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Key Factors Influencing Talent Development of Junior Soccer Players in Sports Academies: A Focus on Coaches and Parents

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A) conception and design of the study
B) acquisition of data
C) analysis and interpretation of data
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Abstract

Soccer academies are responsible for the comprehensive development of young athletes, including formal education, living, and preparation for tournaments. Research on soccer youth development from the perspectives of coaches and parents of sports academy students has been limited. This study aimed to discover their perspectives on the key internal and external factors that influence the development of young soccer talents. Questionnaire data were collected from 79 coaches and 326 parents of U15 to U19 soccer players across eight soccer academies across four Central and Eastern European countries. The questionnaires presented 33 Likert-scale type questions organized around four dimensions to include internal factors, professional/sports factors, family/school factors, and other external factors.

Independent sample t-tests were used to demonstrate the differences between sub-samples, and a stepwise discriminant analysis to highlight the major influential factors.

The results indicate that both coaches and parents emphasize the importance of internal, professional/sports, and other external factors in soccer talent development. Coaches ranked cognitive (t=2.450, p=0.015), psychological (t=3.082, p=0.002), pedagogical (t=2.663, p=0.008) and moral role modeling (t=3.382, p=0.001) factors higher than parents. Parents gave higher priorities to the importance of the team's results in the championship (t=-4.827, p=0.000), school results (t=-4.028, p=0.000), and financial support from family (t=-6.836, p=0.000). Overall, coaches' beliefs focus upon professional conduct, expectations of the profession and the academy, while parents focus on supporting their children's school and sports successes.

Ongoing cooperation between parents and coaches is critical to bring positive changes in the development and long-term successes of young players.

Keywords: soccer academies, youth development, talent management, personal support

Introduction

Sports academies have become an integral part of youth and talent development in the majority of European countries over the last two decades. Establishing soccer academies as a means for talent management has had a profound impact on the sport (Vincze et al., 2011). Soccer academies offer complex and multifaceted support for the young players' skills and personalities (Williams & Franks, 1998). The emphasis on these factors is found

on both the personal and environmental elements and play a fundamental role in the future success of young soccer players (Meylan et al., 2010).

Sports specific, educational, social and psychological factors have a complex impact on the sports careers of young players (Kiss et al., 2015). Soccer academies are responsible for the comprehensive development of young athletes through practice, sports competitions, education and accommodation in dormitories. The relationships among key influences such as parents, coaches and teachers have a major impact on both the personal and professional development of young athletes in these academies (Mills et al., 2014a).

Research traditionally focuses on the micro-level, which includes the areas of sport, the educational system and participants in the athletic programs (Côté, 1999; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005; Wylleman et al., 2007).

Earlier studies emphasized the importance of environmental and personal support in the academy system (Gangsø et al., 2021; Gesbert et al., 2021) and stated that parents play an important role in both their children's development and their achievements (Dorsch et al., 2015). A recent large-scale study concludes that there are differences in stakeholders' perspectives on long-term development, holistic quality preparation, support network and communication, and calls for more consultation and cooperation to have a positive impact on youth development (Sargent Megicks et al., 2022).

Excellence in Soccer Talent

The literature on soccer talent and youth development mainly focuses on body composition, motor skills and performance, and cognitive and mental factors (Dugdale et al., 2019). Excellent anthropometric and performance characteristics are required from athletes for their best development and a high level of sports performance (Malina et al., 2005). It is important to master the essential technical skills, soccer specific coordination and conditional skills, as well as an understanding of the tactical elements, early on in the sports career in order to make appropriate decisions during game situations (Baker, 2003; Goto et al., 2015). As the pace and intensity of the game has become faster and the physical load on the players is also increasing, today's elite soccer demands more strength and agility from players than ever before (Perroni et al., 2023).

Successful athletes perform better in anticipation and game positioning compared to their less successful counterparts (Williams & Davis, 1995). It has also been reported that fast thinking and decision-making skills are of utmost importance in the progress of young players (Kiss et al., 2022).

