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*Corresponding Author: Stig Arve Sæther, Department of Sociology and Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU, Dragvoll, Trondheim 7491, Norway
Email: stigarve@ntnu.no

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Dikaia Chatziefstathiou, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

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SPORT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Unified approaches on talent development in football? Differences and similarities among representatives from a football association and two professional football clubs

Martin Nesse¹, Vegard Fusche Moe² and Stig Arve Sæther^{1*}

Abstract: Talent development is a major task for most coaches, both in professional and non-professional clubs. This study provides a qualitative analysis of how coaches and administrators from both the national football association and two professional clubs express their beliefs on coaching/skill acquisition perspective on how talent development should be done. This article consists of 14 semi-structured interviews with three administrators and two coaches at the Norwegian football federation and two administrators and seven coaches from two professional clubs. The results suggest shared views on the necessity of joining a professional club to become an elite player, although the perceived importance of the professional clubs differs among the respondents. Concerning early recruitment, some of the association and elite coaches believe present practice is able to identify and recruit the most talented players. The professional clubs are also aware of the risk of missing out on talented players, but justify their practice of early recruitment of talented players on increased competition. These different perspectives on talent development comparing representatives from the association and professional clubs could potentially effect the future talent development process and results.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Martin Nesse is a scientific assistant in sport science at the Department of Sociology and Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU. His main research interest are; Development of Knowledge, Organizational culture and Sport science.

Vegard Fusche Moe is an Associate Professor in sport science at the Department of Sport, Food and Natural Sciences, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. His main research interest are; Development of knowledge in football, Physical activity and learning in school and sport philosophy.

Stig Arve Sæther is an Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology and Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU. His main research interest are; talent development, sport psychology and youth sports.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The use of public funds on sports such as football is extensive in Scandinavian countries including Norway. Since a vital part of this funding is used on talent development programs within each/ various sports, the actors such as the football federations and the professional clubs' understanding and knowledge of how talent development should be done, is by many seen as a public matter, discussing how these fundings's could be used as optimal as possible.

Subjects: Coaching Children; Coaching Practice; Talent Identification

Keywords: talent development; football; knowledge

1. Introduction

Talent development in football is a major task for actors on all levels including coaches, clubs and national football associations. Although most associations have goals related to the inclusion of all players who want to play organized football (mass participation), they are often just as much or more concerned about giving the most talented (potentially elite) players the opportunity to develop into elite football. This creates a tension or even a dilemma, because the needs, values and motivation of participation in football may vary significantly between a grassroots player and a highly talented player. While the former player may play for fun and friendship, the latter will usually strive towards excellence in skill, high achievement and perhaps even fame. The different types of clubs within the association, e.g., professional, semi-professional and amateur, would also have different perspectives in terms of focusing on individual skill acquisition, team development, and talent selection. Interestingly, most professional players have a background from a non-professional (mass participation) club, which suggests that most players have to make a transition from a non-professional to a professional club (Sæther, 2017; Stambulova et al., 2012). From a football association perspective, talent development is therefore complex and must fulfil the different expectations and goals from the perspective of the player, coach and parent.

Organized programs of talent identification and development (TID) can be traced back to the 1950s (Baker & Schorer, 2010). Since then elite sport development has been a vital part of political policy and priority, but sport nations have had very different approaches to TID in general and within various types of sports in particular (Green & Houlihan, 2005). While countries like the UK (McDonald, 2011) and Australia (Green & Collins, 2008) have had a quite clear focus on elite sport, Finland has mainly focused on mass sport and a sport for all perspective (Green & Collins, 2008), the last to largely explained by a path dependency (earlier approaches are used as a guide for upcoming approaches) related to the nations sporting politics and policies. Even so, large-scale TID programs have often been associated with poorer performance related to earlier Olympics or World-cup championships, or because of the award of future Olympics (Baker et al., 2012).

