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## DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG FOOTBALL PLAYERS

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### Abstract

*Problem statement.* Sports in general and football in particular today play an important educational role in the development of young people. The development and training of young players is essential for the future of national and international football. This research aims to resume the development process of young football players.

Football practice should not only provide a chance to develop the necessary skills for the game itself but also develop the personal skills of young people in society. In this process, football schools, football academies, clubs, and sports associations play a decisive role. It is important to set goals for each stage, specific to the players' age, mental muscular and physical development, and learning capacity. Knowing the most relevant aspects of the development and training of young football players, we can hope that future elite players will be more efficient and competitive in relation to the demands of modern football. The coach is the most important person in the development of young footballers

*Keywords:* the development process, young players, football training.

### Introduction

Mills A. et al. (2012) revealed six interrelated higher-order categories representing factors perceived to either positively or negatively influence player development. These were: awareness (e.g. self-awareness, awareness of others); resilience (e.g. coping with setbacks, optimistic attitude); goal-directed attributes (e.g. passion, professional attitude); intelligence (e.g. sport intelligence, emotional competence); sport-specific attributes (e.g. coachability, competitiveness); and environmental factors (e.g. significant others, culture of game).

The identification and selection of talented young people for elite sports is the main concern of nations that want to perform at high-level sports competitions such as the Olympic Games or World Championships. In a social context that offers various opportunities and reasons to capture children's attention (internet, video games, social networks), it becomes increasingly difficult to attract children to sports.

#### *Defining the Concept*

Gagne (Gagne, 1999) broadly defines talent as transforming "high aptitudes into the well-trained and systematically developed skills characteristic of a particular field of human activity or performance"

In the Dictionary of Sports Sciences, talent is defined as a "well-marked aptitude in its orientation that exceeds the average or is fully developed. Selection in sports is a continuous process carried out until reaching the upper limits of performance. This process is correlated and directed toward a certain specialization of the child and junior (Nicu A. 1999).

In our opinion, it is an organized, continuous, and repeated process for the early detection of native characteristics based on a complex set of medical, biological, psycho-sociological, and motor skills.

- The medical-sports criterion acts within the selection system by synthesizing all information from the fields of genetics, anthropology, physiology, biomechanics, and sports medicine to achieve a directed, objective selection for performance sports.
- Physiological somatic characteristics are of particular importance in sport selection and orientation.
- Biochemical criteria in sports selection refer to the biochemical characteristics of the body's energy.
- Selection of psychological criteria means knowledge of the psychological peculiarities of the subjects.
- For most sports, motricity expressed by motor skills is the basic selection criteria. General and specific motor skills testing is conducted using a system of tests and control norms established for each sport branch.

#### *Talent identification and development in football*

Talent identification and development in the football game is a continuous and laborious concern. The coaches and scouts identify talented players and predict their potential future development and success by viewing them in a trial or training session environment. However, the identification of talent for an elite sport is a laborious process. The selection of youth players who are more advanced in maturation may elicit some immediate advantages (i.e., competitive success), but it can be counterproductive with regard to long-term player development. The physical, physiological, and functional advantages associated with advanced biological maturation are attenuated or even reversed by adulthood (Cumming SP., et al. 2018).

The Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) recommends that member associations' development plans should include all levels of football, as shown in the following pyramid: football for 6-12 year olds (organised, semi-organised or informal), academies, regional youth football, national elite championship (U-13, U-15, U-17, U-19, U-21), amateur football, professional football.

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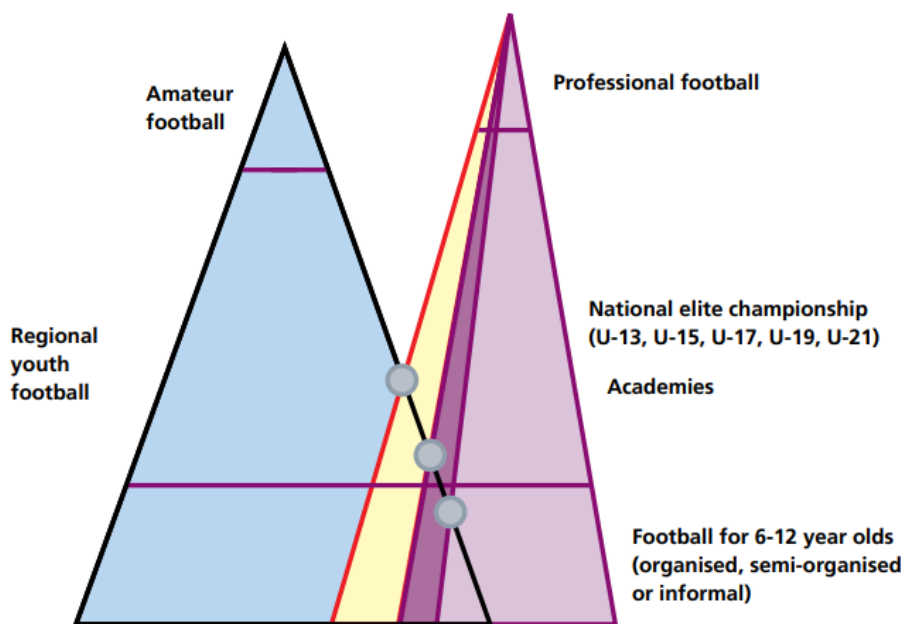