Personality traits such as motivation and anxiety management have a major impact on sports performance (Reilly et al., 2003). Altogether, internal skills (e.g., self-awareness, goal setting, self-organization, ability to work hard) and interpersonal skills (e.g., respect, utilizing team skills, appreciating family and teachers as resources) are equally significant for soccer players' optimal growth and development (Larsen et al., 2012). Psychological and mental characteristics play an important role in performance (Brown & Fenske, 2010) and contribute to long-term success (Martínez-Rodríguez et al., 2022).

The development of soccer talent towards excellence is an intricate process that necessitates a holistic approach, integrating sports-specific, physical, educational and psychological aspects to meet the dynamic demands of modern soccer. Ultimately, achieving excellence in soccer talent requires tailored, multidisciplinary training programs and a supportive environment that fosters continuous learning, adaptability, and mental well-being.

Impact of Professionals, Family and Schooling

Both coaches and sports managers can successfully support players in fulfilling their sports career expectations. Tactical, technical, and fitness-related knowledge, as well as a clear articulation of goals and training methodologies, are part of coaches' professional knowledge (Csáki et al., 2014). In addition to these sports specific knowledge, the pedagogical, practical, and moral expertise of coaches and support personnels are all critical components in the development of players.

It is expected that coaches will demonstrate excellence both at the professional and personal level and offer ongoing support in different areas of players' lives. Consistent competitive sport and school-related expectations need well-organized support from coaches and support personnels on an ongoing basis (Aalberg & Saether, 2016).

The daily practices, routines, and values of families have a major effect on their children's preferences, emotional state and future successes. The sociocultural and socioeconomic status of the parents are considered key influencing factors in their children's development (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Kay, 2004). Besides their roles as providers (e.g., transportation, coaching and volunteerism) (Harwood et al., 2010), parents offer substantial affective and social support throughout practices and competitions (Elliott & Drummond, 2017). A close link is established between parental support and communication and the success of their child's sports participations (Dorsch et al., 2016).

It is reported that young soccer players often face the difficulties of managing sport and school simultaneously (Christensen & Sörensen, 2009). Professionals in schools and dormitories working with young athletes treat school tasks with the same level of consideration as the tasks of sports activities (Kiss & Bognár, 2018). Besides training and competition, it is essential to have sufficient time for activities outside of sports, such as family relations, study, fun, and rest (Larsen et al., 2020).

Sports Academy as Talent Development Environment

The talent development environment model emphasizes a long-term strategy and also the ecological aspect of talent development (Martindale et al., 2007). In this sense the goals and systems in talent development focus on the coaching process as a whole (Martindale et al., 2005) and include aims, communication and support, solid philosophies, daily practices, individual differences, and an emphasis mainly on progression.

The holistic ecological approach to talent development emphasizes a broader context in which the development of pre-elite athletes is in focus (Henriksen et al., 2010). The Athletic Talent Development Environment framework (ATDE) describes the athletic environment and it also clarifies the roles, functions and components of the environment in the talent development process. ATDE's main function is to support talented athletes with their transition from junior to top level sports (Nikander et al., 2022) and thus the athlete at the center of the development.

The quality of facilities and the institutional environment also have an impact on athletes' development and performance. Youth development requires modern sports, school, recreation, health, medical, and rehabilitation facilities and related equipment, because it is considered the cornerstone of the talent development process.

Sports academies have played a pivotal role in youth talent development across Europe over the past two decades, offering multifaceted support to enhance young players' skills and personalities (Williams & Reilly, 2000; Vincze et al., 2011). These academies integrate sport-specific, educational, social, and psychological factors to positively influence athletes' careers (Kiss et al., 2015). Research underscores the comprehensive development facilitated by academies, highlighting the importance of parental, coaching, and educational influences on athletes' personal and professional growth (Mills et al., 2014a).

