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Official Research Journal of
the American Society of
Exercise Physiologists

ISSN 1097-9751

JEPonline

Analysis of the Formation Process of Young Football Athletes in Differentiated Situations

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ABSTRACT

Gonçalves CE, Capraro AM, Caregnato AF, Silva CL, Cavichioli FR. Analysis of the Formation Process of Young Football Athletes in Differentiated Situations. **JEP**online 2015;18 (1):22-36. This study investigates the process of formation of football athletes from two countries, in two different continents, considering the point of view of managers and coaches whose discourse – currently in vogue – reveals a set of values known as holism. The research was conducted using ethnographic techniques by means of two instruments: semi-structured interviews and the field diary. The semi-structured interviews were examined by content analysis. Based on the observations reported in the field diary by two research teams during matches, training sessions, and social activities, this study presents insight in the process of specialization of these athletes. The study shows that there is concern about developing athletes from a multidisciplinary perspective that goes beyond the technical dimension. Although not always possible, the intention is to form intelligent athletes who are capable of fully exercising their citizenship. If holistic values are considered, the clubs can be important social institutions in the upbringing of these athletes. However, in order to enable them to perform this mission, structural adjustments in the clubs and the social mechanisms are necessary.

Key Words: Football, Formation Process, Holism, Brazil, Portugal

INTRODUCTION

During the past 10 yrs, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) registered over 3000 transfers of Brazilian players to foreign clubs (1). An interesting comparison reveals that the exportations of motorcycles, buses, and aluminum mineral did not reach the same financial benefits (1). In 2011, more than 283 Brazilian players were transferred to Europe of which one-third went to Portugal. In Portugal, the transferences have a smaller dimension but the panorama is not very different. Two examples are worth mentioning: (a) the first is in regards the transfer of athletes from “Futebol Clube do Porto” during the past 10 yrs with figures that are considered a financial world record; (b) the second example refers to the 2004 financial results of the main Portuguese company that deals with transfers. The financial profits were equivalent to one-third of the country’s exports of leather in the same period of time, and a quarter of traditional wine exports, such as Port wine.

Last year, Portugal was ranked eight among countries that export athletes. Many of the 57 players were originally from South America (1). For example, the Brazilian defender Pepe who, before being bought by “Marítimo da Ilha da Madeira” and after that by “F.C. Porto”, was completely unknown in his native country. Today Pepe plays for Real Madrid, which shows that Portuguese clubs seek after players, particularly those who are free of any contractual ties or at low cost. The main target is still the Brazilian market, followed by the Argentinian one (1).

The pathway to become a professional football player in Brazil demands over 5000 training hours. In Europe, this time is reduced to half of that (7). This knowledge allows us to question whether young athletes are seen by clubs merely as a product managed according to market logic, or there is any possibility that they could offer something more than financial gain and entertainment. This problem originates from the social discomfort (22,23) that is caused by the destiny of the athletes discarded during this process.

Thus, it is clear that the need arises to rethink the role of clubs, particularly in regards to their social responsibilities. The athletes spend a great number of hours in training and intense involvement in the formation of the football *habitus* (8) that decreases their possibilities of greater dedication to a formal education and professional options (18).

The Brazilian educational system keeps youngsters at school around 25 hrs·wk⁻¹. There are many cases in which the training hours are equivalent to more than half of the hours dedicated to studies. The educational system in Europe does not allow so much of the students’ free time spent in training, but the problem also begins to affect this continent when the main football markets import so many young players from South America or Africa.

Due to such a competitive sports structure, which leads to a constant search for athletic results and improvement in technical skill, youngsters are attracted to football or the most common correlated variation, “futsal” (indoor football). For specialists (3), sports training should be initiated during childhood “so that the athlete can progressively and systematically develop body and mind to attain excellence in the long run, and not be worn out in the short term”.

The number of work posts in football is very limited. Thus, the youngsters with sport ambitions that look to professional clubs is bigger than market opportunities. In fact, estimates indicate that for every 4000 tests, <1% of the candidates become professional athletes. Even then, this small group should not be seen as an indication of success because there are other factors to be considered (e.g., the small percentage of well paid athletes) (25). Hence, the question is this: If it is so difficult to be successful in this profession, why invest so much time and effort?

