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Talent development and ecology of practice in a professional club

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Abstract: This study attempts to explore sports participation, dominant relationships and contextual influences in a professional environment through the perspective of social actors within the club. Participant observation, semi-structured interviews alongside with a field diary were the instruments used to assess how the interpersonal context, competitive environment and the organisational structure impact on youth sports participation. This study has demonstrated a twofold reality, how weak organisation and good coaching create a climate that has direct implications on youth sports participation. Indeed, results show that youth-competitive climate and the search for status recognition, desire and uncertainty of professionalisation are the main characteristics of this environment. Researchers also acknowledged the fact that the main relationships carried out in these environments are the coach-athlete dyad in a way to foster a more pronounced mastery climate. Coach and parents are important positive assets in talent development, as well as the overall organisation. Significant others perceive the athletes' competitive and professional disposition to train, to compete and to be in a constant search for sport performance. These results suggest new avenues of research in the way of youth sports talent management and the search for sports contextual change agents. Implications for applied practitioners and researchers are explored.

Keywords: professional sport, talented youth, context, organisation

Introduction

Sport at the elite level is a hard pathway to endure and maximising effectiveness of the talent development pathway is crucial. Although in the social science domain there is very little discussion on the social ground of talent development and, although talent is socially situated and constructed (Gagné, 2004), it is primarily the result of practice and experience (Howe, 2001) and biological determinants. The ultimate achievement for any coach or organisation interested in the performance level is to nurture effectively, enabling the athletes to realise their full potential and succeed at a professional level. In this type of excellence orientation, identification and development of talent are both an integral and intertwined part of a successful process (Abbott & Collins, 2002; Bloom 1985; Martindale, Collins & Daubney, 2005).

The academic literature on talent has tended to focus on the individual athlete, and on the discovery and development of athletic talent (Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler, 2010a), either with psychological (Domingues & Gonçalves, 2012; Mac-Namara, 2011; Taylor & Bruner, 2012); biological data (Le Gall, Carling, Williams & Reilly, 2010; Hardman & Jones, 2011; Keogh, 1999; Pearson, Naughton & Torode, 2006) or from a more organisational perspective (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009).

In the 1980's there were epistemological and methodological shifts in some of the research on the development of talent and expertise. Research moved from focusing on cognitive determinants of elite performance to better understanding of contextual influences. More recently, some models have been particularly influential in discussions of sports participation and development: Balyi's (2001) long-term athlete development; Côté and Hay's (2002) developmental model of sports participation (DMSP); Abbott and Collins' (2002) psychological characteristics of developing excellence; Bailey and Morley's (2006) model of talent development in physical education (MTDPE). All of these models have different aims and research methods providing descriptions of participant development in sport. The fact is that only Côté's DSMP and Bailey and Morley's MTDPE elaborate on psychosocial influences as well as environmental factors as a way of sport involvement (DSMP) or discuss the character of the talent development process.

The latest research in talent development shows that more varied psychological and especially social and cultural circumstances play an important role. The growing number of qualitative studies (Domingues & Gonçalves, 2013; Henriksen et al., 2010a; 2010b; Larsen, Alfermann & Christensen, 2012; Martindale et al., 2010) highlight the need in setting the right ethos in youth practices, providing change and development through the environment (Martindale & Mortimore, 2011).

Within this reasoning Harwood (2008, 120-125) argues that external assets are characterised by the quality of the environment shaping the young athlete, including access to positive role models, social support, and positive peer influence. Determining a detailed picture of effective goals and systems within the talent development environments Martindale, Collins and Abraham (2007) provided a clear picture of an effective talent environment: long-term aims and methods, strong support background, emphasis on development and a holistic approach. Following these concerns, Martindale et al. (2010) have examined the key features of an effective talent development environment specific to sport, developing the talent development environment questionnaire.

Literature continues to show some potential pitfalls that arise when operationalising long-term focus, although research has shown that potential champions are often brought up in environments where close support networks make efforts to de-emphasise the importance of success through developmental periods (Gould, Dief-

fenbach & Moffett, 2002). Furthermore, some findings have pinpointed its attention to the relationship between environmental resources (autonomy, social support from the coach, and performance feedback) and performance among young players (Bakker, Oerlemans, Demerouti, Slot & Ali, 2011).