The literature highlights the role of a supportive environment and multidisciplinary approaches in talent development (Larsen et al., 2012). However, comprehensive models that integrate the personal factors in soccer are lacking. The complex tasks of coaches in sports academies are of particular importance in youth development. There seems to be limited research on the holistic development of young soccer players in academies including aspects of sports, family, schooling, and living (Bognár & Csáki, 2020). Recent findings highlight the critical role of personal support and interpersonal relationships in determining long-term success and call for more empirical studies focusing on these areas (Kiss et al., 2022; Martínez-Rodríguez et al., 2022). Furthermore, there is a need for more empirical investigations unpacking the experiences and expectations of personal and environmental factors of players, coaches, and parents.

Hence, the purpose of this study was to delineate the key factors influencing the holistic development of young soccer players. The research was extended to determine the level and the differences of the viewpoints of coaches and parents within the following areas:

1. internal, professional and sports factors, family and school factors and other external factors affecting becoming a successful soccer player,
2. the professional and pedagogical tasks of coaches, considering that coaches in academies have to assume some of the parental role and tasks, so that their work is provided with special content,
3. the criteria of becoming a successful educational coach.

The key internal, professional/sports, family and school, as well as other external influencing factors of becoming a successful football player in the academic system is presented from the perspectives of parents and coaches. Our assumption is that coaches and parents will emphasize internal and professional/sports factors. It was also hypothesized that there will be differences between the viewpoints of coaches and parents.

Materials and Methods

Sample

The study was carried out in eight soccer academies: the five flagship academies in Hungary from the seven accredited academies and one academy in Romania, Slovakia, and Serbia (RSS), the only ones abroad supported by the Hungarian Government. The soccer academies were purposefully selected because they are the biggest and most successful ones in the region. All eight academies were set up according to the Hungarian sports academy model and the language of instruction is Hungarian in all of them. These academies serve four different age groups (U15, U16, U17 and U19).

All professionals employed at these academies and one parent of all the academy-resident players across the eight academies were invited to participate in this study. From the professionals' side, the study invitation included all individuals who worked with players on a daily basis, such as head coaches, assistant coaches, strength and conditioning coaches, and video analysts. Responses from 58 coaches from Hungarian academies and 21 coaches from RSS academies were included in the analysis. A majority of the coaches both in Hungarian academies and in the neighboring countries have a sports-specific higher education degree (coach or physical education teacher) (n_h=21; n_n=6). In addition, 230 parents from Hungarian academies and 96 parents from RSS academies were included in the study. Altogether, the return rate for questionnaires was 92.5% (Table 1).

Participants were informed about the purpose, benefits and risks of the study. Every coach and parent in the study signed an informed consent form to participate in the study. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (IRB approval number RK/620/2022).

Table 1. Description of Participants

	Hungarian coaches	Coaches in neighboring countries	Hungarian parents	Parents in neighboring countries	∑
Sample	58	21	230	96	405
Age Mean ± SD	46.56±6.88	35.71±4.82	42.65±4.62	44.61±5.14	42.38±5.36
Gender	male - female 55 3	male - female 21 0	male - female 138 92	male - female 61 35	male - female 275 130
Secondary school degree	30	13	147	67	190
Higher education degree	28	8	83	29	148
Sport specific	21	6			
Non-specialized	7	2			

Data Collection

Data collection took place during the second half of the 2021–2022season. Since all involved academies worked full time in that period, the influence of COVID was not considered as an influential factor. A questionnaire with 33 closed-ended questions was utilized in the study. The dimensions and questions were derived from an earlier exploratory study (Kiss et al., 2022) and aimed to investigate the influencing factors that coaches and parents considered to be decisive in the development of young players in soccer academies. Based upon the findings of the earlier study, the following four dimensions were identified as critical to demonstrate: a) internal factors; b) professional and sports factors; c) family and school factors; and d) other external factors. The questionnaire in the exploratory study had an acceptable level of validity (Cronbach's Alpha =0,894)

The dimension of Internal Factors on the Success Rate consists of educational, psychological and ability related questions (questions/items no 1–9). The dimension of Professional and Sports Factors on the Success Rate involves questions of the coach's competencies, performance and results of the team (questions/items no 10–20). The dimension of Family and School on the Success Rate includes questions of family support and school results (questions/items no 21–26). The dimension of External Factors on the Success Rate consists of questions of contract, supporting the club and lifestyle (questions/items no 27–33). Each of these dimensions focus on how coaches and parents view the important factors in the youth development program.