The short answer is that there is always the possibility of being successful. Clearly, some athletes have reached the top of their career while circumventing the regular school period. They achieved fame, glory, and financial success without going through the university system. Indeed, this is the the football athlete's paradox. That is, the athletic breakthrough stands out on one hand as a great success while on the other hand as an impeccable bad example of society's demand for scholarly achievement. When failure is the case, the football related skills and knowledge acquired during years of dedication and hard training fail in helping the athlete enter the labor market.

Unfortunately, one can assume that young athletes from the football world have very little interest in academia. Yet, even though there are legal limitations regarding education in Brazil, there is no supervision or any type of guidance provided for these young athletes who become raw material for setting up an assembly line for football player production. The educational system in Portugal keeps students at school for a longer time, either being athletes or not.

Although it is possible for young athletes to achieve professional status with minimal to poor degrees of schooling and end up with a successful (i.e., wealthy) sports careers, the problem is that there are young athletes who fail to make it. They spend their youth in the system and failed to gain the opportunity to be part of the competitive market. This means they also failed the search for an identity that would help them face their basic needs as an adult (e.g., "the choice of their occupation and the adoption of the values in which to believe and according to which they would live their lives") (16).

Considering that the ambiguities, uncertainties and contemporary social dynamics of youth bring new challenges to education in all professional fields, especially when the specialization begins at the lower ages, the goal to develop athletes in the football clubs (more so than education citizens for credible career opportunities) must be analyzed as a multidisciplinary phenomenon. There are physical (13,26), psychological (4,10,21,27), cultural concerns, and social (1,11,18,19) training with explicit outcomes that must be evaluated by those who are responsible for coordinating the process.

For example, when the emphasis on sports reaches the point of being harmful to children and youngsters, then, it is pastime to stop the psychological and physical damage that it could causes. Other studies emphasize the pleasant or traumatic experiences these youngsters face in the clubs where they practice. They warn about the need for a new proposal that is based on complex and systematic views about the specialization of football athletes at the expense of forgetting about the youngster as future citizens. Within this ideological framework, some of the stakeholders – as is the case of the managers – can help play fundamentally important roles in solving these problems in a more dynamic and global way.

Holism: Set of Values in Football

The interviewed managers pointed out the need to integrate different fields of knowledge in the education of the athletes. In particular, they stated that the global education of young athletes in contemporary society cannot be compared with goods manufacturing. But, these statements are not theoretically grounded. Therefore, the holistic values will be explained in detail in order to clarify and question the point of view of the managers and their relationship with the education of the athletes.

The systematic thinking adopted by holism implies the perceiving of the object of analysis in a broader context, as opposed to analytical thinking that seeks to isolate parts of a problem. Holism means that man is an indivisible being, who cannot be understood through a separate analysis of his different components. In practice, this means that the aspects and variables of each situation have to be taken into consideration so that a larger number of individuals must participate in the decision-making process.

To think holistic means to deny what was established by René Descartes in the 17th century. The analytic method by Descartes embraces reductionism and the casual relationships among all the parts that makes up a complex whole and, consequently, demands a strict division between body and mind. It represents a reaction to the Newtonian-Cartesian view of a fragmented, atomized, and unrelated universe characterized by the mechanistic paradigm that sees the world as a machine (5,6). Holism involves more integrative and organic premises, integrating sensations, feelings, reason, and intuition. In holistic thinking, the aim is to help human beings become more creative, intellectual, and professionally independent. They are prepared to be future professionals with authentic opinions of their own with the ability to solve problematic situations. Thus, holistic thinking requires personal development in areas such as educational, cultural, economic, and social. In the educational environment, the term holism has been used as a unifying principle in the different areas of knowledge for the benefit of the human being, looking to rebuild the subject's integrity, fostering his initiative, and developing his creativity (9).

In the sports area (i.e., specifically in football), the term holism or global formation of the player is present even if incipiently. After some European clubs, and later the Brazilian clubs, had achieved sport and off-sport results, the idea of combining specialization and education outweighed the routines in the athletes' specialization that included only economical and financial aspects (7,20).

