

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTIDISCIPLINE MODEL FOR SOCCER TALENT IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT WITHIN A SOUTH AFRICAN POPULATION

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This is a conceptual paper that discusses the potential of implementing a multidiscipline model for soccer talent identification and development in South Africa.

There is currently a lack of direction in terms of how talent identification and development (TID) should operate within a footballing context in South Africa. There is also limited information on the anthropometric status, physical and cognitive performance and technical skill level of youth footballers within South Africa. Without such data it is not possible to develop appropriate programs for TID purposes. Currently the principles used for talent identification and development are based on non-South African populations. Although there may be an overlap in certain characteristics there is a risk of not truly encapsulating the unique problems and advantages South African footballers may experience. Furthermore, the barriers preventing youth players from making it to an elite level are not yet known; or the extent to which they are modifiable. Additionally, the risk of various injuries may be heightened due to a lack of available information on the physical capabilities of South African youth footballers during their development.

The standard model of talent development, such as the pyramid model, has been documented to have several problems. Criticism of the standard model of talent identification focuses on a number of aspects, namely; the use of an individualistic approach containing an over reliance on physical characteristics to identify talent. There is then a subsequent impact of implementing extensive deliberate practice while not accounting for relative age effects (RAE) and maturity rates. Thus it is imperative that a comprehensive, multidiscipline model that appreciates the environment that youth South African may experience is implemented.

The purpose of the current study was therefore to conduct an in-depth analysis that accounts for the various components that may influence a youth footballer. A unique aspect of the current study was that it is the first that has tried to take a systems theory approach to talent identification and development within a South African context. From a humans systems viewpoint, the need to take into account anthropometrical, physiological, cognitive and technical related tactical characteristics as well as personality is highly important.

There are also the interactions between the different work environments, such as practice and during matches, and the individuals within a given team. Additionally, the external environment is important to consider in terms of family support, socioeconomic status or level of schooling, among others. Organisational issues must also be addressed in terms of how elite pathways currently operate and the role that the governing body has. By fully understanding the current system, and illuminating where potential bottlenecks are occurring, effective talent identification and development can be achieved.

Talent identification and development is a complex, chaotic, dynamic and labour intensive process. In order to ensure our youth players have the best opportunities to maximize their given talent, greater effort is needed to address and correct the current problems present in youth South African soccer.

Key Words: Soccer; Talent Identification & Development; Multidisciplinary; Systems theory

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