A number of models and theories on talent development has emerged. They are all trying to predict and explain how expertise is developed and achieved. Within football earlier studies have found differences between the identified players in areas such as physiological skills (Huijgen et al., 2014), dribbling and ball control (Figueiredo et al., 2009), and psychological skills such as motivation (Forsman et al., 2016) and self-referential cognitions (Höner & Feichtinger, 2016). There is also an on-going (potentially never ending) debate which is mostly about the training amount, but also the training content during childhood and youth needed to succeed in elite sport (Ford et al., 2009). Furthermore, the debate also includes the age of engagement within the different sports and even more the age of specialization within the athletes main sport.

Despite the large amount of research on talent development that is centred around features of the players (Côté et al., 2007; Stambulova, 2009; Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009; Stambulova et al., 2007), there is also an increasing focus on the role of the environment and the cases that are successful in supporting young players' transition to the professional level (Henriksen et al., 2010). Elite clubs have been shown to be an important developmental arena (Reeves et al., 2009) for promising young players who aim to become professional football players. This is/might be due to the coach's expertise, training facilities and facilitation.

However, the field of research is, according to Cushion et al. (2012), characterized by a discrepancy between the aforementioned perspectives and other sports science subdiscipline areas, as motor learning and skill acquisition. Lately, Martindale et al. (2005); (2007) have highlighted that long-term planning is crucial in the development of elite athletes at a young age. They

also made it clear that a good talent development environment must facilitate flexible systems tailored to the individual practitioner, and that the aim of development should be the individual's progression over previous results. As the research on expertise, talent identification and development has tended to be mono-disciplinary, a need of a multidisciplinary theoretical approach has emerged in order to capture how multiple interacting constraints can shape the development of expert performers (Phillips et al., 2010).

A football association seeks best practice and it's important to be familiar with the research literature as it always seeks best practice on how to develop promising young players. However, for this practice to work its vital that all parts of the association are aware of the overall ideas and plans for talent development, and executed accordingly by the club's coaches on a daily basis. Prior research has, however, shown that coaches not base their practice on the guidelines of their association but rely more on their previous experiences and tacit knowledge (Kelly, 2008; Nesse et al., 2017).

In light of this, it is important to illuminate how representatives from the football association and professional clubs understand and weight factors affecting talent development. Therefore, we aim to (i) investigate, from a coaching/skill acquisition perspective, how/what coaches within professional clubs and representatives from the Norwegian football association highlight as essential in talent development (i.e. recruitment age, talent development environments and the talent identification process), and (ii), illuminate whether there is a common understanding of the processes, goals and priorities among the coaches and representatives of the clubs and the association.

1.1. Context

During the period 2016–2019, the Norwegian football association made talent development one of three priority areas in their policy plan (Norges Fotballforbund, 2016). In the policy plan, the association suggested a new model of talent development based upon a cooperation between the association, local governing bodies and professional and non-professional clubs. In the model the latter is responsible for the (talent) development in the ages of 5 to 12 years old, while the local governing bodies and professional clubs are responsible for players 13–16 years old. Further, the professional clubs are solely responsible for talent development of players 17–21 years old.

A key element of this model is a common political anchoring and understanding of the goals and priorities of talent development both from a coaching and club perspective (Norges Fotballforbund, 2016). To ensure this common understanding the association has in combination with three levels of training courses established a national school of football, "Landslagsskolen" (Norges Fotballforbund, 2015b), the quality club project (Norges Fotballforbund, 2019) and role of a certified coach supervisor (Madsen, 2017).

These projects all serve the purpose of developing a common understanding of talent development, but with different approaches. The first, the national school of football, aims to select and educate the most talented players aged 12–16 years old while the quality club project includes a set of structural guidelines for talent development in both professional and non-professional clubs. One of these structural guidelines is the implementation of the coach supervisor. A new role made to secure local coaching development in line with the association's guidelines and best practice.

Through these courses and certifications, the football association recognises the role of coaches and clubs as the most important precondition for good talent development. However, previous research has shown that the effects of these courses are limited (Søvik et al., 2017). With the result, as mentioned earlier, that coaches use their own tacit knowledge in their coaching practice (Kelly, 2008; Nesse et al., 2017).

