Study on Talent Identification of Soccer For Young Indian Male Players

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Abstract

Background: The identification of talents is a crucial field in the development of sports. In India, most of the coaches, scout players evaluating their current skill, not considering their future development. The scouts and coaches need a systematic and multidimensional approach in identifying talent. Methods: The article reviews the various factors considered for the identification process that affect the success of young soccer talents (age under 14). It includes physiological, sociological, psychological, and technical/tactical factors. It also considers the relative age effect and training history of the player. Conclusion: the study emphasis the need to consider all these variables and their relationships between them by the scouts and coaches. The scouting sheet simplifies this process and the checklist for the same is demonstrated in this paper.

Keywords: talent identification, scouting, physiological, psychological, technical, tactical, sociological, relative age effect

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1. Introduction:

Identification of sports talent is aimed at recognizing, discovering, choosing, and encouraging the skilled and capable athlete with the potential to achieve competitive success (¹) as far as possible. The recognition of soccer ability at an early age ensures that players are provided with professional guidance and preparation for the growth of talent. Identification of future elite players is made possible which would thereby help the club in better resource management by investing in player’s development. In terms of the FIFA rankings, it is evident from the world's top football countries that each of those countries has a successful youth development program.

“At a young age winning is not the most important thing... the important thing is to develop creative and skilled players with good confidence.” (Arsene Wenger, Manager, Arsenal FC 1996-2018). Youth development is the talent pipeline for the future, but it is impossible to boost the existing football status without improving a youth development program. Normally the identification is done by watching the players perform in a test game or during training where players try to impress coach. This selection strategy does not rely on empirical facts, but instead coaches a preconceived subjective understanding of the ideal player, which can lead to repeated misjudgements and minimal consistency (²,³). Therefore, it is significant that the underrepresented field of talent identification literature is further investigated to better understand the potential characteristics and techniques of scouts and coaches in identifying potential players.

The largest population of young people in the world is in India. In October 2012, the AIFF Grassroots initiative began with Mizoram to begin an ambitious system of football at the basic level, with its pilot project extended to five States in one year, and eventually to every nation of India (⁴). The program was launched by the All India Football Federation. The Indian Super League has changed the football industry in India, but no proper talent identification or development program has been developed. There are clubs with their identification and grassroots programs. A Master Plan for holistic football development has been created for AIFF in India – Lakshya: One
Vision. One goal. Another goal. Youth development is given the highest focus and effort, as it is the future (5). For the identification of talent, no proper model or procedure is specified. Coaches are responsible for deciding who is selected for the club, moved to the higher training program or the national team (6). However, the manner in which the talent is assessed has been very subjective and sometimes generated conflicts(7) and is considered incoherent (3).

2. Literature Review

Soccer talent prediction includes consideration of social, psychological, physical, and technical variables. There are also a variety of factors within these four categories that must be considered important in the prediction of talent. Current soccer physiological criteria have changed significantly from previous decades. Soccer players now cover more distance, make more explosive movements, play more intensively than ever before (8,9). Football requires physiological skills in various aspects of fitness, including aerobic and anaerobic control, muscle strength, flexibility, and agility (10,11). These fitness components also differ from one player to another according to player position and the game style (12). For both trainer and player, it is a necessary to know about player’s physical performance so as to plan the training sessions and to encourage players to work harder. This information can be collected using physical skill evaluation tests (13).

In recent years, scouting sheets have been updated to integrate psychological characteristics and the soccer academies are asking their trainers to periodically evaluate the psychological characteristics of the players (14). Two key approaches using standardized questionnaires were developed for psychological diagnosis. The first method is focused on questionnaires on personality and the next method uses sport-specific instruments (15,16). Usage of sport-specific self-reporting questions has shown that several different psychological characteristics in football have been tested, from motivation to self-regulation (17), or the application of coping strategies (18). A recent study involving 43 studies (14,977 participants) concluded that the most impact on the development of players is self-regulation, endurance, commitment, and discipline (19). The standard interview with coaches suggests other psychological features such as perception, zeal, attitude (20), or a willingness to sacrifice (21). The viewpoint of coaches provides more insight into the related psychological qualities. Coaches may compare individuals and use this information to determine and forecast the present and future potential of a player. An important basis for this is the clear definition of the characteristics in the scouting sheets, which helps the scouts or coaches to assess the player (14). Psychologists in sports should assist in creating behavioural anchors that are more general or abstract in their psychological aspects (23,24).