The questionnaires were sent to the academies by mail. The individual academies forwarded them to the respective coaches and parents, who were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements on a Likert-scale of 1 to 4, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 4 indicated strong agreement. The Cronbach alpha values were acceptable for all four dimensions (0.60–0.83). Coaches filled out the questionnaires during weekday training sessions, while parents completed the questionnaires at their homes and returned the forms via their children.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to characterize the sample, independent sample t-tests to demonstrate the differences between coaches and parents, and discriminant analysis (stepwise method) to highlight the major influential factors. SPSS 25.0 statistical software was utilized to analyze the data. The level of significance was set at the 5% margin of error.

Results

In terms of the internal factors influencing the development of youth soccer players, coaches and parents ranked the statement "positive traits manifested while doing the sport" (M=3.80±0.44) as the most important, while the least important factor was "body composition" (M=3.19±0.73) and "mobility of joints" (M=3.21±0.64) (Table 2). Two statistical differences showed up between coaches and parents. In the case of "Cognitive factors" (t=2.450; p=0.015) and "psychological skills" (t=3.082; p=0.002), the results show that these factors were more important for coaches than for parents.

Table 2. Internal Factors on the Success Rate of Soccer Talents: Coaches' and Parents' Points of View

	∑ M±SD (n=405)	Coaches M±SD (n=79)	Parents M±SD (n=326)	T	p
Positive traits during sport	3.80±0.44	3.81±0.41	3.79±0.44	1.407	0.160
Cognitive factors	3.73±0.47	3.83±0.37	3.70±0.48	2.450	0.015*
Technical skills	3.70±0.48	3.71±0.50	3.70±0.48	0.54	0.586
Agility and fitness	3.67±0.52	3.80±0.40	3.65±0.53	-0.19	0.848
Psychological skills	3.66±0.52	3.82±0.38	3.62±0.55	3.082	0.002*
Coordination skills	3.64±0.52	3.66±0.49	3.64±0.53	0.61	0.540
Positive traits outside sports	3.46±0.61	3.40±0.63	3.47±0.61	-0.354	0.723
Mobility of joints	3.21±0.64	3.17±0.53	3.22±0.67	-0.07	0.939
Body composition	3.19±0.73	3.14±0.70	3.20±0.74	0.29	0.771

Note: Maximum score of 4 on each question.
*Statistical significance ($p<0.05$).
Cronbach alfa=0,75.

As for the professional factors, both coaches and parents rated the "motivational base and attitude of the coach" question highest (M=3.77±0.92). However, a number of variables were regarded with high values (professional knowledge of the coach, number of hours spent playing soccer, methodology of the coach, pedagogical preparedness of the coach, know-how of the staff, moral role modeling of the coach, psychological preparedness of the coach). The least important factor was "the team's results in the junior championship" (M=2.76±0.80) (Table 3).

There were three significant differences between coaches and parents in these professional factors. Coaches emphasized the "pedagogical preparedness of the coach" more than parents (t=2.663; p=0.008), as well as the "moral role modeling of the coach" (t=3.382; p=0.001). By contrast, parents gave significantly higher ratings for the importance of "the team's results in the junior championship" (t=-4.827; p=0.000) compared to the coaches.