Figure 1. FIFA development pyramid youth football

These pyramids are dependent on each other. On the one hand, elite youth football provides high-level training for young professionals and international players of tomorrow, and on the other hand, football is a leisure activity that provides opportunities for people of all ages to play football. Clubs and local communities create opportunities to play soccer – whether organized or informal – by providing infrastructure such as pitches, equipment, and changing facilities for training sessions and matches (<https://cdn3.sportngin.com/attachments/document/be82-2348965/youth-football-training-manual-2866317.pdf>).

There are studies that show that in a traditional way coaches and scouts identify talented players and predict potential future development and success from viewing players in a trial or training session environment, and in some cases only on one occasion (Larkin & O'Connor, 2017).

Slaidins K., et al. (2021) maintained that talent development programs in football provide players with a quality training process that contributes to the growth of success potential in the long run. Many studies have shown that the development of technical skills for youth football players is an important aspect in the development of their skills for future achievements. There are studies showing the phenomenon of small but successful football countries that can compete and produce talent at the highest international levels. The question that football structures want to answer is: What factors determine the success of small football nations?

Bosscher et al. (2007) claimed that success in elite sports can be systematized on three levels:

1. Macro-level factors: the social and cultural context in which people live, including economic welfare, population, geographic and climatic variation, degree of urbanization, political system, and the cultural system.
2. Meso-level factors are the sports policies of nations (e.g., policies on coach development, policies on talent identification and selection).
3. Micro-level factors relate to individual athletes (genetic qualities) and their close environment (e.g., parents, friends, coaches).

Figure 2 shows that macro- and meso-level factors influence the national success of countries. Micro-level factors related to individual success can be strongly correlated with meso-level implementations. In this process, the quality of training is most important for developing elite athletes (Côté & Hay, 2002). The macro-level factor of a country with a great football culture and high ranking FIFA, such as Brazil, Argentina, Spain, England, Germany, France, or Italy, seems to be the engine for great results.

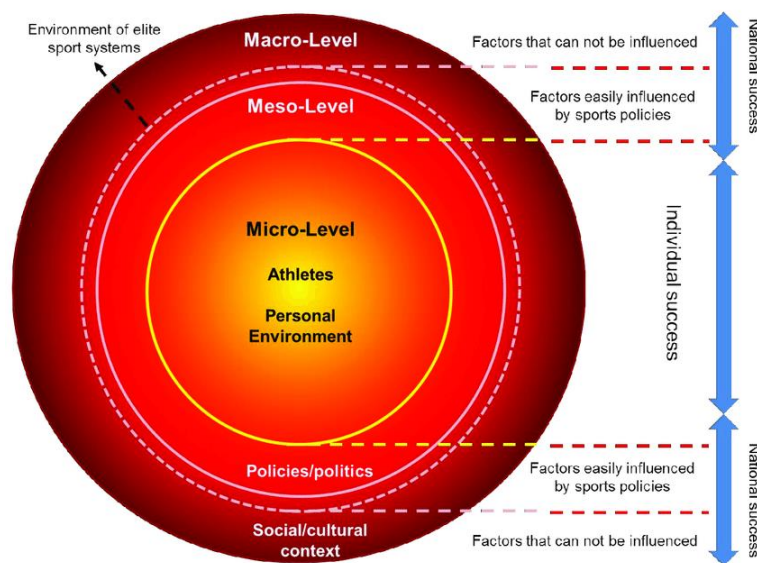


Figure 2. Relationship between factors determining individual and national success (De Bosscher et al., 2007, p.17)

### Examples of good practice

For example, Belgium adopts a talent identification process that identifies youth at the earliest possible stage in which they present themselves. This can result in the relative age effect influencing the direction some level or another the talent development of a country. In the last decade, Belgian football has produced many international stars such as: Eden Hazard, Vincent Kompany, Romelu Lukaku, Kevin De Bruyne, Thibaut Courtois, and Yannick Carrasco. The Royal Belgian Football Association's (RBFA) development is guided using a three-pronged approach:

- Increasing the number of people playing soccer at all levels, especially women;
- Improving governance of the game;
- Encouraging more fans to support Belgium's national teams.

