Leadership development is “a continuous learning process that spans an entire lifetime; where knowledge and experience builds and allows for even more advanced learning and growth” (Brungardt, 1996, p. 83). And according to Bass (1990), “the effectiveness of [leadership] training depends on the trainee, the trainer, the composition of the training group...[and] feedback” (p. 856). In the youth sport context, researchers indicate that there are antecedent skills (e.g., self-awareness), environmental conditions (e.g., mentor access), and actions (e.g., persistence and reflection) that enable youth to lead effectively (Redmond & Dolan, 2014). While others describe the importance of youth leaders learning to care about others and to demonstrate optimism and other transformational behaviours (e.g., inspirational motivation) (Gould & Voelker, 2013).

In the sport for development (SFD) context, and according to Schulenkorf (2017), “sport managers can learn from these experiences...[and] SFD scholars may be able to contribute to the development of strong, inclusive, and well-respected leaders in SFD” (p. 248). Thus, the purpose of this research project is to develop more authentic leaders (Avolio, Gardner, & Walumbwa, 2018) who are strong, inclusive, and well-respected, using the sport of tackle football at the Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment (MLSE) Launchpad. In September 2019, 17 high school football players from Canada agreed to participate in this study (n=17). The football players completed a day-long workshop at Launchpad that included modified football games designed to build trust and enhance their communication skills, and reflective learning exercises to develop self-awareness and conflict resolution skills. The football players also completed the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) Self Version 1.0 and offered qualitative responses to questions regarding challenges they faced leading their teams.

This research is still in progress, and semi-structured interviews (following Patton, 2015) will be conducted with the football players and also with their high school’s head football coach at the conclusion of 2019 season. Findings from this research will enhance our understanding of youth leadership development in SFD broadly and using tackle football specifically. Implications for SFD practitioners and youth sport leaders will be highlighted during this presentation.