In the factors related to the family and school dimension, coaches and parents attributed highest importance

Table 3. Professional and Sport Factors on the Success Rate of Soccer Talents: Coaches' and Parents' Points of View

	∑ M±SD (n=405)	Coaches M±SD (n=79)	Parents M±SD (n=326)	T	p
Motivational base and attitude of the coach	3.77±0.45	3.75±0.45	3.77±0.44	1.578	0.115
Professional knowledge of the coach	3.73±0.48	3.63±0.52	3.76±0.47	-0.844	0.399
Number of hours spent playing soccer	3.72±0.49	3.74±0.48	3.72±0.49	0.220	0.826
Methodology of the coach	3.70±0.50	3.65±0.52	3.72±0.50	-0.135	0.893
Pedagogical preparedness of the coach	3.69±0.53	3.82±0.46	3.64±0.54	2.663	0.008*
Know-how of the staff	3.67±0.50	3.70±0.48	3.66±0.51	0.824	0.411
Moral role modeling of the coach	3.64±0.54	3.79±0.40	3.61±0.57	3.382	0.001*
Psychological preparedness of the coach	3.63±0.55	3.62±0.52	3.63±0.55	1.637	0.102
Coach as an educated, cultured person	3.30±0.64	3.28±0.64	3.31±0.64	0.381	0.703
Performance of team mates	3.24±0.67	3.23±0.62	3.27±0.64	-0.566	0.571
The team's results in the junior championship	2.76±0.80	2.36±0.70	2.86±0.79	-4.827	0.000*

Note: Maximum score of 4 on each question.
*Statistical significance ($p<0.05$).
Cronbach's alpha=0.83.

to "moral support from the family" (M=3.62±0.56) and "psychological support from the family" (M=3.55±0.60) (Table 4). The lowest level of importance was perceived for the question on "cultural background provided by the family" (M=2.51±0.46).

There were three statistically significant differences between coaches and parents in the factors related to family and school. Parents gave higher priorities to "school results reflecting the student's abilities" (t=-4.756; p=0.000), "school results" (t=-4.028; p=0.000), and "financial support from the family" (t=-6.836; p=0.000) as compared to coaches' views.

Considering the other external factors, "lifestyle" (M=3.68±0.53) was viewed as the most influential factor,

Table 4. Family and School on the Success Rate of Soccer Talents: Coaches' and Parents' Points of View

	∑	Coaches	Parents	T	p
	M±SD (n=405)	M±SD (n=79)	M±SD (n=326)		
Moral support from the family	3.62±0.56	3.48±0.57	3.65±0.56	-1.635	0.103
Psychological support from the family	3.55±0.60	3.47±0.59	3.56±0.60	-0.004	0.997
School results reflecting students' abilities	2.94±0.75	2.49±0.65	3.05±0.73	-4.756	0.000*
School results	2.77±0.76	2.38±0.66	2.87±0.76	-4.028	0.000*
Financial support from the family	2.74±0.83	2.16±0.66	2.88±0.80	-6.836	0.000*
Cultural background provided by the family	2.51±0.46	2.38±0.67	2.54±0.77	-1.718	0.087

Note: Maximum score of 4 on each question.
*Statistical significance (p<0.05).
Cronbach's alpha=0.73.

while the least important ones were "professional contract with a negotiated higher salary" (M=2.18±0.93) and "professional contract with a low salary" (M=2.26±0.85) (Table 5).

There were four significant differences between coaches and parents in the dimension of other external factors. Coaches ranked "lifestyle" higher than parents (t= 2.115; p =0.035), while parents placed more importance on "role of manager" (t= -3.940; p =0.000), "professional contract with a low salary" (t=-2.714; p=0,007) and "professional contract with a high salary" (t= -3.649; p =0.000) than coaches.

