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Original article

SURVEY ON THE OPINION OF CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH FOOTBALL COACHES IN BULGARIA ABOUT FUTSAL

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Abstract

Aim. The main purpose of the study is to analyze the opinion of qualified coaches in youth football on the state of futsal in Bulgaria. To achieve this, the following tasks were implemented: 1. Study and analysis of specialized literary sources. 2. Processing and analysis of the results of the survey. 3. Revealing the opinion of coaches in youth football in Bulgaria about futsal.

Methods. The study was attended by 115 football coaches working in children's and youth academies in amateur and professional football clubs in Bulgaria. The experiment was conducted in March 2025. In the study, the methods for collecting empirical information through separate methodologies and mathematical and statistical methods for quantitative processing and analysis of the results obtained, frequency analysis is used.

Results. The results were obtained after analyzing all opinions of the coaches in youth football academies in Bulgaria.

Conclusions. We can conclude that coaches in football academies are familiar with the level and development opportunities that futsal offers. According to the collected data, we can note that practicing futsal with young players would help their growth in football.

Keywords: futsal, survey, coaches, football.

Introduction

In essence, futsal serves as a valuable training tool for soccer players, fostering the development of crucial skills that translate well to the larger field. It's a dynamic and engaging sport that can help players reach their full potential. This study determines the contributions of futsal to adolescent football players, which could be the basis for the development of this sport in youth football in Bulgaria.

Given the fact that futsal is a team sport, where collaboration and opposition occur in a continuous interaction, a great variability of unpredictable situations is created, with an alternation between offense and defense, which requires different physical and psychological behavior from the athletes. Training should not only produce a physiological response to each game situation but must also develop a behavior that can be transferred to competition, integrating all the qualities and factors that improve the capacity to play. (Sanz & Guerrero, 2005)

Futsal competitors are subjected to a serious load. The specific thing about futsal is that players are forced to perform repeated sprint sections, which place serious demands on their endurance, especially on special endurance, also called specific-futsal endurance. Speed, agility, and strength, and specifically dynamic strength, with other qualities that a good futsal competitor must possess, given all the demands of the game. (Stoilov & Madanski, 2015)

The use of small-sided games and inferiority games should be regarded as a simplification of the real game (fewer players, adapted spaces). This is a way of improving technique (Ivanov & Gadzhev, 2020) and tactics, as well as increasing the physiological and psychological capacities of players, since the intensity of the exercise can be manipulated, with implications at the level of decision-making and of the visual patterns (Vaeyens et al., 2007; Ivanov & Lovkov, 2023). Bulgarian coaches widely agree that regular strength and conditioning sessions are a fundamental element of the training process, as they significantly enhance the overall technical and physical development of young football players (Tsvetkov & Ivanov, 2021). According to Bulgarian coaching perspectives, focusing exclusively on early specialization may raise performance potential, yet true long-term player growth depends on integrating diverse training methods and experiences (Tsvetkov et al., 2021).

Young people involved in sporting contexts should be seen as active subjects, capable of modifying themselves and positively modifying the environment in which they are included. Therefore, a coach who is democratic, affective, and precise in teaching instructions ends up becoming a facilitator for significant alterations in the cognitive skills of adolescents (Scheeren et al., 2020).

In a study with 169 participants, including managers, organizers, coaches, referees, and futsal players, we found results related to what attracts them to futsal. 53.8% of the participants in the study said that they like futsal because of the dynamics and speed of the game, 21.9% noted that futsal helps them improve as football players, and 14.2% the greater attractiveness of the game. These results show that the best determine the attractiveness of futsal, but also the opportunities for players to improve, not only as futsal players, but also as football players (Staykov, 2025).

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In another study, the conclusion is that futsal players experience fatigue as the game progresses due to the high-intensity nature of the game, and the ability to repeat maximal sprint efforts and resist fatigue is paramount to the player's overall game performance. Therefore, to play at a high level, a futsal player needs to have or develop a great capacity of intermittent endurance, repeated sprint ability, leg power, and agility (Naser et al., 2017).