For instance, studies are consensual when referring to the importance of the climate created by coaches. Taylor and Bruner (2012) used strong theoretical foundations to highlight the role of the coach and team environment in facilitating positive youth outcomes. It is clear that a professional environment is required to promote the attainment of excellence and coaches are strongly recommended in promoting positive learning environments.

From an ecological perspective, it makes little sense to perceive young athletes as independent and stable personalities (Larsen et al., 2012). Instead, personal attributes have to be perceived as socially constructed and highly dependent on the specific environmental conditions. Vigotsky was a precursor of Bronfenbrenners' work and his assumption that learning always occurs and cannot be separated from a social context on many levels is in line with Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (1998, 995-1008) and Bronfenbrenner and Evans' (2000, 116-120) writings.

There is the need to understand individuals' development within their environments. This inductive research used Bronfenbrenners' (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000) bioecological theory (BET) to stress the importance of contextual cues (organisation and structure of the club) and interrelationships (coach-athlete-parent relationship) called by definition proximal processes and determine the perceptions of sports participation in youth adolescent athletes.

In this sense, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory and successive reformulations (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) claim that nature, power, content of proximal processes vary systematically in function of personal characteristics in development, context where processes meet, under consideration developmental outcomes, and changes that occur over a period of time where processes are occurring (Krebs, 2009a; 2009b). In fact, several studies using this model have been carried out in the youth sport field, focusing on important relationships in sports participation (Bengoechea & Johnson, 2001; Domingues & Gonçalves, 2012; 2013; Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn & Wall, 2008; Kiely Mueller et al., 2011).

It offers a qualitative, longitudinal design to explore social variables that can affect talent development in performance environments identified with a professional organisation (structure, climate, shared objectives) and main interrelations that foster youth talent development. In this sense, the study tries to determine the interpersonal climate (dominant social relationships such as coach-athlete) and processes that undergo in youth sporting contexts.

The researchers hypothesised that the professional environment will have an effect on the athlete's personal dispositions. Also, the relationships in the club will

be markedly oriented for the development and improvement of both social and technical skills. Studying this sporting environment some research questions arise, for example, which actors and relationships are important in the development of youth sporting talent? How does the organisation and structure (physical context) impede or foster the athlete's development? Finally, how do significant others (coach, parents and directors) perceive the athlete's desire to professional football?

Methods

Participants

Data was collected from people who were easily available and had a thorough knowledge of the club in order to support the researcher's study, that is, participants ($n = 9$) were selected according to their representativeness and importance in a football Professional Oriented Club (POC). These participants were parents with managerial roles, directors, coaches with a rich past serving the club and youth coordinator.

Professional oriented club

POC refers to a club with a senior professional squad with a wide history in the Portuguese first division. The club is located in the centre area of Portugal and has sixteen youth teams competing at a national and regional level. The club is popular and known at a national level.

Data Collection

Data was collected and analysed during one sport year. Several methods of data collection were used, namely, semi-structured interviews with significant others; participant observation (more than 80 hours of direct observation, with a field diary and completion of observation grills); the latter served the purpose of cross checking the interviewer's statement. These instruments were employed to provide a thick and reliable description of the professional club (see table 1). This procedure was important to verify and contradict statements from the interviews and provide a wider and comprehensive knowledge of this particular context. These instruments used were important in determining the main relationships in the club, and how this sporting context determines different outcomes in the athletes.

The field descriptive analysis was based on Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Model. Parents' biographic and demographic information was obtained, for example, their father's academic and professional achievements. This data was obtained through the athletes' information. For this matter, the researchers chose the teams between thirteen and sixteen years of age because they could easily express their thoughts and feelings towards their sports participation.

This multi method approach allowed a cross validation and added emergent descriptions (Lessard-Hérbert, Goyette & Boutin, 2008). In this study, using Bron-

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model researchers were able to understand some psychosocial variables and explain what was happening in the professional oriented club (microsystem), namely: main relationships, organisation, others' perception of athletes competitive strive. Both the field diary and the questions of the interviews were based upon how context, proximal processes, time and person were defined in the model.

