Player Perceptions Of The Talent Development Environment In Elite English Youth Soccer Academies

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Introduction

Talent Development Environments (TDEs) are resource intensive requiring substantial financial investment.


TDEs in English soccer have been a focus of increasing research attention.


Concerns around balancing positive and negative subjective (e.g., psychological, social) and functional (e.g., educational) outcomes.

Challenges to coaches and other stakeholders

Low productivity of academies Less than 1% of players who are contracted to professional football clubs aged 16 will still be playing the game aged 23.

We know little about player perceptions of their TDEs With this regard, their voice underrepresented.

Aim To explore England based academy soccer player perceptions of their talent development environments.

Materials and procedure

Talent Development Environment Questionnaire (TDEQ-5)


Designed to identify good practice in TDEs. Various iterations of the TDEQ (used in football but now could be seen as obsolete).

25 item, 5 Subscales. Deemed to be valid and reliable.

Likert scale 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree)
A total of 90 (N = 90) elite youth soccer players completed the TDEQ-5. Mean age ($M_{age} = 17.8$, $s = 0.5$ years). The sample consisted of players from CAT2 ($n = 15$), CAT3 ($n = 56$) and CAT4 ($n = 19$) soccer academies aligned to professional soccer clubs.

5 Clubs in total (4 northern, 1 southern)

Completed in season, in person or via google forms.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long term development</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support network</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment of Expectations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic quality prep</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Factor** | **Descriptions**
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1. Long-term development | The extent to which developmental programmes are specifically designed to facilitate athletes' long-term success (e.g., fundamental training and rounded development, ongoing opportunities, and de-emphasis of winning).
2. Holistic quality preparation | The extent to which intervention programmes are prepared both inside and outside of sports settings (e.g., caring coach, clear guidance, mental preparation, and balanced life).
3. Support network | The extent to which a coherent, approachable, and wide-ranging support network is available for the athlete in all areas (e.g., professionals, parents, coaches, and schools).
4. Communication | The extent to which the coach communicates effectively with the athlete in both formal and informal settings (e.g., development path, rationale for training, and feedback).
5. Alignment of expectations | The extent to which goals for sport development are coherently set and aligned (e.g., goal setting, goal review, and individualised goals).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My training is specifically designed to help me develop effectively in the long term. (LTD1)</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I can pop in to see my coach or other support staff whenever I need to (e.g. physiotherapist, psychologist, strength trainer, nutritionist, lifestyle advisor). (SN2)</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I spend most of my time developing skills and attributes that my coach tells me I will need if I am to compete successfully at the top/professional level. (LTD3)</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My coach allows me to learn through making my own mistakes. (LTD4)</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Currently, I have access to a variety of different types of professionals to help my sports development (e.g. physiotherapist, sport psychologist, strength trainer, nutritionist, lifestyle advisor). (SN1)</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. My coach rarely takes the time to talk to other coaches who work with me. (RHQP3)</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. My coach rarely talks to me about my well-being. (RHQP1)</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I am not taught that much about how to balance training, competing, and recovery. (RHQP7)</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. My coach doesn’t appear to be that interested in my life outside of sport. (RHQP2)</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I don’t get much help to develop my mental toughness in sport effectively. (HHQP4)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion and Implications

Factors such as key stakeholder relationships, holistic development, and player welfare are indicators of an optimal TDE in football (Larsen et al., 2013; Mills et al., 2014b). Holistic preparation is perceived to be the weakest area by elite youth football players. Current findings support previous research (Gledhill & Harwood, 2014, 2015, 2018; Mills et al., 2014a) by noting that there are potential issues surrounding communication between stakeholders and coaches' understanding of the athlete needs.

Curriculum
- Driven programme?
- Needs Driven programme?

Abstract
Based on the developmental theory presented by Gagné (2009), we examined the factors perceived to influence the development of elite youth football players at a critical stage in their progression to the professional level. Transcribed interviews with six expert development coaches were inductively and deductively content analyzed. Conceptualization of the data revealed six interrelated higher-order categories that represented the 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); skills (e.g., technical, tactical, physical); attributes (e.g., intelligence, emotional control, self-regulation); sociosportive attributes (e.g., sociability, competitiveness); and environmental factors (e.g., significant others, culture of sport). The themes demonstrated an interactive and reciprocal model for understanding how young players are able to transition to the professional level. Collectively, the findings illustrate the multidimensional nature of talent development and suggest that an intricate combination of supra- and infra-specific factors must manifest for gifted young players to translate their potential into excellence. Mechanisms by which academies could be helped to shape the characteristics and conditions associated with effective development are discussed.

Keywords: talent, awareness, environment
Implications for Coaches and other stakeholders

Scope for education for coaches and wider stakeholders (parents, players, all support staff) in the form of workshops surrounding coach-athlete relationships and also holistic preparation. *Similar practice has been shown to work within psychological skills*


Individual club stakeholders such as Academy Managers or Director of Football could use the TDEQ-5 to self assess against TDEQ-5 subscales as part of existing evaluative processes.
Thank you
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