Clubs that value education instead of athlete production use these values because they favor the interaction of individual skills with the collective organization of the team. More precisely, this educational perspective was adopted by *Amsterdamsche Football Club Ajax* of the Netherlands, some decades ago (12,14), and later adapted to the Brazilian scenario by *Sport Club Internacional do Brasil* (19). These clubs sought an articulation of the different areas in the athlete specialization, with active participation of different agents, with the goal of a positive effect on sports performance (17). In particular, the cognitive and mental dimensions of the athlete are valued. This encourages the athlete to perform mental operations that allow for the assessment, anticipation, and control of one's participation in sports and life (19).

In the athlete selection process at the Dutch club Ajax, "...each player is evaluated according to a system called *tips*, which includes skill, intelligence, and personality. The development of personality is based on...creativity, courage, charisma, and self-confidence" (14). The success of Ajax is due to the internationalization of the club's values and to the respect for its culture, embodied in the athletes' daily routine (12). Theoretically, there is a concern about "forming citizens who are aware of the world outside football and not only workers whose job is playing ball" (19).

Clubs are important for supplying sport activities and assuming responsibility for organizing the participation of individuals. When providing conditions for the athletes' development and involvement of other important aspects of life, they promote their organizational culture. This practical ecology may influence the way in which youngsters and their communities perceive their sporting experiences (15,24).

The message seems quite clear to clubs that recruiting and teaching skills are no longer achieved exclusively by analytic methods based only on performance. Intelligence, versatility, school, family, and all the other social relationships must be taken into consideration. This thinking has led to the implementation of the various departments in club organization that, include but is not limited to, psycho-pedagogical, nutrition, and statistics.

The specialization of the football athlete in contemporary society is mediated by public scrutiny. Therefore, ethnographic instruments can contribute to a thematic approach to qualitative research, especially for those who are interested in the study of exclusions or youngsters at risk. The *habitus* is not a mere reflection of social structural strength, but as a mediation system of meanings between social structure and human action where social actors are participative authors in the process of changing social structures.

The Brazilian clubs analyzed in this paper have existed for over 100 yrs. The new managing board that took office in 2008 decided to restructure and invest in the development of athletes as a strategy to bring down the costs of organizing the main team and giving priority to players identified with the institution. With the end of the “Lei do Passe”, the law that stipulated legal ties between players and clubs, the Brazilian clubs focused their efforts on the athletes. The main goal was to rejuvenate their labor force, with the intention of preparing professional football players and generating funding for the clubs. This change adapted to FIFA (International Federation of Football Associations) guidelines that helped to assure financial compensations to the clubs when transfers occurred.

The professionals who work in the root categories come from scientific areas such as pedagogy, psychology, nutrition, and management. A large support staff of 53 employees is dedicated exclusively to youth department. More than 70% of the coaches with a university degree in Physical Education are dedicated exclusively to the club. The facilities available for the youth department include a Training Center (TC) with eight pitches, in addition to partnerships with other places for football practice. Moreover, spaces such as the medical department, strength training room, locker rooms, and other facilities are used only by the youth department. There are 200 players, and among them >50% have a home, food, salary, or some type of financial support provided by the club. This represents a big investment with a significant impact on the club’s annual budget.

The Portuguese club analyzed belongs also to the first division of the national league. Founded in the mid-70s, this club recently built a TC (Training Center) where some areas are shared between the youth and the professional departments (e.g., the medical department and the strength training room). The youth teams have at their disposal two artificial grass pitches, 12 apartments, and a self-service restaurant available to players aged above 16 yrs.

The training process starts at 5 yrs of age. Only one of the youth coaches does not have a degree in Physical Education, but he has another university degree and a Level 3 FIFA course. The majority of coaches maintain close ties with the public schools, and the work in the base categories is characterized as secondary activity (i.e., voluntary work). There are 43 professionals who share the formative category and professional department. There are more than 240 athletes of which 2/3 are paid a monthly fee. The investment made in the root department is close to \$420,000 per year.