Table 1: Field descriptive analysis based on participant observation

Denomination			Time	Reference
Physical time	Month	Day	Hour	Temperature
Context (Microsystem)	Structure	Physical characteristics	Internal organisation	
			Planned	Not planned
Person in context	Race	Sex	Age	
Individual behaviour (Person)	Competence		Dysfunction	
Interaction patterns and group activities (Proximal processes)				
Communication	Content		Intensity	
	Time and language routine		Function	
Nonverbal behaviour and linguistic properties	Young athletes		Adults	
Motivation and goal achievement	Individual		Group	
Influence of other social systems in context	Proximal (Mesosystem)		Non proximal (Exosystem)	

Note: Based on Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) and Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000)

Procedures

In order to introduce procedures and establish further visits, various meetings were held prior to data collection. The schedule of observations was distributed in different competitive phases throughout the sport season in order to obtain different informational cues, i.e., different competitive behaviours in different phases of the competition. Participant observation was partially co-organised on a weekly timetable with the youth coordinator in order to observe training sessions and arrange the interview meetings with the coaches.

Collected data was consistently analysed throughout with BET. Daily notes and observational grids were reviewed at the end of each day during one sport season. Furthermore, interviews were transcribed verbatim and tape recorder confirmation followed the procedure. After this procedure, the transcribed interviews were then returned to the interviewees for cross validation and verification. Researchers also received the expertise of a researcher in qualitative analysis.

This study was approved by the ethic board committee of the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education in Coimbra. In fact, ethical guidelines followed the work towards protecting the individuals, club and communities involved in the study against any form of harm, manipulation or malpractice.

Data analysis

Field diary and observational grills were analysed concurrently with the semi-structured interviews, which allowed crossing data and statement verification. In order to understand meanings and actions, data was analysed through standardised interpretative techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 23-45; Patton, 2002, 35-42; Ryan & Bernard, 2000, 782-801) as it is the most pragmatic way of conducting interpretative content analysis (Vazou, Ntoumanis & Duda, 2005). Also, researchers used conceptual and relational analysis provided by the semi-structured interviews as well as the field diary. The group of statements that emerged from the data was based upon the theoretical framework adopted, with this longitudinal design, i.e. the directions and intensity of the relationships in the club. Researchers also looked for personal characteristics that were developed through this participation as well as contextual cues that enabled or disabled this development.

Content analysis was employed with four successive and interdependent steps (Bardin, 1988, 14-38; Krippendorff, 2012, 25-49; Moraes, 1999, 7-32). First, interview transcription (discourse reproduction), second step, careful reading and analysis (including second and third reading) from both the main researchers and senior researcher. In the third phase, researchers proceeded with the identification and description of specific themes through inductive analysis, and lastly, with the identified themes and creation of categories (originated from the interviews and field diary).

New statements emerged such as “Opportunities for life enduring skill construction through sport” (Person in the PPCT model); “Clubs’ identity and experiences...” (Context in the PPCT model); and “Climate in the club and inherent values” (Proximal Processes in the PPCT model). All of the categories were reviewed to ascertain whether some categories could be merged or if some needed to be sub-categorised against pre-determined codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data was analysed following the PPCT model, i.e. the pre-determined categories were guided through both the components of the model and the research questions. Finally, researchers returned to the original transcripts to ensure that all the information that needed to be categorised had been so. After complete interpretation, emerged data was delivered to the athletes for feedback check and cross validation.

Internal validity was achieved through repeated hours of observation and multi-method data collection in different phases of a sport season. Peer review was assured by an external research specialist in content analysis and with extensive experience in conducting qualitative studies.

Validity

Qualitative analysis searches primarily for understanding particular and non-generalisable situations (Erickson, 1986, 42-53). Knowing that triangulation constitutes a mean of strengthening data (Patton, 2002), this was a way to generalise the findings to other professional contexts. Researchers also critically examined the gathered information to detect any potential bias and inclination that may have influenced the conclusions about the data. In-depth and accurate descriptions of sporting context provided applicability and descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2002) and BET provided a solid framework from which results did derive. Due to a lack of measurement in natural settings and noticeable changes in this professional oriented club (change in sport directors, sport facilities, nature of the management) replicability couldn’t be assessed.

Results

It is important to consider the wider social context (exosystem) of what represents the professional environment in Portugal. Analysing the young athletes’ involvement in competitive sport, three related aspects emerge: mobility rates between clubs, rate between foreign players and Portuguese players playing in Portugal and, finally, the percentage of junior players in the forthcoming season.

In order to ascertain the importance of the first and most important microsystem (family structure), parents’ socio-demographic data was also obtained, with information such as parents’ professional activity and academic background. In part, this information helped to describe family structure as another important microsystem besides the club.