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

This study is based upon 14 semi-structured interviews with administrators and coaches at the Norwegian football federation and two professional clubs. All of the participants occupy similar roles and are closely associated with work on talent development. Of the 14 interviews, five participants work at the Norwegian football federation, two as coaches and three as administrators. The coaches and one administrator represent professional football, and the final administrator represents non-professional football. One of these has a UEFA-Pro license, three have UEFA A-licenses and one has a UEFA-B license. The remaining nine interviewees come from two professional clubs. Five were recruited from club 1, including four coaches and one administrator, who is also a representative of community football. Of the participants from club 1, one has a UEFA-Pro license, three have a UEFA A-license and one has a C-license. The final four participants were recruited from professional club 2, including three coaches and one administrator. As with professional club 1, the administrator represents community football. Two of these have a UEFA A-license, one has a UEFA-Pro license and one has a C-license. The 14 participants included 13 men and 1 woman. Given how few full-time positions there are in Norwegian football (Norges Fotballforbund, 2015a), we found that participants from both the association and the clubs relevant to the theme of the study.

2.2. Interviews

A semi-structured interview was used to gain greater insight into the different perspectives on talent development (Markula & Silk, 2011; Rapley, 2007). The interview guide included questions about their former career within sports and questions related to their perspective on talent development (see appendix 1). The guide was also open to relevant emerging topics not included in the original interview guide (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Silverman, 2010), and was sufficiently open so that informants' own perspectives could be followed up as they appeared. As these perspectives could appear quite rapidly on many different subjects, it was up to the interviewer to decide whether to elaborate upon a given perspective. The most prominent emergent topic was "training compensation" and "solidarity payments".

The guide did not include any questions regarding gender, as we wanted to see whether this was a topic the informants would bring up on their own. Ultimately, the coaches discussed player development in light of their respective teams, while the informants with administrative roles mentioned player development in light of their own gender.

Thirteen of the interviews were conducted face to face, and the remaining interview was conducted over the phone. Of the 13 face-to-face interviews, 12 were conducted at the informant's places of work and the remaining interview was conducted at the training ground. The interviews lasted from 31 to 72 minutes, and the interviews with the representatives from the Norwegian football federation were, systematically, the shortest.

2.3. Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis following Smith and Osborn (2008), with seven levels of analysis via HyperRESEARCH. The text data were first developed into initial themes before being clustered into connected areas and categorized by superordinate themes and subthemes. The superordinate themes were in accordance with the major topics of the interview guide. The study (ethics clearance) was in accordance with and approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

In the following discussion, the five participants from the Norwegian football federation (FA) are given the names I1–I5, those from professional club 1 are I6–I10 and those from professional club 2 are I11–I14.

3. Results and discussion

The results of this study confirm the complexity of the talent development process (Williams, 2000). As highlighted earlier, there are obvious differences between the representatives from the association and the representatives from the professional clubs, primarily and naturally because the professional clubs have a larger focus on the most skilled players. Even so, talent development is a long-term process including both non-professional and professional clubs (Martindale et al., 2007, 2005), although their impact on the players often occurs at different ages (Ford et al., 2009). This is also highlighted by the fact that the case in this study, the Norwegian football association has made talent development one of three priority areas in their current policy plan.

3.1. The perception of talent development

To a direct question about their perception of talent development, the representative for the football association acknowledged that their work with the process has been insufficient. They did, however, regard it as the most important area of priority, as one informant stated:

This is the main focus area of the Norwegian football federation and in Norwegian football [...] After the successive years, there has not been enough investment in player development [...] At present, there are] few employees, little professionalism, old methods. (I1)

When asked further about characteristics of good talent development, another of the representatives from the football association acknowledged that the process is complex, highlighting that this is a basic question related to performance, especially for the most talented players.