Another study demonstrates that regarding disparities in levels of physical fitness in football and futsal extracurricular students aged 13–15 years. The typical degree of physical fitness among students participating in futsal and soccer as extracurricular activities differs. The study's findings demonstrated that the extracurricular activities of futsal and soccer had significantly different levels of physical fitness. (Suryadi et al., 2023)

Another study involving FIET (Futsal Intermittent Endurance Test) was to analyze the effect of futsal training on variables related to body composition and physical performance in student-athletes. The results showed that after 12 weeks of training, the athlete's height, body mass, and lean body mass had a significant increase with a large effect. Body Fat showed a significant and large-effect reduction in both absolute and relative measures. Peak velocity showed a significant increase with a large effect, as the FIET distance. (Gomes et al., 2024)

The study for Characteristics of Speed and Acceleration provides data that can be used by coaches to make a more complete assessment of their players' physical level profiles regarding the quality of their speed. However, coaches from these sports should also develop accelerative practices that involve turns. The authors of the study demonstrate that the running speed of futsal players is higher than that of football players. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that futsal players are used to the characteristics of futsal games that rely on short sprints during matches with relatively smaller fields compared to football. The authors encouraged all coaches and sports scientists to generate training programs for futsal and football based on the characteristics of each game and the physiological needs of athletes. (Apriantono et al., 2019)

Objectives

This study aims to analyze the opinions of qualified coaches in youth football on the state of futsal in Bulgaria. To achieve this, the following tasks were implemented: 1. Study and analysis of specialized literary sources. 2. Processing and analysis of the results of the survey. 3. Revealing the opinion of coaches in youth football in Bulgaria about futsal.

Methods

The study was attended by 115 football coaches working in children's and youth schools in amateur and professional football clubs in Bulgaria. The survey was closed-ended, contained 8 questions, and was conducted in an electronic environment using Google Forms. The study was conducted with coaches who hold valid licenses "C" (55 coaches), "B" (33 coaches), "A" (24 coaches), and "PRO" (3 coaches) in 2024. Of the coaches surveyed, 96.5% have watched futsal and are familiar with the specifics of the sport, and even 64% of the coaches have practiced futsal. These high percentages are encouraging because the coaches have an idea of what futsal is and how it affects those who practice it. The experiment was conducted in March 2025. To achieve the set goal and objectives of the study, a complex methodology was applied:

- Analysis of specialized literary sources;
- Methods for collecting empirical information through separate methodologies - a survey.
- Mathematical and statistical methods for quantitative processing and analysis of the results obtained - frequency analysis.

Results

To determine the experience of football coaches, we asked the following question: "What experience do you have as a coach in youth football?" The distribution is even as follows: 30.4% over 10 years of experience, 33.9% - 5-10 years, and 35.7% from 1 to 5 years of experience in the field of youth football.

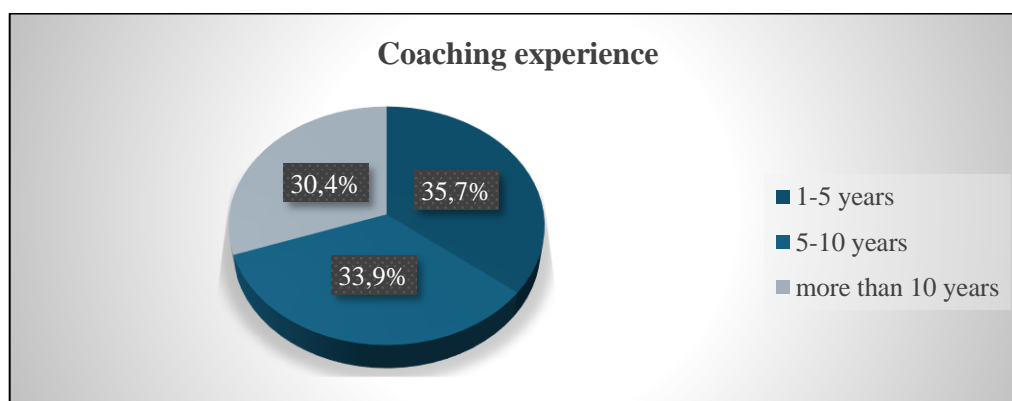


Figure 1. What experience do you have as a coach in youth football?

As shown on Figure № 2, we can see the distribution by age that the surveyed coaches indicated. The smallest number of those who lead 5-6 year olds (13%), and the largest 56.5% - over 12 year olds. In the period between 7 and 12 years, the distribution of coaches who lead the respective age groups is almost even with small differences.