Parents' socio-demographic data and sport competitive structure

Table 2: POC biographical and socio-demographic data

Team	Under 14			Under 15			Under 16			Under 17		
	Father	Mother	% Total									
1 st Circle	–	1	2.63	1	3	9.52	–	2	5.71	1	2	10.71
2 nd Circle	2	2	10.52	4	3	16.67	2	2	11.43	5	2	25
3 rd Circle	6	2	21.05	2	4	14.29	5	5	28.57	1	3	14.29
Secondary	6	6	31.58	6	4	23.81	7	2	25.71	6	6	42.86
College	4	4	21.05	6	6	28.57	3	2	14.29	–	2	7.14
Masters	–	2	5.26	1	1	4.76	–	3	8.57	–	–	–
Doctoral	2	1	7.89	–	1	2.38	–	–	–	–	–	–
Doesn't have	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	5.71	–	–	–
TOTAL	20	18	100	20	22	100	18	17	100	13	15	100
Professional activity sector												
Parents	Father	Mother	% Total									
	Father	Mother	% Total									
UNE	–	–	–	–	1	2.27	1	1	5.56	–	1	3.33
SEC	4	2	19.05	6	3	20.45	5	7	33.33	4	1	16.67
THI	14	12	61.9	12	15	61.36	10	7	47.22	7	12	63.33
FOR*	2	5	16.67	–	2	4.55	1	2	8.33	2	1	10
NR	1	2	7.14	3	1	9.09	1	1	5.56	2	–	6.67
RET	–	–	–	1	–	2.27	–	–	–	–	–	–
TOTAL	21	21	100	22	22	100	18	18	100	15	15	100

Note: UNE = Unemployed; THI =Third; NR = No response; SEC = Secondary; FOR = Forth; RET = Retired

* Forth sector – This sector includes health professionals and professors

Table 2 shows data from young athletes' parents (family microsystem). The athletes in this research were from U-17, U-16 U-15 and U-14 teams. Data shows that parents, in general, have more academic background when compared to less structured and professionalised clubs (Domingues, Cavichioli & Gonçalves, 2013). Analysing the four groups, only Junior B (U-17) showed low levels of scholar attainment, being 3rd cycle the main academic level of their parents. On the other side, Junior C (U-15) registered a significant amount of parents with university level. Furthermore, analysing parents' professional occupation, the third sector was dominant among four groups.

Describing the Portuguese professional context (exosystem) one could see a clearer picture of what is happening in these professional leagues regarding the number of foreign players playing in Portuguese professional leagues. Results (see table 3) demonstrate a higher mobility rate in league 1 teams (main professional league) and a higher number of Portuguese players in league 2 (second professional league). Inversely, league 1 has a higher presence of foreign players, in average 13 athletes per team; a total of 53 (89%) foreign players play in league 1 against 34 (34%) in league 2.

Table 3: Portugal professional leagues. Season 11/12

		Portugal professional leagues 11/12								Pre-season 12/13		
Season and professional leagues	mobility	Players finishing in the club					Transfers during season			Pre-season mobility		
		start season (n)	Squad	Portuguese	Foreign	Foreign (%)	Portuguese	Foreign	% Portuguese	In	Out	In Junior
League 1	Mean	37	24	11	13	53.89	6	8	43.18	9	10	1*
	Total	588	377	173	204	_	88	121	_	139	157	7
League 2	Mean	30	24	16	8	34.34	2	3	41.19	10	17	1
	Total	472	382	252	130	_	38	52	_	156	278	22

Note: 6 teams posse B squads, therefore, they weren't accountable, from an initial number of 16 teams only 10 were considered.

The numbers of foreign players in Portuguese teams represent a large tendency of Portuguese football and other championships as well; the difficult pathway to the senior squad represents a big challenge to young players during each season. Data collected in the pre-season showed little difference of new incoming players between the two leagues, despite the fact that league 2 showed more players leaving and more ex-junior players entering each squad (statistical terms represent only 1%).

Semi-structured interviews and field diary from significant others (coaches, parents, directors)

The interpretive approach to content analysis revealed three critical dimensions and eight primary categories, in accordance with the PPCT model (Personal development and self-improvement – Person, proximal processes and social interactions – Proximal processes, and sport context and achievement – Context; see table 4). Participant observation and the observational grids served to reinforce these emergent dimensions. The grid that the researchers used also followed the four concepts of the PPCT model and provided a better insight on to how parents, directors and coaches interacted with each other and with the athletes.