Extremely large field ... Development of coaches, a good children's football model, etc. Enormous area ... It is called within our FA: "Football pleasure, opportunities and challenges for all" ... when we talk about player development, we can talk about those who are a little more dedicated, who have some dreams ... Let them get the opportunity to maximize their potential. That's what one puts into the term in our federation and generally in Norway I think. (I2)

Good player development for me, is to make sure that everyone who wishes is allowed to develop in the best possible way based on their prerequisites ... In general, I think in Norwegian children's and youth football we are way too concerned about results. We must be patient, we must see that our children are developing at different rates. (I5)

As the results indicate, there is a common understanding within the association that every player should be given the possibility to improve significantly, supporting Martindale et al. (2005), (2007) in their focus on facilitating flexible systems tailored to the individual practitioner, and that the aim of development should be the individual's progression over previous results. As informant I1 also mentioned, this is in line with the association's strategy for talent development. There is a slight tension, however, concerning whether one should give attention only to the ones who show dedication and wish to maximize their potential or also focus on the ones who do not share this ambition. The thought of performance as output for the player development process, according to informant I2, is further believed to be a common understanding both within the association and in professional and non-professional clubs. As seen by I5, this is not fully the case within the former.

The model described by the football association has given professional and non-professional clubs different tasks in the talent development process. Following this belief, non-professional clubs are the best area for youngsters and the more developed players (13–16) are best taken care of by the local governing body, elite clubs and national school of football. Furthermore, to ensure the effect of specialization is in line with the guidelines and procedures of the strategic plan, the members at the different levels of the organization are encouraged or required (depending on their level and place in the hierarchy) to complete different courses. This division of tasks seems appropriate since most players, at least in the Norwegian context, start their football participation in a local non-professional club (Sæther, 2017; Stambulova et al., 2012). By this practice of

theoretical schooling, the Norwegian FA wants to share their perspective on talent development and further teach the norms and rules believed to be necessary to accomplish their goals.

When the representatives for the professional clubs were asked about talent development, they had a similar perspective highlighting talent development as an individual process where performance was related to the individual player.

It is a word that is used all the time. As people do not have much focus on the basics. What is player development? I do not think so many can answer it, because in 90% of the matches I'm seeing, people are more concerned about results than developing footballers. (I13)

What lies in player development for me, is that one is concerned with the individual and one is concerned with development—that it's a process versus getting short-term results really. (I8)

In the professional clubs, we find the same perspectives highlighting talent development as an individual process where performance is related to the individual player. There is also a current trend in elite football that seems to facilitate the individual processes of talent development, such as the use of equipment like tracking devices and video-based systems to monitor the performance of each player in a team in a very detailed way. This may also call forth a more individualized approach to talent development. In addition, the national football school also has a detailed list of the demands for the various playing roles/positions in a team. This also appears to bring about a more individualized approach to player development. One could argue that there is a common understanding within both the federation and the professional clubs that talent development is an individual process related to the individual player (Clarke et al., 2018), but even among the professional club representatives, the same question remained as to whether player development is for everyone or just the most dedicated players.

3.2. The best environment for development: Non-professional club or professional club?

The importance of the talent development environment has been established within the literature (Henriksen et al., 2010), but it remains natural to assume that professional and non-professional clubs offer vitally differently developmental environments, not only in terms of skill development but also in overall focus and perspective both on and off the pitch (Ashworth & Heyndels, 2007). It is surely to be expected that the professional clubs could offer high-quality environments (i.e. better and more constructive feedback; Ligestad et al. (2017)), but how far from this are the offerings of non-professional clubs?

When representatives from the federation were asked about whether the non-professional or professional clubs provided the best environment for development, they highlighted the importance of the resources and competence of the professional clubs, thereby suggesting that these clubs offer the best environment for development, confirming a natural assumption (Reeves et al., 2009). Informants were however also open to the idea that a non-professional club could offer an equally good environment, based on their resources (Henriksen et al., 2010).

[Long pause before answering.] The most developed non-professional clubs, the ones that have come the furthest, they are able to differentiate the training sessions and the training situation with qualified coaches in the professional clubs you should specialize on the players' skills and manage their skill development, because there are far more talented players there. That has come a long way.

It's a new thing in Norway to have so much staff during the day-time, so being able to get the most out of this opportunity will be important for the future of Norwegian football ... I think it is possible [for the players] to develop in both of these environments ... I believe

there are a lot of good environments among the non-professional clubs, clubs which are good at developing [players]. (I3)

The representatives from the association insist that both environments could be good arenas for development. Even so, it was clear that to become a professional player one must join a professional club at some point. This is further elaborated by I2 on question about professional clubs and early recruitment.