The purpose of this study was: (a) to describe the socio-professional meaning of the athlete specialization process of two clubs of different cultural contexts following the guidelines of holistic

values; (b) to analyze the social responsibilities assumed by the clubs, and the actions implemented in this process; and (c) regarding the Portuguese club, to verify whether there are different possibilities for relationships in the education of athletes and citizens.

METHODS

Participants

To analyze the athlete formation process, the coordinator from the base category of a Portuguese club and a Brazilian club participated in data collection. Field observations focused on parents of athletes (7 in Portugal and 9 in Brazil) and staff (3 in Portugal and 2 in Brazil), speeches of professionals linked to clubs were recorded, agents in the business of football (only in Brazil), and athletes in the sub 11 to sub 20. The Portuguese club coordinator was identified by the initials CPT and the Brazilian coordinator by CBr.

Instruments

This socio-anthropological enquiry was conducted using basically two instruments: field diary and a semi-structured interview. For the construction of the field diary, ethnographic techniques were used: practices were observed both in training sessions and in games correlated with the categories established for the study and described below.

The second qualitative research instrument was the semi-structured interview. The interview script was prepared after a literature review, involving football and the root age groups, and the ideals of holistic values, both in the administrative and bio-psycho-social areas. Twelve questions were formulated and categories corresponding to each of the items were conceptualized. The first questions asked about the life experience connected with the sporting field, professional formation, and experience in the administrative area of the coordinator. The subsequent questions corresponded to the categories of pre-established analyses, resulting from the literature review and from the theoretic framework adopted by the researchers: (a) organization chart and professional qualification; (b) recruitment, maintenance, and exclusion of athletes; (c) training methodology; (d) pedagogical and health relationships; (e) football-professional follow-up; and (f) relationships with families and significant others.

Procedures

In Portugal, field observations occurred between October 2010 and June 2011. In Brazil, field observations began in February 2011 and ended in June 2011. The differences in observation dates result from the football calendar of each country. Semi-structured interviews were held in the period from November to December 2010 in both countries. A team consisting of five researchers in Brazil, and second team of two researchers in Portugal, one of them being the project co-coordinator, participated in these procedures. The project was approved by the Research Ethics Committed in Protocol No. 03 61 2010.

Data Analysis

The material produced by the interviews was submitted to Content Analysis, following several rules. In order to maintain the rule of homogeneity, the semi-structured interview was identical in both clubs, and the researchers-interviewers were from the same center of studies, and were present at the application of the pilot project and in the procedures of analysis, re-discussion of the categories, and construction of the definitive version of the semi-structured interview (2). The methodological stage, labeled exploration of the material, followed several steps. An analysis grid was created and divided into 4 columns: the first column for each of the pre-established

categories, the second and third columns for CPt and CBr, and the fourth column for field observations.

The aim was to order the data interpretation, in the sense of pointing out the most significant topic in each category. Finally, based on the research objectives, inferences and deductions were made, and elaborated upon from the interpretation of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of inferences are presented together with the discussion of each category, which were grouped according to the thematic proximity. Therefore, six groups are presented with discussion of the data. In the majority of instances, an effort was made to present the data of the Portuguese club first, with reference to a certain category, after that the data of the Brazilian club, and at the end, the discussion of the categorical group.

Professional Training, Organizational Chart, and Professional Qualification

In the two clubs that were researched in Portugal and Brazil, the persons in charge have college degrees. They also have continued to improve their education through post-graduate courses.

The organizational charts of the clubs are directed to take care of the athletes in a global manner. For example, they are engaged in the athletes' personal development in such as biologic adaptation, physical performance assessment, psychology, schooling, social assistance, and pedagogy.

Both clubs are interested in hiring coaches with university degrees. In fact, 90% of the Portuguese coaches have an undergraduate degree in Physical Education. Also, by means of small subsidies, the clubs encourage the coaches to participate in FIFA's courses.

