The Human Development in Player Development

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The Multiple Meanings of “Youth Development”?

Overview

Following a comprehensive review of elite player development in the United States and around the world, U.S. Soccer created the Development Academy in 2007 to improve the everyday environment for the elite youth player.

The Development Academy is a partnership between U.S. Soccer and the top youth clubs around the country to provide the best youth players in the U.S. with an every day environment designed to produce the next generation of National Team players. The Academy’s programming philosophy is based on increased training, less total games and more competitive games.

The Academy also connects National Team coaches directly with the Academy clubs to develop and identify players and coaches for future Youth National Teams. Each Academy team is evaluated by a member of the Men’s Scouting Network at least 10 times each year and each Academy club receives two formal evaluations in over 100 categories each year from U.S. Soccer Technical Staff.

The Development Academy is also focused on identifying and developing the next generation of elite referees. U.S. Soccer assigns up-and-coming officials to participate in Academy games at the local level and at national events.
The Multiple Meanings of “Youth Development”?

The potential for change is a core strength of all youth—a strength that can be built upon. The strength is cause for optimism for it means we can positively influence the life paths of all children.

- Dr. Richard M. Lerner, Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development, Tufts University
Overview...

I. Why does it matter that talent development models and human development models are often separate when they don’t have to be?
   I. Examples of the distance between
   II. Examples that could bridge the gap

II. Fun (and motivation) as a bridge

III. Life Skills as a bridge

IV. Making both human development and talent development part of team / club culture by coaching like a sociologist?
“You have a major problem in the ages of 17 to 21,” Huw Jennings, now the director of the youth academy at Fulham, in the English Premier League, told me when I visited him in London. “The N.C.A.A. system is the fault line. I understand that it is good for a person’s development to go to university, but it’s not the way the world develops players.””

- From Sokolove (2010): ‘How a Soccer Star is Made’
“It is my view that the comprehensive technologizing of high performance sport contains, and in some ways conceals, an agenda for human development for which high-performance athletes serve as ideal models. It is also my opinion that this anthropological agenda is a sinister one that transcends, even as it includes, the cultivation of certain body-types for sportive purposes. High-performance sport has become an exercise in human engineering that aims at producing not simply an athletic type, but a human type as well.”

- Hoberman (1988, p. 203)
There is not just one pathway to elite player development!

“To date, researchers have revealed at least three main pathways or models detailing how these activities are engaged in by elite athletes from childhood to late adolescence. The pathways are characterised by the amount of time spent in practice, play and competition activity in one or more sports. These pathways are termed early specialisation, early diversification and early engagement.”
Table I. Milestones in years of age achieved by elite soccer players aged 16 years from Brazil, England, France, Ghana, Portugal, and Mexico.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Start age in soccer</th>
<th>Start age in supervised training</th>
<th>Start age in leagues</th>
<th>Start age in academies</th>
<th>Hours in soccer by under-16 age group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>4.94 ± 1.38</td>
<td>7.78 ± 1.75</td>
<td>9.56 ± 1.62</td>
<td>13.16 ± 1.38</td>
<td>4118.68 ± 1533.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>4.47 ± 1.44</td>
<td>6.24 ± 1.25</td>
<td>7.45 ± 1.23</td>
<td>10.06 ± 2.26</td>
<td>4306.84 ± 1436.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>5.32 ± 1.11</td>
<td>6.48 ± 1.31</td>
<td>8.66 ± 1.14</td>
<td>12.90 ± 0.42</td>
<td>3890.08 ± 1301.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>5.50 ± 1.43</td>
<td>9.43 ± 1.62</td>
<td>11.14 ± 1.24</td>
<td>12.79 ± 0.88</td>
<td>4588.11 ± 1608.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>5.58 ± 1.47</td>
<td>7.12 ± 2.08</td>
<td>8.46 ± 2.67</td>
<td>12.94 ± 1.56</td>
<td>5449.14 ± 1909.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>4.30 ± 1.37</td>
<td>6.62 ± 1.59</td>
<td>8.26 ± 1.19</td>
<td>8.30 ± 1.67</td>
<td>4438.65 ± 1895.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>4.29 ± 1.04</td>
<td>5.95 ± 1.89</td>
<td>8.12 ± 2.08</td>
<td>13.82 ± 2.55</td>
<td>5095.39 ± 1949.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>4.88 ± 1.41</td>
<td>6.93 ± 1.82</td>
<td>8.65 ± 1.95</td>
<td>11.95 ± 2.56</td>
<td>4553.09 ± 1748.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. The number of other sports engaged in and the number of players who engaged in them during childhood and adolescence in each country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Childhood</th>
<th>Adolescence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of other sports</td>
<td>No. of players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>1.40 ± 0.69</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>4.40 ± 1.55</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1.72 ± 1.27</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>1.91 ± 1.13</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1.73 ± 1.47</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1.66 ± 0.72</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2.54 ± 1.61</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>2.32 ± 1.63</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III. The type of other sports engaged in and the number of players who engaged in them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of sport</th>
<th>No. of players</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table tennis</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handball</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judo/karate</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snooker/pool</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Multiple Meanings of “Youth Development”?