[Using the bronze medal of the U21 national team as an example, where all the players had been selected into the age-specific national team at an early age.] This fact can be seen in two ways. That it's incredibly good to systematically select the "right" players or that we look blindly, re-select the same players and forget others. Not a simple answer to give, but I think if we haven't noticed the players, one way or another when they are 15, 16 or 17 years old, I do not believe that they will end up as an elite level player. (I2)

The topic of early recruitment is also brought up by the other informants within the association. The practice of professional clubs recruiting ever-younger players is problematized, because the practice may not develop as many talented players as planned (Hornig et al., 2016). This is due to the belief that by recruiting the best players from different non-professional clubs, the local "star" players, who are used to being among the best in his team, ends up as one player in a crowd of talented players. The often misplaced relationship between skills and talent—rather than potential and talent—could be an important reason why many of the players never succeed (Hornig et al., 2016). This realization could cause a lack of motivation, with the result that players give up or quit before reaching their potential (Clarke et al., 2018). Combined with the lack of motivation for players left in the non-professional clubs, many within the association believe professional clubs miss many late bloomers.

I do not think all the players have to go to a professional club when they are 14–15 years old ... Not sure if the trend we see now, that players of ever younger age go to the biggest clubs are exclusively positive.... Many players lose their patience ... When they realise they won't get a chance to play for their professional club, they train less or start playing for a fourth or fifth level club. They do not stand the race until they are 21–23 years old and at their best ... Too big of a downturn to go to a lower level club. (I4)

Based on the results, there seems not to be a common belief in the association concerning recruitment into a professional club, particularly as I2 and I4 have quite different perceptions about the suitable age for such recruitment. As I2 observed, if a player has not joined a professional club by a certain age, the player does not have what it takes to become a professional. This informant is also confident that the practice selects and identifies the most talented players:

We have a very nice pattern of recruitment. I feel we catch the most talented players. Not everyone gets recruited to the highest level when they are 15–16, but then people tend to say "But if you do not handle it, you do not have what it takes" ... I believe that if we have not snatched them up in one way or another when they are in 15–16–17 years of age, I do not believe that they will end up as a professional player either. (I2)

Being able to make the right choices in terms of players to select is quite difficult when predicting who can take the next step ... Some are very skilled early on, while others are more "late bloomers" ... There are very different races to end up as a professional player. (I3)

This view of early recruitment can be connected to the organization's understanding of the talent development process and especially related to age (Clarke et al., 2018). In accordance with their perspective on the recruitment process, I1 and I2 state that talent development is primarily in the age group of players 12–16 years old. Even so, there are different perceptions on both the recruitment process and talent development and age, as the other informants representing the federation believe talent development is a process throughout a player's career.

A bit narrowly to define the most important player development process from 13–14 years old and come to the professional club until they finish as Junior players in the club. Player development is for me the course of a player throughout his career. Being in constant development. (I3)

Within the association, there are two different perspectives on the topic of early recruitment, with I1 and I2 stating that the most talented players must join a professional club by the age of 15, as this is the necessary step to becoming a professional player. In this regard, they are certain that the recruitment process is capable of identifying the potentially best players. This belief is however not shared by I3, I4 and I5, who are certain that today's recruitment process is overlooking talented players, which is also highlighted within the research on talented players (Sæther, 2017). These informants were wary of gathering the most talented players, as they risk a lack of motivation leading to dropout—that is, by joining a professional club at an early age, some talented players ultimately quit the sport before reaching their full potential. This disagreement also appears concerning the age of talent development, as the first group sees talent development as a process occurring between the ages of 12 and 16 years, while the second group considers it a career-long process.

Within the professional clubs, there is a common belief that the best arena for talent development is within the professional clubs, because they offer a more performance-oriented culture, with the knowledge and competence needed to help players take the leap into professional-level play. The clubs share the federation's belief in the necessity for full-time employees. However, they acknowledge the importance of the non-professional clubs and believe some of these can provide a good environment for talent development up to a certain age. Few players are able to go from a non-professional club to a professional club once they become a senior player; however, although there are exceptions. We find here a common understanding between the association and the professional clubs regarding the importance of environment on talent development, as well as in the supposition that young talents must take part in this environment at a certain age.