Table 5. External Factors on the Success Rate of Soccer Talents: Coaches' and Parents' Points of View

	∑	Coaches	Parents	T	p
	M±SD (n=405)	M±SD (n=79)	M±SD (n=326)		
Lifestyle	3.68±0.53	3.80±0.43	3.66±0.54	2.115	0.035*
Inspiring/supportive atmosphere at club	3.50±0.59	3.51±0.59	3.50±0.59	1.225	0.221
Facility, equipment	3.24±0.68	3.13±0.70	3.27±0.67	-1.067	0.287
Luck/fate	2.86±0.81	2.99±0.81	2.82±0.81	1.802	0.072
Role of manager	2.61±0.86	2.29±0.85	2.69±0.84	-3.940	0.000*
Professional contract with a low salary	2.26±0.85	2.03±0.69	2.31±0.88	-2.714	0.007*
Professional contract with a negotiated higher salary	2.18±0.93	1.84±0.72	2.26±0.95	-3.649	0.000*

Note: Maximum score of 4 on each question.
*Statistical significance (p<0.05).
Cronbach alpha=0.60.

A discriminant analysis was also utilized to determine which variables were most decisive in determining the major differences between coaches and parents and also in identifying the hierarchy of questions that accounted for the difference. Altogether, nine questions accounted for the differences between the two subsamples (Table 6). The most influential questions were the "financial support from the family", "psychological skills" and "school results reflecting the student's abilities".

Table 6. Discriminant Analysis for the 33 Questions Impacting the Success Rate of Soccer Talents: Coaches' and Parents' Points of View

Steps	Questions	Wilks' Lambda							
		Stat.	df1	df2	df3	Exact F			
						Stat.	df1	df2	Sig.
1	**Financial support from the family**	0.894	1	1	390.000	46.393	1	390.000	0.000
2	**Psychological skills**	0.857	2	1	390.000	32.519	2	389.000	0.000
3	**School results reflecting the student's abilities**	0.818	3	1	390.000	28.740	3	388.000	0.000
4	**The team's results in the junior championship**	0.802	4	1	390.000	23.878	4	387.000	0.000
5	**Moral role modeling of the coach**	0.785	5	1	390.000	21.107	5	386.000	0.000
6	**Luck/fate**	0.772	6	1	390.000	18.964	6	385.000	0.000
7	**Body composition**	0.761	7	1	390.000	17.205	7	384.000	0.000
8	**Role of manager**	0.752	8	1	390.000	15.765	8	383.000	0.000
9	**Lifestyle**	0.744	9	1	390.000	14.583	9	382.000	0.000

Discussion

Positive traits, cognitive and psychological factors were identified as important internal elements by coaches and parents altogether. Technical skills, agility and fitness, and coordination were also rated as key components. Coaches' motivational base, professional, pedagogical and methodological knowledge were of high importance as well. Furthermore, moral and psychological support from family was considered an essential part of the talent development process. As related to external factors, lifestyle and a supportive club were emphasized. From the four main factors, professional contracts, the role of the manager, and cultural background and results in junior championships were rated lowest among all factors.

This study also identified some major differences between coaches and parents. Coaches perceived cognitive factors, psychological skills, pedagogical preparedness of the coach, moral role modeling of the coach, and lifestyle to be more important than parents. Parents, on the other hand, gave higher priority to the importance of the team's results in the junior championship, school results, and financial support from the family when compared to coaches. Parents also placed more importance on the role of the manager and the professional contract than coaches did. Coaches' beliefs focused upon professional conduct, expectations of the profession and the academy. On the other hand, parents focused on schoolwork, successes and holistic support of their children.

This study supports the findings from earlier studies that internal and external factors (Lindner & Kerr, 2001), as well as systematic social and pedagogical influences, are critical components for the development of young soccer talents (Bognár & Kiss, 2020). Similarly, it is confirmed that technical, tactical, and cognitive skills, as well as social and affective factors, played a significant and differentiating role in the process of talent development (Varga et al., 2018).

Psychological aspects were consistently emphasized by both coaches and parents. This suggests that coaches

have a key role throughout the process but most particularly in strengthening young players' commitment to the task and motivation. According to earlier findings, the pressure to win outweighs other values, beliefs, and expectations (Varga et al., 2018). Our study did not support this result. Conversely, we found that moral role modeling and support from the coach is a primary issue.