Longitudinal analysis allowed to verify how important these dimensions are in describing the sporting context in a professional club and how it can foster the young athletes’ development. The adopted BET background emphasised aspects like the club’s identity and its representativeness in the community, organisation and structure, clubs climate and values, predominant social relations, perspectives and club’s importance within the family and school microsystem. Table 5 provides the labels for each statement.

Table 4: Dimensions, categories and groups of responses (Field diary and interviews)

Critical dimensions	Categories	Groups of responses
Personal development and self-improvement	Opportunities for life enduring skill construction through sport	Social skills sport Identity construction
	Relationship with the club, family and support efficacy	Support relations Family structure and support
	School integration and expectations toward sport	School expectations School-club integration
Proximal processes and social interactions	Climate in the club, significant others’ importance and inherent values	Group interaction Sport recognition Significant club relations Club-athlete relation
	Nature of relations, possible outcomes and supported efficacy	Adults’ role
Sport context and achievement	Club’s identity and experiences through their historical path and community proximity	Club history and community Professional sport Club’s status Social characterisation
	Club’s mesosystem defined and its larger social influence	Subsidies and support Structure and human resources Physical structure and conditions
	The club’s sustainable structure and internal organisation	Sport mobility Logistic and organisation

Table 5: Labels of interviewed others

Description	Label
Junior U-18 Director	JU18D
Junior U-15 Coach	JU15C
Junior U-17 Coach	JU17C
Junior U-16 Coach	JU16C
Junior U-16 Director	JU16D
Junior U-14 Coach	JU14C
Junior U-18 Parent	JU18P
Youth Coordinator	YC

Personal development and self-improvement

Significant others point out some particular assets such as life learning skills, opportunities and support efficacy for identity construction, provided by the close environment such as the family and school.

Opportunities for life enduring skill construction through sport

Observational data reveals that the role of sport is set to provide a regulated practice, under supervision where skills and behaviours are revealed, “team spirit, discipline, rigor, setting goals, objectives that have to be achieved, and solidarity” (JU18D). Young athlete’s perception of the sporting context and the club’s dimension carries social behaviours different from those previously charged in other clubs:

[Entering the club] that completely change your way of being, and become super athletes, dedicated, committed, with very high levels of attendance, with great dedication and commitment in training. (JU15C)

Significant others refer to a set of values that have great impact in other microsystems, “sport itself leads us to prepare them for society, not only the fulfilment of rules but also the adversity factor” (JU17C). Others point out a set of personal and social values, more specifically, building personality, resilience to adversity and sense of belonging and balance.

Alongside with respect and discipline, significant others consider the notion of belonging as an important social value, “whoever has more ambition to go further and beyond, creates a greater sense of responsibility, the need to evolve to be more effective, to work harder” (JU16D); time management training/school and compliance with rules.

Relationship with the club, family and support efficacy

Despite recognising their important role in sports there is the need to measure the distance of their influence in-group dynamics in order to better define the limits and their role as providers of support.

They [parents] are very critical, have a very typical view of what is happening, but they are fundamental, in transportation, training, games, especially the little ones [younger athletes], without them this would not work. (JU18D)

There are two forms of negative parental influence on children’s sporting life. Parents’ ambivalence and interference on group decisions can turn out to be deleterious. Coaches realise that expected professional recognition and pressure can exert an influence on group behaviour as it is present in parents’ perspective about youth and sport and assumes an unavoidable reality in youth lives, “a significant number of parents have expectation that their son might one day be one of those famous players”

(JU15C). Nonetheless, the interviewed directors have the idea that family context can foster positive attitudes and behaviours as it can be an indicator of the importance of this microsystem.

Education must be given at home and complemented in school, but football is essential to have the athletes feel they have the support of parents and not feel that they also put too much pressure. (JU18D)

School integration and expectations toward sport

Following the interviews significant others recognise the importance of school and give primacy to the school system, “particularly football is important but its level of importance is followed by two things: family and studies” (JU14C). There is a poor relationship with school and interestingly they recognise that the change to a bigger club carries competitive changes and routines to be assimilated by the young athlete.

But I believe that improving has nothing to do directly with this change, the athlete may not have changed their routines and their rhythms to adapt to this new reality [more competitive club]. (JU15C)

Through their statements they recognise the family’s instrumental use of football as a punishment tool for bad school results: “Many parents do it when they begin to see their first school results ... just take out the ‘ball’” (JU16C). In fact, they realise that it is difficult to reconcile the school system with youths’ sporting life; with a lack of mechanisms and structural link between them, “Our society does not allow a good school-cultural activity/sport relationship” (JU17C), as it proves to be relevant and mandatory for high sport performance achievements.