Sports scientists used different test batteries to identify indicators of talent (23). Few of them have been able to describe factors that can be used in advance for identifying players. Today, professional football clubs depend upon scouts’ or coaches’ subjective assessment which include TABS (Technique, Attitude, Balance, Speed), SUPS (Speed, Understanding, Personality, Skill) (28) and TIPS (Talent, Intelligence, Personality, Speed) (26). Talent identification in football must be seen as complicated, mainly as the sport is of different skills which influence the outcome (27).

Assessing technological skills will minimize the benefits of early maturing athletes in comparison to late maturing athletes (25) instead of physiological characteristics. Earlier studies show that dribbling the ball is a biased technique for young footballers of different levels of performance and could even predict future success (29). Technical skills such as ball dribbling and passing, are important when player’s performance is considered (29,30). These technical skills have evolved most rapidly in the prepubertal years (31). These fundamental results showed that the emphasis should be put on improving a broad range of technical skills in young football players (10-14 years), which includes passing, controlling, centering, dribbling, and shooting the ball. Players with stronger technical skills can be more likely to achieve success in their soccer careers later on (25). Tactical skills are linked to the ability of a player to take appropriate timely action to achieve an objective (32). The value of tactical ability in football was highlighted in a study conducted in Germany assessing young players (24,12). Therefore, tactical skill development seems crucial in achieving high-level football performance.

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Even if development coaches regarded tactical, psychological, technological, and physiological factors as important, they considered the sociological factor as the most important (7). Social support can also influence young players' values, beliefs, emotions, attitude, and commitment to football (3). In addition, several coaches listed cooperation with schools as a critical factor for the same (34,35). Understanding their own skills and abilities is related to players' attitude, which lacks among many talented players. Coaches usually observe this attitude of player during game and training (34,35).

3. Material & methods:

The article uses a qualitative approach. It is accomplished by considering all the related literature from various sources on the subject. By reviewing the literature, researchers have identified different factors affecting the identification of talents and for the development of male football players. Factors to consider for the identification of talents in football are shown in Figure 1.

### Figure 1: Factors for talent identification

#### 3.1 Training

A good player needs a long time of continuous training and must be systematic in achieving elite performance (36). The task of deliberate practice and deliberate play is a part of the process for player development at the elite level (37). The amount of time required to reach an expert level cannot be defined precisely because of the intrinsic nonlinearities in human development (38). The ultimate conclusion is that specific practice is important, however, because of its interaction with other constraints, the quantity required cannot be predicted in advance (25). Recent work shows that the players' involvement in training exercises and the children to teenage play is a significant factor that influences elite success through deliberate practice and deliberate play (37,25,41,40).

#### 3.2 Psychological

In the cycle of identifying and improving youth soccer skills, previous studies showed that psychological factors play a significant role (22,15,32). For the individual as well as for the team spending in talent development, the predictive rating ability of the coaches for psychological characters are very important. A clear definition of characteristics should be given in the scouting sheets which is an important instrument for coaches to assess the players (14). Parameters and factors for assessing a player’s psychological characteristics could be worked out or defined with the help of sports psychologists (23,24). Since coaches have knowledge about a player’s mental condition, apart from just using the standardized questionnaires on players, it is advisable to take the help from coaches. The involvement of coaches’ external valuation along with standardized
questionnaires is significant as they are experts and spend more time with players during game and during training. It is also important to understand the frequency at which psychological characteristics are tested to ensure reliability. If a coach uses more than once to assess the same player, test reliability is being calculated. Since the characteristics are ought to be constant in time and the skills may vary under different circumstances, different test results are predicted in the same timeframe. To measure motivation, a standardized questionnaire is being used (e.g., Wenhold et al.’s Activity motivations scale), coaches and players may be requested to complete standardized assessment sheets with behaviour anchors and additionally add interviews, observing behaviour (analysing video), small-sided games. The same method will allow the validity of the construction of instruments used to evaluate psychological characteristics and link them to the respective measures. In psychological diagnostics, educating and helping coaches and working with sports psychologists may encourage higher quality standards in talent development programs. Psychological parameters used in the evaluation form created by Ontario Soccer is shown in Table 1. Scouts use a marking system (1 to 5) to evaluate the player.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological/ Mental</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self Confidence</td>
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<td>Competitiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concentration</td>
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<td>Commitment</td>
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<td>Self-Control</td>
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<td>Determination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
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</table>