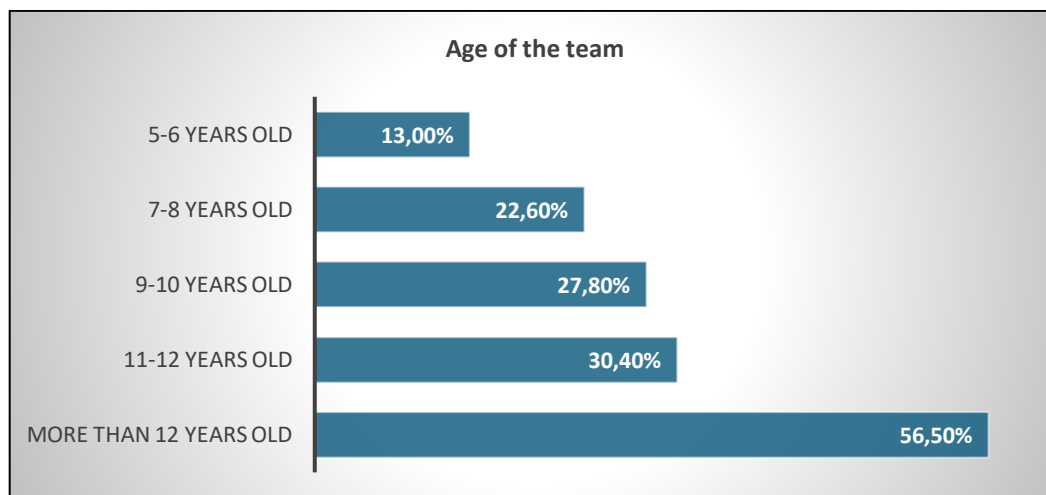


Figure 2. How old is the team you lead?

To test whether coaches believe that practicing futsal would help their players develop, we asked the coaches the question "Do you think that practicing futsal would improve the level of your players?" The results are presented on Figure № 3.

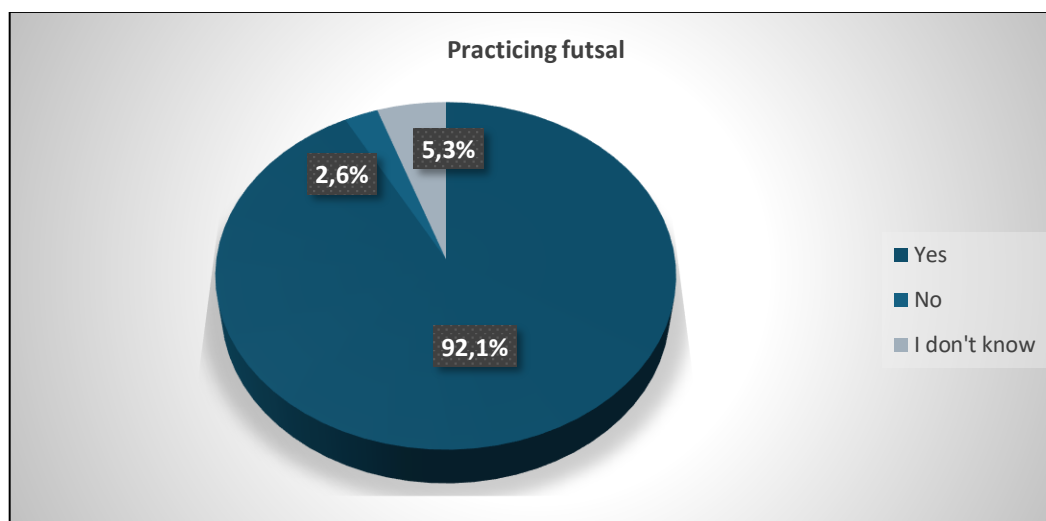


Figure 3. Do you think that practicing futsal would improve the level of your players?

92.1% of the coaches surveyed indicated that practicing futsal would raise the level of their players. 2.6% responded that it would not raise their level, and 5.3% could not assess whether practicing futsal would help the development of the players.

To check the number of training sessions according to football coaches, we asked the question "How many times a week do you think it is necessary to practice futsal to increase the level of players?".