Although they have relatively different organizational charts, the two clubs maintain professionals with similar functions. To educate a citizen-athlete, professionals from different areas are required, qualified, and encouraged to seek new information. In the Brazilian club, the activities were established with the idea of non-segmentation in functions, seeking interactions among different departments. In the Portuguese club, there is an administrative attempt not to segment professional functions, but the organizational chart design and sporting installations at times become an obstacle. There are indications that the Brazilian professionals are considered one of the organization's largest investments, due to the financial return that allows coaches to work full time for the club and to plan a career in sport.

Recruitment, Selection and Exclusion of Athletes

Recruitment is the search for quality and talent. The most common tools used to identify young prospects are trials that are complemented by coaches' observations during the season. The major difference between the clubs regarding recruitment lies in contact with agents. The Brazilian club is more involved with agents and accepts dividing future revenues. It has incorporated this process as an *habitus*.

There is no single formula, and the coordinators are aware of it. However, good relationships with business persons or good partnerships are pathways that ease recruitment. The purpose is to guarantee quality as far as possible, having in mind financial compensations in the near future. But without quality, is it possible to continue?

There are two distinct stages in the selection of athletes, which result from the determinations imposed by FIFA. The first contract may only be signed when the athlete is 16 yrs of age. In the Portuguese club, the outstanding players are courted by three big clubs from the two major cities. This process of enticement by the big clubs is described as something natural by CPT: “who would not like to see their son playing in one of these teams?”

Another factor in the continuity of athletes is the dimension of *status* the athlete gains when he belongs to this Portuguese team (i.e., within the scope of the district and the region), which presents the best physical and human conditions in an environment that favors launching young athletes in the three best clubs in the country. Belonging to a club means being among the best in the district.

For the Brazilian club, keeping the players goes through various strategies. Providing financial assistance to athletes from families with lower economic conditions is one of them. Added to this is the attempt to provide a family environment in the club and at the same time treating young athletes as professionals. Another strategy is to approach youngsters of better quality with some proposal, such as: (a) temporary job offers to parents during the main team’s games; and (b) making it easier to find jobs in the labor market. If there is no effective contract, the club tries to provide an affective contract.

As of 16 yrs of age, the situation changes. There are universal rules imposed by FIFA. In the European club, there are 12 athletes who live at the Training Center and receive a small subsidy (at most \$180.00). To sign the first contract with quality athletes is the first step to guarantee the right to indemnities, which may compensate all the financial effort spent on this stage: “here we sign the first internal contract at the age of 16 yrs, which give us the right to formation. If the father or the agent wants to take the athlete away, it is not our policy to hold the athlete, but the right to formation is guaranteed. Our club must have the right to indemnities in the future, this is correct” (CPT).

With the Brazilian club, there is financial involvement throughout the process. The figures approach \$295.00 initially, but depending of the athlete’s quality, at 16 yrs of age this amount may be multiplied by 4.

Decline in sporting performance is the main reason for an athlete’s exclusion, both from the Brazilian and Portuguese teams. In both clubs, excluding the athlete during the season is avoided. This may create problems regarding school activities. In the Portuguese club, there is a large number of exclusions in the transition from 8 to 9 yrs of age and from 17 yrs of age to the Junior group. To have an idea, of the group of 28 athletes in the under-17 team, only 12 on average enter the following stage. On the other hand, the Brazilian club avoids excluding athletes after 17 yrs of age. After signing the first contract, the coordinators notify the excluded athletes, and try to find a new team for the athlete to continue his career.

In order to be an asset to the club, the “foot-worker” must have quality and engage in the club from a very early age. The network of relationships is fundamental to attract quality athletes, and in the Brazilian club, sharing profits with agents has become a reality. Cases were identified of agents who made gifts of cars and monthly compensations of \$355.00 to the families of under-15 athletes (Field Diary, 11.04.2011- Brazil). In Portugal, agents began to appear more decisively after the age of 17 (Field Diary, 02.02.2011-Portugal).

Finally, exclusion is solely linked to the athlete's quality. If athletes who were considered as having great qualities in previous categories, and as the saying goes in the football environment "safe bets in the football player profession," do not maintain their performance, they are simply excluded. There is an established market logic of which the coordinators are aware and able to attenuate the consequences, but not to avoid them.