I believe the biggest difference is the training environment in a professional club ... And we have the environment in the form of more highly educated coaches per player ... In today's football I don't think it's easy to go from a non-professional club's first team directly into a professional team. This has to do with the increased professionalization of modern football. (I7)

It depends on the age of your athletes. It should be possible for a non-professional club to have a good youth team. I believe young boys, no matter whether they play in a professional or non-professional club, just want to be part of a good structure. Of course, this requires good coaches. (I11)

These informants highlight the importance of the advantages to players in the professional clubs, which the research has also highlighted as an important factor (Reeves et al., 2009) in distinguishing the player opportunities.

Of course it gets harder the older the players are. Often, when a player turns 18 or 19 years old and still plays in a non-professional club, he wants to do other things. But here (in a professional club) we demand a certain level of seriousness ... However, they can still be just as good at talent development as a professional club. (I11)

The main advantage is that in a professional club everything is organized for you to succeed. The drawback is that you are one of many. While at a non-professional club it's the opposite. You are mostly alone and not getting the follow-up you need. However, the way to the first team is shorter. As such, there is opposition between the professional and non-professional clubs. (I12)

The professional clubs justify their early recruitment through the argument of a needed performance culture with the necessary competence and resources. This recruitment has become more

aggressive recently due to the increased competition on a national level, where professional clubs recruit from both professional and non-professional clubs outside their local area. Fearing to lose a talented player to another elite club, professional clubs recruit even younger players.

We are more aggressive in our recruitment than we were 15 years ago. Today we don't wait, we recruit them early. Everyone does. It's because everyone else does the same. Every club starts earlier and earlier. (I11)

The competition among the clubs is tougher. If we don't take the 13 year old, even though he might not be ready, another club will. So we can't afford to wait and as such we don't have time to make the right decision about whether the player should join us right now or when he has developed further. It's a big challenge. (I9)

As shown earlier, the perspective on early recruitment was divided at the association level: some thought the professional clubs missed out on talented players and some were convinced that the practice selects and identifies the most talented players. Within the professional clubs, all informants shared the belief that the clubs have to start early due to the competitive nature of the search for the most talented players, although they, as part of the association, were aware of the complexity of talent identification and the risk of missing out on talented players.

[On a question related to the risk of missing out on talented players.] Yes, I believe so. And that is the downside of early recruitment, there is no guarantee of success ... I am pretty sure we miss out on someone. (I9)

I have been a coach for 20 years and up until ten years ago I think we missed out on a lot of talented players. But today we have more control resulting in a higher rate of success. But I still believe were not able to predict whether one player will better than another in 3–4 years' time ... I'm completely sure we miss out on someone. (I14)

The ones in the association who share this perspective also argued that recruiting at an early age might cause a lack of motivation among talented players, especially in a professional club, where these talented young players are among many other talented players. This is not mentioned by the representatives in the non-professional clubs, because they were more concerned with the reduced chance of match experience because the best players in nearby community clubs join the local professional club, which makes the local tournaments an "easy win" (I11).

Despite an agreement in terms of the belief in the best environment for talent development, there is a disagreement within and between professional clubs in their perspective on talent development and further practice. One can argue, as indicated earlier, that they are facing a challenge in the content and perspective of their theoretical schooling, which leads to different norms, rules and practices at the professional clubs. One can further argue that the football federation strategy of talent development is suffering from a bureaucratic system failure due to a strong belief in individual tacit knowledge and a corresponding lack of common understanding. This is exemplified by the practice of training compensation and solidarity payments.

3.3. System failure: training compensation and solidarity payments

Despite the awareness of the effects of early recruitment, the professional clubs are recruiting at even younger ages. This is due to the competitive nature of the search for the most talented players and training compensation and solidarity payments. This is a part of the Norwegian football association's legislation regulating what type of compensation the players in a youth club are entitled to when a player aged 15–21 moves to a different club to sign a professional contract (Norges Fotballforbund, 2002). The legislation is important because the academy classification emphasizes and evaluates the professional clubs by their use of proprietary players (Norsk Toppfotball, 2017), and this practice promotes early recruitment and makes it difficult for late bloomers.