We go to more developed societies and everything that relates to culture, sport, they have everything organised and all kids have an education in sport. (JU17C)

Proximal processes and social interactions

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) and Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) clearly highlight proximal processes with two propositions; first, as enduring and complex reciprocal interactions in a particular sporting climate with others’ values and importance. Secondly, and following participant observation and field diary, the force and direction of these proximal processes depend on both the developing athlete (group interactions) and the environment (adults’ role and support efficacy). Here the coach-athlete relationship has special meaning and is decisive in the adopted behaviours.

Climate in the club through significant others’ importance and inherent values Considering football a common space in creating social values that are positive assets in the community, adults tend to see the athletes as important pieces in all of the

sport process, reflected in the dynamics created by each team: “Team spirit, spirit of sacrifice, humility, knowledge sharing, I think these are the values that they take out there” (JU14C).

In turn, coaches say that their involvement has more intrinsic motivation, with different goal setting when compared to previous clubs where the athletes played: “athletes are automatically motivated for training ... for the championship they dispute ... they train super-motivated” (JU15C), and this fact reinforces the need for the existence of a demanding climate according to the club’s rules and objectives.

I think it has much to do with the involvement that is created around the teams, groups and also with the intensity that they know they will be placed in competition. (JU14C)

Training sessions were held in a competitive, friendly environment with a clear focus on the objectives of each team; athletes clearly separated fun from hard work. Directors also reflect upon the group dynamics between athletes, friendship bonding and community outreach, “even with different backgrounds, even with different implications, ... group dynamics can overlap to the differences” (JU15C). They perceive the club’s recognition and status in the community and the emphasis given to the club immediately represents a different attitude towards the game itself, “[athlete’s goal] reach a top club in the region and if they want to achieve something more in football, I think they have to face it with another spirit of sacrifice and another attitude” (JU16D).

There is a pride in the respondent’s statement referring a latent sense of belonging, “We are, like it or not, the CLUB ... but we will not be like them, we have to have that distinctive character of maintaining our position” (JU14C). The representatives of the club recognise the will of the vast majority of young athletes to embark for professionalism and also the resources needed to get there; they believe in youngsters’ ability to recognise this capacity, “everyone dreams if all goes well, dream in entering the professional squad” (JU16D).

Nature of relations, possible outcomes and supported efficacy

Notes from the field diary and statements from parents reveal that coaches are primarily responsible for group cohesiveness, the motivational climate created, support and commitment among young athletes. “I find it perfectly natural that they respect me more now and listen to me more like a coach than to parents and teachers.” (JU14C) Interpersonal relationships among significant others are considered good: “people who directly on field experience with the athletes a great complicity establishing ties of friendship” (JU15C).

There is a concern and commitment to respect each athlete’s individuality and insert them in the group with an emphasis on discipline and educational values.

Sport context and achievement

Context as Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines it is a starting point to fully describe the club's identity and immersion in the community, as well as their history through time to focus on the status and follow professional sport organisation. Finally, researchers could also observe the club's structure, human resources available, youth sport mobility and physical conditions in training and games.

The club's identity and experiences through their historical path and community proximity

The respondents refer to the club's difficulty in two particular resources that interconnect: financial difficulty "the club, during some years, lived through public funding and hasn't established its own revenues" (JU17C); and, secondly, infrastructural difficulties to accomplish some sporting goals, "in the present reality teams are completely bankrupt ... if the club isn't in the premier league ... it has a brutal difficulty in surviving" (JU18P). Furthermore, from the interviews it is consensual the club's national representativeness, level of importance in the district and a wide recognition of its importance.

The importance that this club has in the district and the view that other clubs have about us and how they view the game. (JU14C)

After one year of study, researchers acknowledged that the club was still in a fragile situation. Indeed, it has stagnated over time and the many demands of modern society contributed to the club's loss of identity, "The club was very representative in many ways, but this eclecticism was lost over the years" (JU15C). Concomitantly, significant others reported that the club will inevitably have to strive in building its identity through strong investment in youth formation.