Rábai (2020) found that academy players were dissatisfied with the extent to which their coaches follow and care about their academic achievements. The present study can confirm this finding from both the coaches' and the parents' perspectives. The results also demonstrated that lifestyle of young players is a major factor, suggesting that the respondents had some knowledge of the effects of healthy active living and health behavior. The results of this study support that importance of internal and external factors and align with current understandings that both psychological preparedness and environmental support are crucial for youth athletes' growth and success in sports (Crawley & Hills. 2023).

The results of this study confirmed our initial assumption, while most of the internal and professional/sport factors were of high importance by both coaches and parents. The differences between coaches' and parents' perspectives were emphasized, while other external factors altogether seem the least important, which also proved our assumptions.

According to the results of the present study, coaches and parents of young players at the academies share similar ideas and beliefs. It is suggested that academies effectively support parents in understanding the players' lives and also the general expectations towards them. Ongoing cooperation between parents and coaches is critical in bringing positive changes in the development and long-term successes of young players. It is the aim of the academies that soccer players acquired the necessary skills and will be able to achieve long-term excellence in sport and education. Well-functioning communication between stakeholders seems to be essential for the players' long-term development in the academy system. A case study of a Swiss soccer academy demonstrated that the least positive perceptions of the players centered on communication and the alignment of expectations (Gesbert et al., 2021). This finding also offers an ongoing development of communication for optimizing talent pathways. However, this is crucial not only in the coach-player context, but involving all stakeholders. A deficiency appeared in area related to key stakeholders' relationship in a study examining players viewpoints in elite English football academies (Mills et al., 2014). Paying attention to the psychosocial environment is prominent.

Comparing the results with the Athletic Talent Development Environment theory by Henriksen et al. (2010), the emphasis on positive traits, cognitive factors, and psychological skills aligns with the theory's focus on individual characteristics and mental attributes. One key aspect of the ATDE theory in soccer is its emphasis on the multifaceted nature of talent development. The internal factors identified in the study, such as positive traits, cognitive factors, and psychological skills, align with the theory's focus on individual characteristics that through optimal transitions contribute to success. Soccer, being a sport that demands a combination of physical prowess and mental acuity, underscores the importance of nurturing both physiological and psychological aspects in talented players.

This study's findings also suggest differences in priorities between coaches and parents, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of diverse perspectives within the talent development environment. Furthermore, comparing these results with earlier research in soccer underscores the evolving nature of priorities within the sport's developmental context.

Conclusions

The study provides valuable insights into the complex factors influencing youth development in soccer. Acknowledging these variations is central for optimizing the Athletic Talent Development Environment, ensuring a holistic approach to player development that incorporates diverse stakeholder views and aligns with the dynamic nature of soccer talent development in academies.

In order to build up a strong organizational culture in soccer academies, it is necessary to clearly define core values and expectations of key stakeholders. For the professionalization of talent development structures in academies, harmonizing personal growth and education in an environment where young people can excel with the aim of building a sports career and clearing pathways, it is crucial to create opportunities for the stakeholders to express their opinions. Players can be provided with holistic support only if academies forming positive relationships with key stakeholders engaged in the process.

To increase the understanding of the talent development process, further investigation of the internal and external factors in talent development is needed, using different perspectives and study methods. Future studies need to explore the voice of club and player managers, which might give a deeper insight into the global aspects of youth development in sports academies.

The study results can also be used in educational and postgraduate courses for coaches to highlight all the special aspects of coaching which make talent care different within the academic system and traditional preparation. The time has come when courses give knowledge to coaches geared not only to the level of players they

coach but also take into consideration the development environment. The environment of the academy provides all resources, tools, and support a player needs to achieve their full potential. Financial resources provide a strong base for quality work, but without communication and continuous feedback from stakeholders, the academic system cannot achieve its goal.

Limitation

The results in this study were not intended to generalize to a larger population or to other sports. The study only focuses on those involved soccer academies. Also, the aim was to present the findings on the four dimensions from coaches and parents and so the voice of the soccer players is not apparent.

Ethics approval and informed consent

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (IRB approval number RK/620/2022).

Competing interests

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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