3.3 Technical/ Tactical Skills
When a player plays a game, he/she mainly demonstrates their technical skills which include passing, control over the ball, shooting and his movement with the ball. Research showed that when comparing elite players with other players, elite players showed better supremacy in ball handling (i.e. the skill to control a ball in the air without the use of hands or arms), passing accuracy, and dribbling quickness. Four technical attributes were considered as very relevant by recruiters (i.e. first touch, 1 vs 1 ability, striking the ball, and technique used under pressure) with the highest rated attribute as the first touch. If the player has a weak or bad first touch, all other technical skills in the game, such as striking and playing with the ball, can be adversely affected. The FFA national curriculum demonstrates four main skills.

- First touch: good contact when the ball is received; good first contact; better control over the ball; knowing movement of the ball.
- 1 vs 1: comfortable in 1v1 situations.
- Striking the Ball: good in passing the ball; accuracy in passing; can play a disguised pass; hits a ball in ways that are different from the inside of his foot; confidence in using both his left and right foot.
**Running with the ball:** one of the core skill mentioned by FFA; maintain control and can run with the ball.

For a high standard of soccer, tactical skills are fundamental. Constant contact between the attacking teams, defensive teams, and movement of balls are involved in tactical abilities. Tactical skill is linked to how the player executes the right action at the right time. Scouts and coaches combine decision-maker skills with all ball acts (i.e. maintain or lose control of the ball, searching or finding space). With the knowledge of this they test the players in both large and small-sided game situations. Although this method can be used as a suitable method for evaluating talent, there is still only a little knowledge about of how decision is practically evaluated in the game. Technical/tactical parameters used in the evaluation form created by Ontario Soccer is shown in Table 2. Scouts use a marking system (1 to 5) to evaluate the player.

### Table 2. Technical parameters used by Ontario Soccer Academy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dribble the ball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Player can dribble the ball against the opponent, demonstrate change of speed and direction without looking the ball.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shooting the ball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Both feet can be used for short distance shooting. Shots are on target.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Running with the ball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Players can move with the ball in various directions with both feet and can change the speed accordingly without looking the ball.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning with the ball</td>
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<tr>
<td>The player is able to make turns with their head / eyes upwards, with both inside and outside of the feet.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving the ball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good control over the ball with their thigh and chest. With both inside and outside of foot, player is able to control the ball.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passing the ball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Player is able to play the ball over short distances using both feet</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4 Social

Social support is a central component that can influence the values, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and dedication of young players towards football. The inner surrounding is the players’ minds and body. The external factors which affect the player development are the surface, the ball, climate, culture, their idols and local heroes, trainer, teammates, opposite team, amount soccer they watch. Social support is closely linked to group unity, competition stress management, coping with slump in performance, burn-out, injury vulnerability, aetiology and wound recovery, leadership, and performance. Socio-economic status can also impact the growth of a young player. Lack of financial resources may restrict access for coaching and training sessions, games, facilities, kit, equipment, etc. which could give a competitive advantage to the middle and the upper class. In the development of their child, parents play an important role. Pushing the children too much would lower their self-esteem, which may cause stress in them, and thus they may lose the fun factor in the sport. Coaches or scouts typically observe the player’s behaviour in practice sessions, before and after the match, and even when the game situation changes including giving constructive and supportive input to teammates, displaying leadership skills, and supporting the team before and after the training session. Sociological parameters used in the evaluation form created by Ontario Soccer is shown in Table 4. Scouts use a marking system (1 to 5) to evaluate the player.

### Table 3. Social parameters used by Ontario Soccer Academy
### Social/Emotional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Player is showing close attention to details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>Player can work with other players and coaches at the basic level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Player can connect with teammates and inspire others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Realisation of the player that passing can help them win matches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>Players show a fundamental understanding of their errors and try to correct them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>Player is able to make decisions as per the game situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Helping out the teammates and others in the game and training sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>Demonstrate patience with yourself and with the teammates when learning skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.5 Physical