The training load is a good indicator of how these youngsters participate in soccer activities. How many hours of training and games have been spent by an athlete, who engaged in the club since the age of 11 yrs? In Portugal, at 21 yrs of age an athlete has trained an average of 2,300 hrs and may have played over 320 games. In Brazil, at 20 yrs of age, an athlete has trained an average of 5,200 hrs and may officially have played 260 times. How could this have affected the formation of this youngster regarding formal education? When a youngster acquires the football *habitus* and is afterwards excluded, is his reconversion possible? The coordinators are aware of it and they are concerned about the consequences. They seek to replace production with education that is broader in scope. The demand for education that includes schooling is pointed out as the main action to take.

Training Methodology

There are differences in the training methodology, starting with the constraints of the educational system in each country. In the European system, youngsters have a short period of time for training, a maximum of 2 hrs·d⁻¹. Teams under-17 have a mean training time of 6 hrs·wk⁻¹, and the under-20, a little more than 8 hrs. The Brazilian educational system makes longer time units available and the club absorbs these for training. The under-11 teams practice about 6 hrs·wk⁻¹, under-13 teams 9 hrs·wk⁻¹, and from then on the practice sessions can last for approximately 15 hrs·wk⁻¹.

The other difference is related to the rules for each age group. In Portugal, up to 13 yrs of age, the athletes are placed in a system of competition that uses a pitch reduced to 7 participants per team. The idea is that the athletes: (a) spend more time in contact with the ball; (b) learn to play in different positions, seeking versatility; (c) acquire the *habitus* of rapid transitions between defense and attack and vice-versa; (d) appreciate the game at high speed with fast and collective passes; and (e) effectively participate in the game, as the rules allow substituted players to come back in the game at any time (CPT). For this purpose, there is a diversity of exercises with a high degree of intensity and rotation of positions. Some of the basic values of holism are fulfilled, that is, be independent and prepared for new problematic situations.

In Brazil, there is no *football seven*. At 11 yrs of age, athletes practice for over 3 hrs a day at low intensity. But skill, reasoning, and fast passes are developed in another correlated sport, *futsal* (indoor football). Basically, up to 13 yrs of age, there is a shared experience of young athletes between the two sports. There is no effective control on the influence of *futsal* participation on the under-11 and under-13 teams, given that the young athletes are scattered among different teams in the city and each goes under different training methods. Thus, at present there is no way of measuring the training overload, but empirically it does exist for some (Field Diary, 24.03.2011-Brazil).

In the two clubs, training situations of analytical skills are avoided, although they do occur. In planning the sessions, there is the intention to teach the game globally and to blend reason and intuition by presenting problems similar to a game and looking to develop the athlete's creativity when solving the given situations. However, the Portuguese system was shown to be more efficient when this was transferred to *football seven*. In order to learn the decision process, the

athlete has to be in a situation under pressure, and this occur better when the pitch space is reduced, the positions change frequently, and the players can go in and out of the game without limitations. In Brazil, with 11 players in the field, it is easy to note empirically that the athletes in this age group frequently participate very little in the game, excluding them from the decision-making process. In Brazil, there is something that goes unnoticed by the local association, but not by the coordinators. That is the reason for the importance given to *futsal* by CBr, although he knows the difficulties faced by the youngsters until they adjust their physical and technical skills to football.

Pedagogical Relationships

The pedagogical relationship is different in each club. The Portuguese club takes advantage of the educational system that has shown some success over the last few decades. “A major part of the athletes are under their family’s responsibility” and it very rarely happens that any athlete asks for help from the psycho-pedagogic counselor” (CPt). The club is concerned about the athletes who live in the academy. The psycho-pedagogic counselor and the coaches demand good school marks all the time. The club’s history acknowledges the motto that the managers and coaches are proud to show off: “formation of the athlete, formation of the man and academic formation, and if they do not show results, then we cannot keep them” (CPt).

The Brazilian club identified two possibilities regarding formal education: (a) organize a school within the club itself, as some European and Brazilian clubs have already done, e.g., Sporting in Lisboa and Cruzeiro in Belo Horizonte; and (b) get in touch with the school close to the lodgings of the root categories and establish a partnership. The second option was chosen due to difficulties involving the first one. The club pedagogic counselor was responsible for managing the process of approaching the local school.

