



Current

About

Submissions

Archives

Announcements

Home / Archives / Vol. 6 (2021) / Psychology & Philosophy

The athlete talent development environment in the best ranked football academy in Norwegian football: The case of the U16 team in Stabæk football club

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Abstract

We used the holistic ecological approach to examine the talent development of Stabæk football club. Specifically, the male under-16 team. The environment was categorised as successful based on their history of developing senior elite players and being the highest ranked football academy in Norway. The study design was an explorative, integrative, and qualitative study considering an extreme case. Data collection included interviews, observations, and document analysis. The results showed that the environment shared features with other successful environments and deviated on other features. Our findings were consistent with research highlighting the importance of long-term development focus, supportive training groups, and support from the wider environment. However, we also found that the contrary to former research, success was not underpinned by a coherent organisational culture. Instead, there were several examples of ambiguity (e.g., between espoused values and actual behaviours). There was also a lack of integration of efforts, no support for developing psychosocial skills, lack of diversification, and a lack of proximal role models. Instead the club practiced early recruitment and specialisation, employed failure-focused coaching, and kept youth players away from role models. Our findings show that the club environment could be described as a successful, and yet, success does not necessarily equal all previously suggested successful features.

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Stig Arve Sæther is an associate professor in sport science. His main research interests include; talent development, youth sport and sport psychology. Sæther has published close to 30 articles in international journals and three books. His largest research project is a longitudinal 10 year follow-up on an age-cohort of youth national football players from 2005-2015. His latest book [De norske fotballtalentene](#) (2017) is based on this project. Sæther is head of the research group: [Skill and Performance Development in Sport and School](#).

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