In the development process of the young players, Michel Sablon, Belgium's technical director since 2001, has prioritized at youth ages fun and not winning. Free coaching courses in Belgium played an important role in the development process, which effectively increased the number of enrollments ten times (<https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/national-associations/bel/>).

France is currently one of the best talent factories in the world. In France, young players are discovered and trained to become world-class players. The French Football Federation operates under the principle that "This work is very important for the game of tomorrow". The better they develop quality players at the youth level, the more accomplished professional players will burst onto the scene. Noël Le Graët President of the French Football Federation and Member of the FIFA Council believes that development means embarking on the path of progress and giving yourself the means to succeed, with time and hard work. Young players are trained not only in specialized academies such as Olympique Lyonnais, Clairefontaine, Paris Saint Germain, As Monaco, and Le Havre but also in specialized schools. The Academies produce approximately over 70 new professional players every year who have the opportunity to play in top professional leagues such as Ligue 1 and Ligue 2. Players between the ages of 11 and 14 are usually scouted and selected for secondary school specializing in sports development. In the French Football Federation, the selection of top-level players must have exceptional technique, intelligence on the field, a high work rate on the field, a good school record, good health, and motricity. Aime Jacque argues that players are identified at the age of 11 through districts and then regional teams. The best 20-30 players at age 13 go to the "Institut national du football de Clairefontaine (INF)" (<https://studylib.net/doc/8630282/the-french-football-federation-youth-development-program>).

Youth development at Clairefontaine incorporates many principles of football, such

- Physical training and tests to make player movements faster and more efficient;
- Training the weaker foot;
- Weaknesses in the player's game;
- Psychological aspects;
- Medical factors;
- Technical skills training;
- Tactical game training (Mihir B. 2013).

In the FFF's strategies, the coach is the most important person in the development of young footballers, and this is the reason why the federation invests a lot in the development of talented coaches. In this development process, the



priorities for players are to become a professional player with the highest chance of success and to keep up with his studies so he can have a career if football does not work out. Priorities for coaches must include the methods by which they work.

France is the only country in Europe that requires a youth coaching license to develop highly qualified technical staff (<https://studylib.net/doc/8630282/the-french-football-federation-youth-development-program>).

For the Romanian Football Federation (FRF), the development of football at the level of children and juniors by improving the activity of academies and increasing the standard of competitions is a strategic objective. The development of youth soccer according to the FRF vision can be achieved by respecting the following requirements:

- developing the format of the competitions;
- Introduce new competitions for children and juniors;
- Identification from an early age of children with potential football skills;
- Implementation of the project of centralized training of juniors through the Regional Centers of Excellence;
- Increasing the number of elite players identified through scouting activities;
- Specialized training for children and junior coaches within the Federal School of Trainers;
- Compliance with the requirement that all participating clubs in League I have junior centers;
- Increase in the number of junior groups within the same club at the same level of age;
- Implementation of a unitary training program (for batches and national centers regional) focused on modern training methods, specific nutrition, assistance psychology, school education, and sports science;
- Increasing the number of days in a year that juniors spend with national teams;
- Subsidizing visas by the FRF and eliminating all fees for junior teams;
- Creation of a federal fund dedicated to financing the best development project for youth football ([file:///C:/Users/drago/Downloads/FRF\\_Strategie\\_2015\\_vizualizare.pdf](file:///C:/Users/drago/Downloads/FRF_Strategie_2015_vizualizare.pdf)).

### Conclusions

Data from the literature show that coaching and the ability to motivate youth are paramount in the success of a footballing nation. In the process of developing young players in academies, the passion for football is promoted before the results. Studies have shown that the macro-level factor of a country with a great soccer tradition is the engine for great results. The coach is the most important person in the development of young footballers

In youth football development plans, the member associations must include all levels: football for 6-12 year olds (organized, semi-organised or informal), academies, regional youth football, national elite championships (U-13, U-15, U-17, U-19, U-21), amateur football, and professional football.

In the development process of elite athletes, the quality of training, discipline, and passion for football are the most important aspects.

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