The club's mesosystem defined and its larger social influence

Over time, the club's relationship with the city gained different characteristics; the city and its citizens have no direct identification to both the city and the club:

The city is no more a city of natives who value what's in the region ... there are many outside references in people who currently live here. (JU15C)

During this one-year study, researchers were able to perceive a weak link between the club, community and city. During the last years, the club has shown a growing dependency with the city hall, namely, financial aids that guaranteed immediate organisation during each sports season, "the club had a financial aid that gave more or less in financial terms to ensure the organisation ... the grant ended and the liability of the club increased tremendously" (JU17C).

The club's sustainable structure and internal organisation

From the statements and longitudinal observational data, researchers concluded that this category of analysis highlighted three big ideas. First, the researchers observed that the infrastructure deficit leads to overarching difficulties in the organisation of the youth structure, with greater sense of availability of all people around the club: "We have teams competing in nationals and training in the dirt." (JU17C); namely, logistical, other conditions of practice that hinder the creation of opportunities to raise the club to another level.

It is the issue of infrastructures. The club hasn't, at this time, a support that allows other levels of training, organisation, equipment available, to do a job. (JU15C)

Second, researchers could easily see that the club at an organisational level showed a clear distance between the youth structure and the professional football club, "For me the club has a youth formation because it looks good, because this youth structure exists for many years" (JU16C). Thus, they consider the new reality (constitution of an anonymous society) a mean to improve training facilities and general conditions of the club.

[Last year] there wasn't this organisation, each one with its role, we saw a lot of disorganisation around here. If we wanted something, we didn't know to whom to turn. (JU14C)

Respondents, especially coaches said that there was a wide recognition of what professional football represented, relegating youth academy to a minor place. Participant observation also allowed verifying the unequal conditions the youth academy had and how it changed the quality of practice:

The club is restructuring itself ... I think the overall organisation is bad, bad, because there are still many things that are channelled into the professional football and there is a large distance between the professional football and the academy. (JU14C)

The structure of the professional football should be based on youth formation, "every year you walk the talk if the club will survive if it will not survive, if the club is a bet for the future or if the club isn't a bet for the future" (JU18P). With respect to sport mobility, the region provides most of the players to the POC, as coaches in particular refer to the difficulty in recruiting young athletes due to protection rights surrounding young players in Portugal.

There are situations that sometimes help the young Portuguese getting there, to that transition to professionalism and they have no chance, because there are many fees and most of the times foreign players come with unknown quality. (YC)

Discussion

Results demonstrate that the development of talent in professional clubs is also dependent on environmental and social features, i.e. organisational influences at a micro level of immediate settings (practice settings, success factors in sport, parents and coach's influence, perception of roles). Following the research questions, results also show the importance of reciprocal interactions between the talented athletes and significant others involved in this specific environment and specifically the coach. He is the main provider of instruction and feedback, having a decisive role in the motivational climate created.

Although in more need of research, Portugal's sport mobility rate and the number of foreign players in the professional leagues might be responsible for the few opportunities youngsters have in playing in the professional squads. In order to deal with different contextual factors influencing organised sport (Knop et al., 1999), one also needs to reflect upon the changes of the macrosystem, the larger society that influence the development of young athletes (demographic, socioeconomic and psychosocial).

It is a fact that youngsters may benefit with their engagement in sport. Although some dispute continues surrounding this dimension, literature unravels some insight on how talented athletes perceive their sport environment. Results demonstrated that POC incorporates a particular environment with the emergence of specific behaviours. Observational data shows that professional appeal and status and recognition in playing at a more competitive national championships, produce a specific social environment that is transversal to the findings and statements. The lack of resources was compensated by values of open co-operation, individual responsibility and a focus on performance process and by a whole-person approach in the person of the Youth Coordinator (Henriksen et al., 2010a). Findings also point to a high degree of cohesion and by the important role given to talented athletes as pointed out in other studies (Henriksen et al., 2010b).

How do significant others (coach, parents and directors) perceive the athlete's personal dispositions in a competitive professional strive atmosphere? Following the observational grids, POC directors and coaches perceive some main contextual developing skills and behaviours in training and competition such as commitment, respect and discipline, whilst parents tended to focus more on social support and group climate (Spink, Wilson & Odnokon, 2010). Moreover, from participant observation, coaches tend to be more accurate, informed and possessing more contextual relevant information with more performance feedback. These skills were identified by Holt and Dunn (2004) as essential for success in youth elite football.