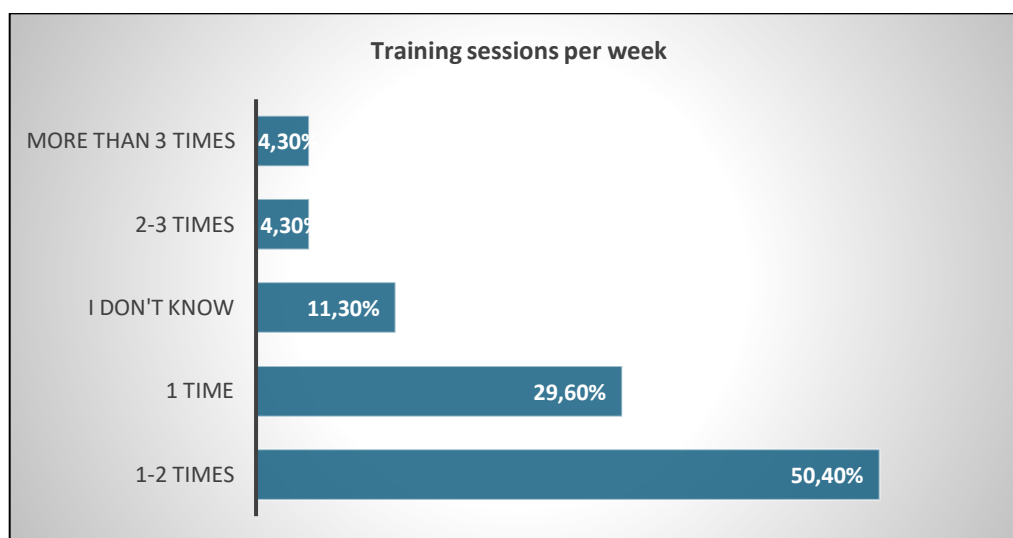


Figure 4. How many times a week is it necessary to practice futsal?

Figure № 4 presents the results for the number of workouts per week, with 50.4% of respondents indicating “1-2 times a week”. 29.6% indicated “1 time a week”, 11.3% answered “can’t estimate”, and 4.3% each answered “2-3 times a week” and “more than 3 times a week”.

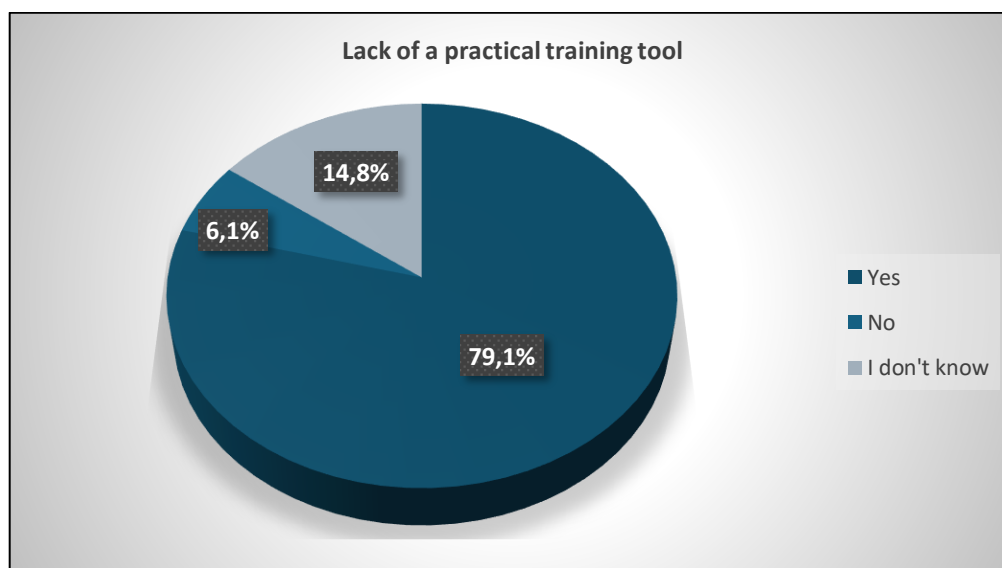


Figure 5. Do you think that the lack of a practical futsal training tool has an impact on coaches not being familiar with the benefits of futsal?

Figure № 5 presents the results of whether the lack of a practical futsal aid has an impact on coaches not being familiar with the benefits of the game, with 79.1% of coaches indicating "yes" and 6.1% indicating “no”. The remaining 14.8% of the surveyed specialists can’t assess whether this would have an impact on them.