It was interesting to learn that the pedagogic counselor has a weekly schedule with the students who live in the club facilities, and with some students who live with their families. The families try to use this benefit offered by the club, just as the club seeks to involve the families in this process by holding individual meetings. The effect of the extensive training hours led the coordinator to say about athletes:

We try to give them at least this basic support, until the third year (twelve years of schooling), and then refer him to a future situation. Actually, it is as I told you: up to under-17 they end up being excluded, and those who are not in a condition to carry on with the career, in this way, within a condition of schooling, a condition of formation that is possible to offer....One has to form the athlete, but one has to form the man, the citizen, this is the club’s aim, many clubs already use this approach, because in the process of formation, the athlete spends most of his time at the club, and one cannot be incoherent and not interfere in the process of formation of the man, as well as of the athlete (CBr).

In specific cases, the club has been concerned about athletes in risk situations. The families have been contacted by social assistance at their homes. There are cases of abandoning school, maltreatment, drug traffic in which the family is involved. “Suddenly we are rescuing a boy from this type of environment. It is difficult for you to predict whether we are dealing with a future star player, but you may be sure that the club is doing its social part and helping to educate a citizen” (CBr).

Regarding health insurance, the Portuguese Football Association makes compulsory for all clubs to have health insurance for all the athletes. In the Brazilian case, this is not mandatory. According to the Brazilian coordinator, "...considering that the occurrence of injuries would be much less frequent at the ages up to 14 yrs, it is easier for the club and cheaper to pay for treatment when anything happens." From the age of 14 onwards, all have health insurance, complete medical assistance, and dental assistance.

The Portuguese state supports the clubs action in the holistic formation of the athlete. It was interesting to observe that full members of teams up to 15 yrs of age were kept out of games because of poor school marks. But, as one of the coaches said, after this age the problem is with the family. The club seeks results (Field Diary 12.12.2010-Portugal), and CBr showed concern about education issues, but in practice he was not able to prevent failures at school.

The coordinator has no guarantees the multilingual and sagacious athletes will more easily become professionals than players with a lower cultural level. In this specific category, the holistic model was assumed much more in impressionist parameters, believing that with broad cultural formation, the future athlete could more easily understand the game and have more controlled social relationships in order to have a successful career.

Follow-Up and Football-Profession

In the Brazilian club, a program with a continuous formation cycle was created that addresses health, education, religion, and career. This involves lectures on matters such as financial career, drugs, and alcoholism; all under the coordination of the social assistant who is the link between the club and the athlete's family.

The Portuguese club functions as a school of sport and the athletes pay a monthly fee until the age of 16 yrs. In addition to payment, they go through a selection process, in a trajectory to a professional career. As CPT affirmed, "this is a type of river... it starts as a large brace, then it begins to tighten, tighten, tighten....we make our choice within our objectives, within our criteria," which in practice means that 12 players pass on to the Junior's team every year and of these 3 enter the main team.

For those who are excluded, the continuity of their career in other teams is possible by means of the network of relationships that the coordinators have constructed over time. In the same way as they try to place in other teams certain athletes that have been excluded, they receive athletes that have been excluded as well. As the Brazilian coordinator stated: "Many of these athletes that are not good enough today, after going through the experience of playing in a smaller club may come back into a much better condition, having developed their skills and maturity and finishing by being integrated into the professional ranks."

CBr knows the importance of his work to the club, and the need to focus on the search for quality. Moreover, under the rules of FIFA, those who are cut may produce some financial return to the club, and also there is an effort to reinsert them into the football market. It would be an almost unimaginable mission if the club were the only party responsible for inserting these young ex-athletes into other professions: society, family, agents, and clubs are all involved.

Relationships with Family and with Significant Others

In both clubs, it was common to observe rapid and prompt intervention when an athlete's performance diminished. Psychologists, pedagogues, and social assistants arrive on the scene. CBr pointed out different intervention situations with the main problem remaining as unstructured

families. Financial problems, lack of humanist values, and drugs appear less frequently. Action is taken in order to internalize values, under a holistic perspective, seeking to integrate the athlete into the club's philosophy.