In studying the main relationships and processes conducive to talent development Lauer, Gould, Roman and Pierce (2010) extended the role parents played in developing professional tennis players and, specifically, the full array of positive and

negative attitudes and behaviours that influenced talent development. Through this, biographical and demographical data showed that, although parents from the POC had more educational background than parents from socially deprived community clubs (Domingues et al., 2013), they tended not to participate and be involved in the clubs' activities.

Researchers started by questioning the impact that the sporting context had on the athletes' behaviour. This research highlights the possibility that not only youth athletes bring a set of positive personal psychological characteristics to the training field but the external assets (quality of the sporting context) can, in fact, increment and develop these internal assets, despite some negative aspects regarding organisation. In fact, these personal and situational dispositions (strive for professionalism and social status) are dictated not only by the professional sporting context in which they are immersed but by reciprocal interactions that take place.

Reporting on Jackson and Beauchamp's (2010) findings, the researchers also found that this microenvironment (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) is dictated by a reciprocal commitment between coaches and athletes. Carron, Hausenblas & Eys (2005) also highlighted the powerful impact that the environment can have on shaping individual behaviour within a sport group, particularly when it is done through informal and formal group norms.

Literature reports that one of the main roles of the coach is to promote the development of social skills (Côté, 2002). Framing on the years of specialisation as stated in the literature (Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, 2009), significant others acknowledge the coach-athlete interaction in a more reciprocal style, with more instruction and athletes' participation in training. In fact, these researchers followed a similar approach to other organisational contexts (social deprived club) and found out that social relationships and competitive orientation influences the way athletes see the club and their careers (Domingues & Gonçalves 2013; Domingues et al., 2013).

Participant observation showed that the POC coaches emphasise their proximal relations to the athletes, close control and feedback with young athletes, with most information oriented to social skills development and sport performance outcomes. Regarding this issue and following Bronfenbrenner and Evans' (2000) definition of competence (i.e. development of knowledge skill and ability across developmental domains), proximal processes can, in fact, enhance positive behaviours. POC coaches believe informal, emerging roles and norms within a group and the communication of clear expectations (again either formally or informally) can exert a very powerful pressure on attitudes and behaviour.

An aspect that has witnessed a considerable amount of research in sport experiences and talented young athlete's environment is the family (microsystem). All interviews acknowledged that school achievement was more important than sport achievement. Resembling Côté's (1999) study with families of successful individu-

als, parents make a financial and time commitment to their child-athlete. What impact do differences in family education and background have in young talented athletes' behaviour in football? Findings from the study show parents as key drivers in the search for a fast sporting success and results (Gould, 2009, 81-82).

One might argue that in order to develop a consistent talent sport program there is a need to convey sport interests with school organisation and commitment in modern society. Henriksen et al. (2010a) found that talented athletes are able to effectively balance sport and school in the process when they have well developed skills besides their athletic skills. Findings also tell us that parents see young athletes who are very committed to sport (which they see as primordial to young athletes) as showing greater compliance with rules and discipline in school.

Conclusion

The longitudinal study offers an overlook of the interaction of different sport actors in young talent development through a professional oriented context. The study tried to reflect how an interdependent talent development sport program in a markedly performance climate depends upon a set of contextual favourable characteristics, highlighting the role of sporting experiences in promoting positive development. The results reinforce the need to better understand organisational influences at a micro level (practice settings, success factors in sport, parents and coach's influence, perception of roles).

The study highlighted one particular football environment with social organisation where coaches and parents assume themselves as important avenues in talent development but, most importantly, is the process that undergoes these relationships, direction, nature and force. The study also acknowledged significant others' perception of a clear disposition from the athletes to train and compete, in a constant search for sport performance. Researchers also highlight the need to better integrate sport policies and talent programmes especially when it comes to school system and the wider national sport structure, providing more opportunities to play at a senior level.

Further studies should focus even more on proximal relationships that are key in specialisation, namely, athlete-coach relationship and father-athlete relationship. Regarding the father-athlete relationship there is a need to better understand how they deal with their children's professional aspiration and what load and intensity they put in this aspiration.

Some questions arise for further research. Does sporting environment conveyed by the club itself provide the athletes' adoption of new social behaviours, skills and values? If yes, to what extent? And what is the scope of this difference on young athletes' attitudes and pro-social values in other contexts? It would seem worthwhile to study how gender impacts on these dispositions and achievements in same competitive environments.

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