 537 km from the southern tip of the Korean peninsula to the DMZ [de-militarized zone], the last step that [Korean] civilians can take towards the north. I reached the finish line."* (interview)

The success of the IAU World Cup inspired Lee and Park's latest ultrarunning venture--an ultradistance run from Seoul to Pyongyang. They met with the Head of the Korean Committee for Reconciliation and Cooperation to discuss the future possibility. The strong, pioneering spirits of ultrarunning and entrepreneurship are likely to lead to more grassroots sporting initiatives in Asia's future.

CONCLUSION

This study identified macro-environmental and individual factors related to the growth of entrepreneurial activity in Korean ultradistance running. Macro-environmental factors include the economic crisis and subsequent rebuilding of the economy and the Korean

cultural values of comradery, emotional expressiveness and entrepreneurial spirit. Individual factors include capacities for self-leadership, focus, persistence, team dynamics and access to resources. Moreover, this research has highlighted important linkages across both individual and macro-environmental factors. For example, the Asian financial crisis which jeopardised Korea's economic sovereignty also prompted Korean individuals to think about how they could take charge of their own lives in an uncertain time. For some, this personal journey led them to try running and then ultrarunning. Ultrarunners who worked as managers in large Korean chaebols focused their personal time and energy on developing completely new organisations and activities, such as KUMF and new ultramarathon competitions.

The findings demonstrate the promise of mega-sporting events as a context to examine the entrepreneurial process. Mega-sporting events are cultural productions of modern ideology, shaping national identities at home and abroad. While the scholarly definition of entrepreneurship encompasses new organisations of all forms, there is limited research in non-traditional non-firm environments. This detailed case study demonstrates the idiosyncratic nature of the entrepreneurial individuals, opportunity and process inherent in mega-sporting ventures. In the case of Korea's IAU World Cup, the event was borne by a recently formed organisation (KUMF) and subsequently generated more efforts.

Furthermore, the IAU World Cup case describes escalated levels of entrepreneurial commitment. For example, KUMF founder Lee began by running around a playground

and subsequently running a half-marathon, marathon and ultramarathon before turning his energies to establishing and developing KUMF. His trip to the 2004 IAU World Cup then inspired the successful bid for the 2006 event.

The IAU World Cup experience suggests that findings from established sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games are not generalizable to other ventures, especially of a more grassroots nature. For example, a principle concern of KUMF and IAU leadership is the need to establishing legitimacy for the sport of ultrarunning and the IAU World Cup. In contrast, FIFA and the Olympic Games are well-established brands which attract resources and leaders focus on infrastructure development. Grassroots sports are on the increase, attracting participants and spectators from slow/no-growth sports such as golf (Newport, 2007). Public interest in grassroots sporting initiatives is also growing, as witnessed in the recent media coverage of the Michigan-based Brooks-Hanson Distance Running project which provides high-potential athletes with basic resources (accommodation, training, nutrition, physiotherapy, and income through a job in the local running store) to chase their Olympic dreams (see, e.g. Kolata, 2007). The findings may, however, inform examinations of mega-sporting entrepreneurship in other Asian countries, such as China which has a rapidly changing entrepreneurial profile (Dolles, 2006).

In addition to demonstrating, in a phenomenological way, the entrepreneurship of grassroots sports in Korea, the IAU World Cup represents a major step in the

internationalization of ultradistance events. The IAU is applying for a 100 km exhibition event at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in India. This is the first step towards Commonwealth Games and Olympic Games ratification.

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ENDNOTES

[I] Korea refers to the Republic of Korea, also known as South Korea.
[II] Japan-Korea relations have improved substantially over time (Hook, 2002).
[III] Korea's GDP per capita grew from -6.85 per cent in 1998 to 8.49 per cent in 2000 and 4.9 per cent in 2006 (IMF, 2007).