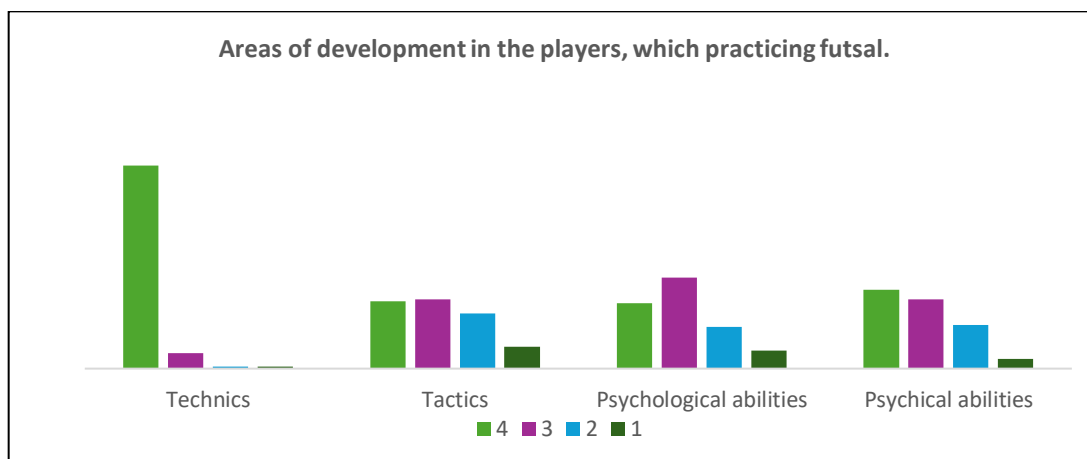


Figure 6. Determine the areas of importance in your opinion that develop players when practicing futsal! /with 1 being the weakest and 4 being the strongest/

Coaches are constantly improving their work, and for this purpose, we decided to ask whether, in their opinion, a manual for specialized exercises should be published that would support the work in their club. As shown in Figure № 7, 87.8% of the coaches surveyed noted that, in their opinion, the preparation of a manual with specialized futsal exercises would help the development of their players. 6.1% of the coaches cannot assess whether it would be beneficial, and the same number of specialists noted the answer "no". Based on the responses in Figure 7, we show in Figure 8 that 94.7% of the coaches confirm that they would use such a tool in their training program.

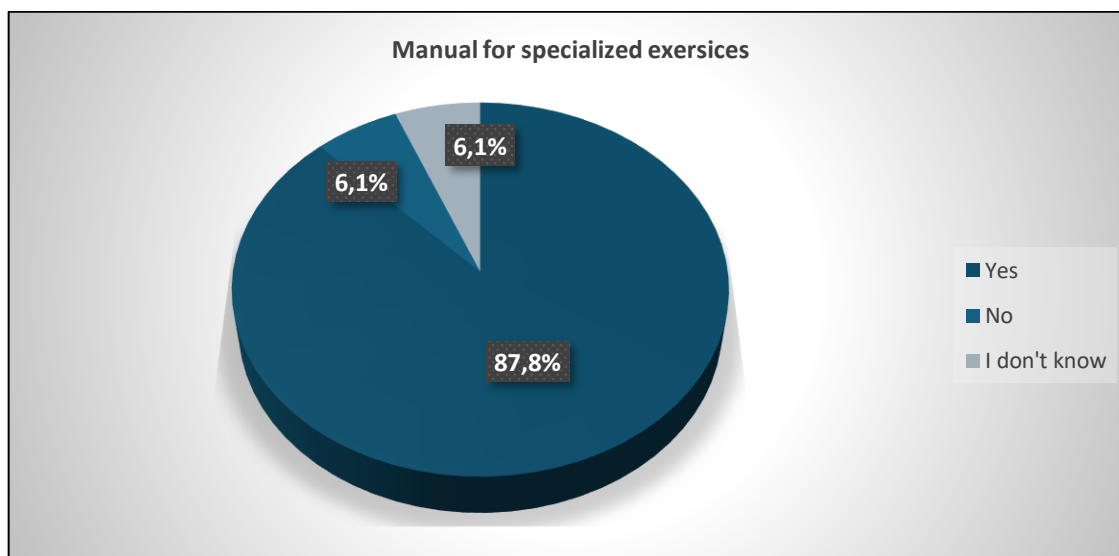


Figure 7. Do you think a manual should be published for specialized exercises that would support the work in your club?