There is a differentiation between two ecosystems regarding the relationship with the families. In Portugal, in addition to being selected, the athlete pays for his formation, and the parents are responsible for supporting the coaches during training, transport to games, and organization of festive activities. In Brazil, athletes follow a model very close to that of the professional team. Over half of the young athletes are paid to play, transported to training and games, and food is provided by the club. As the Brazilian model is close to that of the professional teams, the parents act as agents or promoters of their son's career up to the age of 15 yrs. After this age, it is common for agents to participate in all the negotiations. Therefore, there is financial investment by the club, agents, and parents. All are involved in creating the demand and pressure for results.

The *habitus* of the relationship with significant others in Brazil assumes the "figure" of the sporting agent as something with which the clubs have to live with. When a prospect player appears, the agents are always present. In a country of continental dimensions, the club has scouts looking for talented players in different regions. In the Portuguese club, this process is at an embryonic stage. There are over 12 scouts scattered around Portugal to identify prospects, but with rare exceptions, this occurs only in the under-18 team.

If the club's greatest assets are its human resources, acquisition of the best is a necessity. Therefore, there is a constant interaction between macro systems (the club) and micro systems (agents and smaller clubs). With the figure of the sporting agent certified by FIFA, the agent has become a partner of the institutions, and sometimes, before the institutions, the agent has become a partner of the families.

Helping people feel they are part of the process is not the easiest of tasks for the coordinators. At present, according to the athlete's quality, the career is traced at an increasingly earlier stage, and to this scenario previously dominated by the parents and club directors, the figure of the sporting agent has been added.

CONCLUSIONS

It would be misleading to affirm that the clubs researched in this study do not have any concern about formation "beyond the four lines delimiting the playing field" that is to say, that they do not invest in complementary education. The present findings in two continents support the discourse of global or holistic education that is in vogue and justifies a series of attitudes taken by managers and coaches. It seems clear to them that between the productivist and formative models, the latter has advantages and can be considered more humanistic.

The two coordinators understood they are far from resolving the problem of reconversion. A decade of acquisition of specific *habitus* in a single sport, at such an important stage of life, may have brutal consequences for the lives of these youngsters. It appeared clear that clubs cannot be held responsible alone. Parents, agents, the athlete's expectations, and the monopoly maintained by FIFA and its legal representatives in different countries makes of those who are deeply involved in youth football a group of youngsters at risk. A risk that is inherent to the kind of investment of a decade, with consequences that could be disastrous, even with the possibility of international employment at a young age with astronomic financial incomes. Social discomfort was pointed out

by the coordinators of both clubs. Concrete actions depend on the reorganization of the sporting scene and the balance between education and professionalization in football.

Perhaps the discourse about holistic education is more adjusted in Portugal, given that the club takes advantage of the state's educational policy as well as the cultural tradition of the importance of formal education. Through the cultural and moral differences – and not by the football per se – it can be pointed out that the professionalization of athletes does not appear to be the only option. Other options seem always to be open in the lives of these youngsters in this European country. An objective finding is that of the 27 athletes of the under-20 team of the Portuguese club, 10 are college undergraduates, 12 are in their final year in high school, 2 do not go to school at all, and the others are delayed in their school process (CPt).

In Brazil, the proportion of successful schooling is much lower. Perhaps because the club takes advantage of the athlete's free time, made available by the educational system, and leaves little time for independent study. The main beneficiary is the club itself, which can easily deal with a less demanding school schedule. At a certain age, when athletes begin to study at night, they are at the disposal of the training schedule. The club assumes the mission to balance the needs of education of human beings, athlete-citizens participating in social life. This is the present discourse, but it is not always possible. The holistic thinking places the club in the position of an important social institution for the education of the youth, but requires structural adjustments that go far beyond football.

These findings and concerns must be disseminated in society. Significant actors in sport have the duty to generate an open debate about the education of the athlete-citizen, putting pressure on the clubs to assume social responsibility that has been latent up to now. In future studies, discussions on the central problem "why and how the clubs form athletes" will continue, associating qualitative data with quantitative methodologies.

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