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## Breakaway, a soccer game about gender violence

Posted by Jeff Ramos on 02-10-11



It's not often that a video game about the dynamics of a soccer team serves as an introduction to violence and gender discrimination. However, the Emergent Media Center at Champlain College decided to use such a narrative to draw young boys in and teach them the importance of teamwork and gender equality. This unique take on gameplay narrative adapts the "[Sabido Methodology](#)" of using serialized stories to tackle sensitive subjects.

I spoke with Ann DeMarle, Director at The Emergent Media Center to gain some perspective on how she and a group of young students created the game, [Breakaway](#).

Ann enlisted the aid of the Population Media Center (PMC), who introduced her to the Sabido Methodology and the United Nation's team behind their gender-based initiatives. Together with the PMC and the UN, the team traveled to various countries to see how they responded to gender-based violence. In their travels, they noticed two very important things that influenced the creation

of Breakaway.

The first discovery was although some countries have similar rates of gender-based violence compared to America, the way in which people view this violence is often different. Men and even young boys openly discussed gender-based violence with as much casualty as they would tell you what their favorite sport was. This was shocking to Ann, so she decided that targeting young boys would be the first step. But, even though they knew the Sabido Methodology was a powerful way to share an idea, they knew most young boys do not respond well to games with long narratives. This left them unsure as to what kind of game to create. Their second discovery in their travels gave them the answer.

Other than the US, the most popular sport in the world is soccer. In their visits to various countries, they couldn't help but notice how many boys were engaged with the sport. They realized that creating a game around a young boy joining a soccer team would be the perfect way to draw in their target audience. From there, Breakaway was born. But to really engage young boys, they needed one more ingredient.

The team asked the UN if they could provide them with a list of international celebrities that could endorse Breakaway. The UN responded with just one name: Samuel Eto'o. Many Americans may not know his name, but Samuel is best known for being Africa's most decorated soccer player and an [active humanitarian](#). His contributions to the sport as well as those in need made him a perfect ambassador of the game.

Unlike most games that focus on gender-based violence, Breakaway presents itself purely as a soccer-based action game. Players are eased into the story and begin learning basic soccer skills and familiarizing themselves with the other story characters. It isn't until you're finally on the team and learn who everyone is that the issues of gender slowly creeps in, almost as just another facet of the story, not the core element. Throughout gameplay, players are slowly challenged to not only become a great soccer player but to make ethical decisions about gender-based violence in meaningful and thoughtful way.

You can catch up with the story of Breakaway as the last chapter nears its debut [here](#).

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