

Talent Paradigm in Soccer

It is often assumed that exceptional sport performance depends on presence or absence of “natural talent”. The talent account in sport performance has been extensively debated (Baker & Wattie, 2018; Gulbin et al., 2010). For the purposes of this review, we will assign four properties to the talent account that theoretically persist on a continuum and are maintained in youth through professional level of sport evaluation: 1. Talent is at minimum partly innate. 2. Full effects of talent may not be completely evident at an early age, but there will be some advanced indications, allowing trained coaches to identify the presence of talent before remarkable mature levels of performance are demonstrated. 3. Early indications of talent provide a basis for predicting players who are more likely to succeed 4. Only a minority are talented enough, enabling explanation for differential levels of success in sport (Howe et al., 1998).

Over the lifespan of footballer’s playing career talent demonstrated through performance undergoes detection, identification, development, and selection processes that will directly and indirectly determine their current competitive state, upward and/or potential downward trajectory in the sport. While interconnected, each of these talent processes are distinguishable. Talent detection refers to the discovery of potential prospects who are currently not involved in a soccer club structure or an active member of a competitive-level team. Talent identification refers to the process of recognizing current footballers best suited for high-level competition. This practice

requires soccer coaches, scouts, and sport scientists to predict future performance over various periods of time by assessing physical, physiological, psychological, and sociological attributes alongside technical tactical skill. Talent development entails an appropriate training environment necessary to cultivate footballers' athletic potential. Talent selection involves choosing the most appropriate individual or group of individuals with the prerequisite levels of performance for inclusion within a given football team. A talent paradigm and theoretical framework in soccer has been recently proposed (Williams et al., 2020) (See Figure 1.0). This model highlights two key components of football's evolutionary cycle: 1. Soccer players' talent and performance is temporal yet continuously under evaluation 2. Soccer players' demotion, sustainment, or advancement is at least in part dependent upon respective level of competition and training environment.

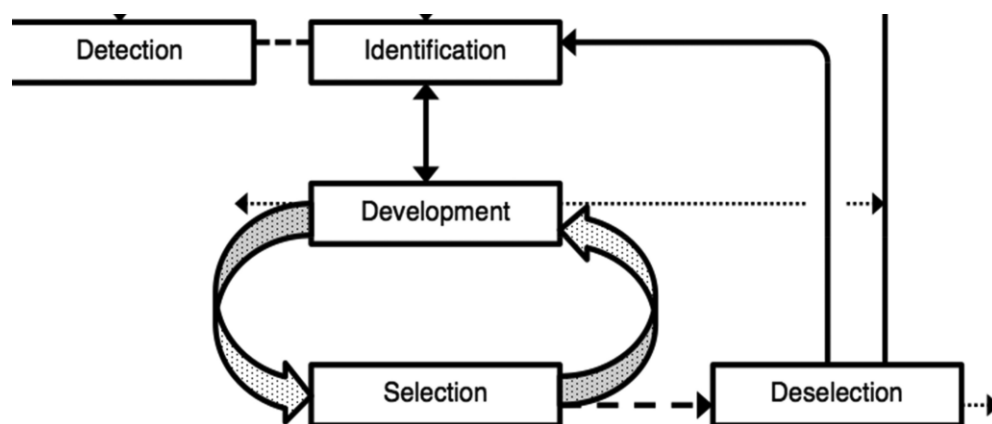


Figure 1. Key parts of the identification, selection, and development process in soccer. The arrows indicate possible player pathways; with heavy dashed lines indicating interlinked concepts and light dashed lines indicating exit or entry routes (Williams et al., 2020).

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