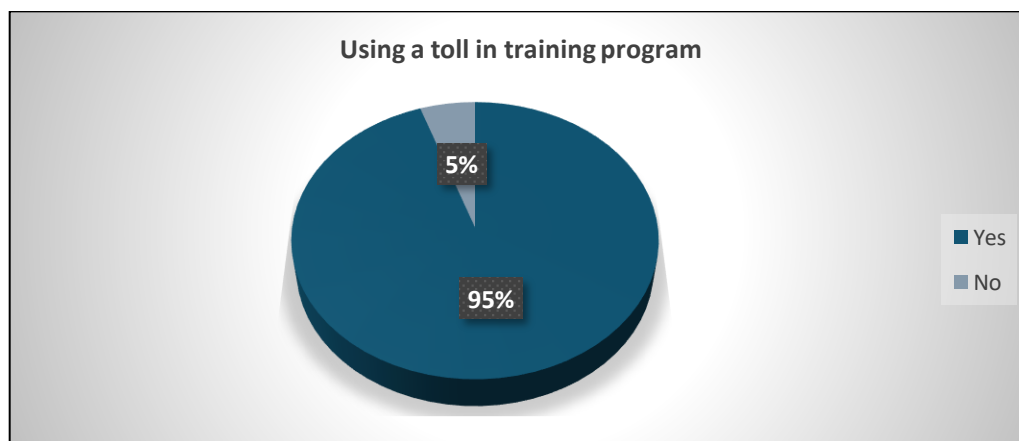


Figure 8. Would you use such a tool in your training program?

Discussions

The demands placed on players in modern football are extremely high and force coaches to seek different methods and means for training players. Bulgarian Second League players cover on average 7 to 9 km per match, which is close to higher levels of European professional football, although their output in high-intensity speed zones remains lower (Gutsev, Dimova, & Ivanov, 2021). On the other hand, accurate shots on goal proved to be one of the strongest determinants of final league position, while team average age showed little influence on performance outcomes (Ivanov, 2024).

Our study reveals the benefits of practicing futsal in the early years of development in football players. The opinion of specialists that futsal supports the growth of players stands out. More than 92% of the surveyed coaches believe that futsal training would improve the level of their players, which confirms previous research emphasizing the transferability of futsal skills to football (Vaeyens et al., 2007; Gomes et al., 2024).

One of the key arguments is that futsal provides a unique environment that combines technical, tactical, physical, and cognitive challenges in a compressed space. This is consistent with the findings of Ivanov and Gadzhev (2020), who highlight that Bulgarian coaches consider the creation of specialized methodologies for youth training, with a focus on technique, to be essential at early ages. Similarly, Tsvetkov et al. (2021) argue that while early specialization is often seen as necessary, the diversification of training forms—such as futsal—ensures the well-rounded development of players.

From a physical perspective, futsal players are required to perform repeated sprints, quick accelerations, and frequent changes of direction (Naser, Ali, & Macadam, 2017; Gadzhev & Ivanov, 2024). These demands complement traditional football training by improving agility, reaction speed, and specific endurance. In this regard, futsal can be seen as a practical bridge that helps youth players develop not only their technical abilities (Mladenov & Ivanov, 2024) but also their physical conditioning, which is in line with broader analyses of training load in football (Suryadi et al., 2023).

Equally important are the psychological and cognitive aspects of futsal. The smaller space and faster rhythm demand constant decision-making and adaptability, enhancing perceptual and cognitive skills (Vaeyens et al., 2007). Coaches in Bulgaria also stress the role of democratic and player-centered leadership styles in shaping adolescent athletes' cognitive and social growth (Scheeren et al., 2020; Ivanov, 2024). Therefore, futsal provides not only technical and physical benefits but also fosters resilience, teamwork, and decision-making under pressure—skills directly transferable to the 11-a-side game.

Finally, the strong support from Bulgarian coaches for the creation of a practical futsal manual with specialized exercises (87.8% agreement) shows that there is both interest and demand for structured guidance. Such resources could standardize best practices and further promote futsal as an effective developmental tool within football academies. Future research should focus on designing, testing, and implementing such a manual, while also examining the longitudinal effects of futsal training on technical performance, match intelligence, and long-term athletic development.

Conclusions

Based on the conducted survey, we can note that the surveyed coaches have extensive experience in the coaching profession. The answers noted show that the opinion of football specialists in Bulgaria about futsal is at a good level, as well as their awareness of the benefits and conveniences of this type of football game. We noted most strongly from the opinion of the coaches that futsal is developing the technical skills of the players. We can note that according to the coaches, it is enough for their players to train futsal 1-2 times a week, and this gives us confidence to prepare a practical guide that would be useful in the work of the coaches. From the completed data, we can determine that preparing a guide with specialized exercises specific to futsal would be useful for the players and that the coaches would also be willing to include them in their training programs.

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