In Norway we have training compensation and solidarity payments. As soon as the players reach a certain age, recruitment gets expensive. Big payouts for uncertainty ... I mean this legislation is a major challenge, as the non-professional clubs can't pay for our second best or late bloomers. So, in order to not emerge as a selfish and destructive club, we have to give them way for free. It's something completely wrong with the system (I9).

Although the association and professional clubs agree that the professional clubs provide a better environment for development, they do not agree on the practice of recruitment. The football association evaluates professional clubs on their use of proprietary players and as such indirectly enforce the process of early recruitment, a process most coaches and administrators in the professional clubs find problematic due to the limitations discussed above. By pushing this practice, the football association risks creating distrust between professional coaches and administrators (Kelly, 2008).

Because the perspectives on early recruitment differ between the association and professional clubs, one can argue this is a failure of theoretical schooling as rather than training courses and written rules of conduct, beliefs are based on individual tacit knowledge, leading to the retention of different perspectives within the whole organization and lack of a common understanding on the practice of talent development between the levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy (Nesse et al., 2017). This ultimately leads to different approaches and practices at different clubs (Kelly, 2008; Nesse et al., 2017).

The Norwegian football federation's work towards successful talent development is thus challenged by distrust for federation practice. This distrust is based on the lack of a common understanding among the different subgroups within the hierarchy, which makes it difficult to create internal continuity of knowledge and thus failure to accomplish organizational goals (De Long & Fahey, 2000). In their work towards achieving their objectives and a better talent development, the football federation needs to develop a basic common understanding of the processes related to the topic that would hopefully appeal to the majority of the Norwegian coaches.

4. Conclusion

This study provided a qualitative analysis of how coaches and administrators from both the national football association and two professional clubs expressed their beliefs on how talent development should be done, particularly in terms of recruitment age, talent development environment and the talent identification process. The results highlight the complexity of talent development and the importance of differing views on early recruitment between these organizations (Martindale et al., 2007, 2005). While some believe today's practice is able to identify and recruit the most talented players, this understanding is not shared by others within the association nor by the professional clubs, who are certain they run the risk of overlooking talented players.

There was, however, a joint understanding of the importance of a player being recruited to a professional club, because these clubs provide a performance-oriented culture and the competence and resources to create player success. As such, there are different perspectives on the central elements of talent development in the Norwegian football federation, which results in cultural procedures and norms. These disagreements represent views of different subgroups. Because all of the informants had, to differing extents, taken football federation's courses, following De Long and Fahey (2000) one could argue that they do not agree with the procedures developed to accomplish the football federation's goals for talent development. As such, the effects of the theoretical schooling (in the form of the different courses) are low (Søvik et al., 2017), and the informants base their practice on individual tacit knowledge (Kelly, 2008; Nesse et al., 2017). These different perspectives on talent development in Norwegian football could potentially effect the future talent development process and results, especially related to the understanding of the term talent and even more how the football association strategies are understood and executed by both the professional and non-professional clubs.

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Author details

Martin Nesse¹

E-mail: martin.nesse@ntnu.no

Vegard Fusche Moe²

E-mail: vegard.fusche.moe@hvl.no

Stig Arve Sæther¹

E-mail: stigarve@ntnu.no

¹ Department of Sociology and Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU, Norway.

² Department of Sport, Food and Natural Sciences, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences.

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Appendix 1. Interview guide

Theme	Question	Follow up questions
Player development	(1) How do you/the club/association perceive player development?	
	(2) How do yourself and the club to be able to provide good talent development?	
	(3) What are your thoughts about player development in elite football and grassroots football?	What about late blooming players? What about playing up? The main difference between professional and non-professional players? Risk of dropouts?
	(4) How do you/the club/association consider individual and team development?	First and second teams? Adjust the players according to a system (playing style)? Adjust the system according to available players? What about players not fitting into the system?



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