For your club or team, what percentage of the emphasis is on:

• ‘soccer specific skills’?
• ‘life skills and psychology’?
• ‘fitness and health’?

What percentage of your time with players?
What does that time look like?
Why does this matter? As the science of performance gets better, the number of youth participants is going down!

### Losing Ground

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>Change (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tackle football</td>
<td>3.26m</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>-5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>-7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>-7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>7.59</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>-8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice hockey</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>+64.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacrosse</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>+158.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SFIA/Physical Activity Council survey of nearly 70,000 households and individuals

The Wall Street Journal

### Slowing Down

Percentage of U.S. youths involved in no physical activity over a 12-month period.

- Ages 6-12
- Ages 13-17

Source: SFIA/Physical Activity Council survey of nearly 70,000 households and individuals

The Wall Street Journal
So, why is youth hockey growing?
“If we can change how we view kids and hockey — if we can let kids act like kids and develop at an appropriate pace — we can improve a lot more than just the quality of youth hockey. We’ll have better kids.”
Potential points of symbiosis between talent development and human development models?

Examples:
- Encourage broad motor skill / athletic development at early ages (avoid early specialization)
- Accommodate maturational differences by making experiences ‘age appropriate’
- Increase opportunities and ‘social capital’
- Consider the whole person in a way that minimizes the potential for burnout
- Cultivate intrinsic motivation and a passion for the game (i.e., make sure kids have fun!)
- Develop life skills and character
Cultivate intrinsic motivation and a passion for the game (ie, make sure kids have fun!)
Why players quit?

Based on Sabo (2007) survey for the Women’s Sports Foundation
Developing life skills and character...

“At its core, sport is an odd blending of play and work, of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, of ‘it’s just a game’, and ‘life’s a game’. Under these conflicting tensions and pulls, it is not surprising that a moral leniency that is legitimated, in part, by the playful, nonserious nature of sport is stretched beyond its appropriate bounds. One can hide seriousness under the cloak of play. The egocentrism of the game provides an easy rationalization of all manner of egocentric moral distortion.”

-- David Shields
Making teams ‘communities of character’ by:

Building a sense of community through democratic leadership.

Developing a task / mastery-oriented environment.
Motivational – Goal Orientation

Task / mastery-oriented:
• Improvement focus
• Athlete receives positive reinforcement for
  – working hard,
  – demonstrating improvement,
  – helping others learn, and
  – believing that each player’s contribution is important.

Ego-oriented:
• Outcome focus
• Athlete receives positive reinforcement for performing well and competing aggressively with other players.
• Athletes are punished for mistakes.
• Most attention is given to high-ability (star) athletes.
For sports to build ‘life skills’ and ‘social character’ that applies outside of sport settings:

Life skills should be have explicit points of integration within the sports context (not just an assumed side-benefit);

Life skills associated with sports settings should transfer in clear and intentional ways outside of sports settings (ie, in the workplace, home, school, etc.)
Example 1: Goal Setting

http://www.uptivity.com/blog/2014/04/02/the-key-to-performance-management-success-goal-setting/
Example 2: How to compete

Andrew Luck: The NFL’s Most Perplexing Trash Talker
The Colts Quarterback Drives Defenders Crazy by Offering Compliments; Head Games or Genuine Kindness?
Your Examples?

What works?
Have you seen or enacted successful ways of cultivating human development in contexts of player development?
Have you seen or enacted convincing ways of making that part of a team, club, or school culture?
Final thoughts...

Human development and talent development are not (necessarily) different ways of approaching ‘youth development’ – the best coaching combines both…

There is not just one ‘best’ model of player development – they always depend on cultures and opportunities (within teams, communities, and nations). Creating new cultures requires intentional reflection and effort…

Even though psychology is great, American soccer needs more people who can also coach like sociologists!
Questions? Comments?

Also – Some suggested resources that bridge human development and talent development (to which I have no direct connection):


http://truecompetition.org/

http://www.aspenprojectplay.org/

http://www.positivecoach.org/