The competitive nature and physiological requirements of football want a player to be competent in every physical component (57). The calculation of Anthropometry is possible with electronic weight-based measurement devices, height stadiometers, and skinfold callipers (58), with an average of 3 measurements per seven-site skinfolds as the final percentage of body fat. Anaerobic strength can, as is possible, be calculated by vertical jump with hands-on-hips and self-selected heights by using the strength plate in the laboratory if not Myotest-T (Myotest, SA) using flight time as it is a reliable alternative to calculate (59), whereby the best 3 jumps are registered 1-2 minute rest between jumps. Change of direction speed (CODS) is calculated employing the 9–3–6-3-9 m sprint with reverse and forward running (SBF) (60), with the use of stopwatch or timing gates. With 3-5-minute rest period between tries, the best of the three attempts are recorded. The normal pace may be measured by the use of 6 timing gates located at ten metre intervals over a forty metre distance. The best three attempts are taken with 3-5 minutes’ rest period between tries (61). Repeated sprint ability test (RSA) with 6 x 20 m sprints and 20s recovery time, where time gates are used to record speed, is used to calculate Repeated sprint ability (RSA) (62). The intermittent Yo-Yo endurance test level 2 will calculate maximum aerobic strength (YYIE2) (63). Using a one-time maximum (1RM), back squat with free weight, and Olympic Bar (64), maximal lower body strength can be determined by setting the maximum squat in 4-5 lifts with adequate rest of 3-5 minutes between lifts. A predictive 1RM will be used if the athlete has not physically grown. Laboratory assessments provide coaches and sports scientists with a way to assess players' general health because testing is not soccer-specific. There are potentially fewer chances to perform laboratory experiments that take time and are expensive. Field test tests provide information about clear improvements in sports performance and take less time. Field testing requires simple equipment, is fairly easy to conduct, and relatively inexpensive. So these experiments should be done more thoroughly throughout the season since testing on the training site can be performed. Physiological parameters used in the evaluation form created by Ontario Soccer is shown in Table 3 (72). Scouts use a marking system (1 to 5) to evaluate the player.

Table 4. Physical parameters used by Ontario Soccer Academy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Agility
Jumping, hoping, skipping, twisting bounding

### Balance
Shows balance in a different positions, one foot, crouched, on toes, etc.

### Coordination
Demonstrates the ability to twist and turn, change of direction keeping movements with body under control.

### Stamina
Player does not get tired soon, have good endurance and stamina in different game situations.

### Strength
Shows strength on the ball and to not get physically pushed off the ball.

### Speed
Player has good speed in his movement, with and without the ball.

### Acceleration
Player is able to increase the speed quickly.

### Reaction
Player has a quick response or reaction at different game situations.

#### 3.6 Relative Age Effect
The relative age effect (RAE) is the difference in age between people that affect their success in each age group. Past studies indicate that elite clubs in Europe are more likely to select players who mature early because of the value of body size, corporal structure, versatility and unique sport capabilities. RAE can have a significant impact on talent identification in football since coaches and scouts choose the players that perform best on the selection stage instead of those who are promising long-term players. The RAE is defined based on physical and cognitive maturation. In contrast to those chronologically younger (relatively younger athletes) the athletes born earlier in the year of selection had substantial advantages which could be clarified by describing the mid-term disparities between them. According to Wattie et al. some constraints (date of birth, maturation, and size), tasks (participation level, play position) and the environment (age groups) have been established in the examined literature and other criteria need to be investigated, for example, sport's popularity, family and coach impact, time of training and the advantage of laterality. This strategy may also be used to evaluate the efficacy of various policies introduced to reduce the negative impact of relative age on talent identification: (1) model calendars with alternative age selection limits; (2) generate further age categories with lower range; (3) divide players into skill level categories and (4) enable players born later in the year to move temporarily to a younger age group.

#### 4. Conclusion
Research indicates that different factors affect performance in the identification of young football talents. The examined literature reveals that tactical, technical, anthropometric, maturational, physiological, and psychological and sociological factors depend on their maturation status and age and have a complex relationship. The participants in the process of recognition and development of talented football players will address this dynamic relationship attentively. The negative effect of RAE on identification of talent could be avoided, if the scouts are aware of the level of performance of a player considering physical and biological maturation. To improve the awareness of recruitment, researchers must take a systemic approach instead of an isolated one into account. It will also give more insight on how coaches and recruiters evaluate talent or make individual judgments of players using different game scenarios. This helps to establish more objective instruments or evaluation methods that can explain the process for all key stakeholders. Descriptive studies with multidimensional evaluations are necessary as a future aspect to investigate whether all the factors have larger impact on the playing ability performances in talent.
identification of young male Indian football players especially their psychological and sociological traits.

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**References:**