



The predictive ability of the talent development environment on youth elite football players' well-being: A person-centered approach



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study was to examine the predictive ability of perceived talent development environment (TDE) on the well-being of youth elite football players.

Design: A field-based longitudinal design was employed.

Method: The participants were 195 Swedish youth elite football players between 13 and 16 years of age enrolled at Swedish football academies. The players responded to questionnaires regarding their perceptions of their TDE, perceived stress, and well-being in the beginning of the competitive season 2012 (T1). On two more occasions, six and 12 months later, the players completed the stress and well-being questionnaires.

Results: A latent class analysis, based on the TDEQ sub-scale scores at T1, revealed three classes of players with different perceptions of their TDE (one high quality, one moderate quality, and one poor quality class). A second-order multivariate latent growth curve model (factor-of-curves model) showed that the class of players perceiving the lowest TDE quality, experienced higher initial level of stress and lower initial level of well-being at T1 compared to the other two classes. Moreover, there were no significant differences in slopes for neither stress nor well-being between classes (the initial difference between the three groups, in well-being, remained stable over time).

Conclusion: The results indicate that players perceiving their TDE as supporting and focusing on long-term development seem to be less stressed and experience higher well-being than other players. Hence, in addition to facilitate sport-specific development and performance among youth athletes, high quality TDEs may be important for youth elite athletes' general well-being.

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Introduction

There has been a vast amount of research exploring talent development in sports, focusing on various influential factors such as developmental pathways (Ford et al., 2012), development of perceptual-cognitive expertise (Berry, Abernethy, & Côté, 2008), or anthropometric characteristics (Mohamed et al., 2009). In addition, researchers have acknowledged that several environmental factors influence young athletes' development (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2010). It has also been argued that it is crucial to examine young athletes in elite contexts in order to help facilitate physically and psychologically healthy individuals as well as talented athletes (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2011). A few studies within the talent

development literature have examined aspects related to youth elite athletes well-being, such as differences in self-reported burnout between samplers and specializers (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009) or how the stress-recovery balance is related to injuries and illness in youth elite football players (Brink et al., 2010). However, very few studies have examined the direct impact of factors in the talent development environment on young elite athletes' well-being. A holistic approach is often stressed as a key issue in successful talent development (e.g., Henriksen et al., 2010; Martindale, Collins, & Daubney, 2005), in which the athletes' well-being should be an important factor to consider. However, athletes' well-being is a largely overlooked topic in the talent development literature (Burgess & Naughton, 2010). Therefore, it is warrant to investigate if youth athletes' perceptions of the talent development environment that they are involved in is related to their perceived level of well-being. The result from such design could potentially generate knowledge about important factors in the talent

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development environment related to athletes' well-being and psychological functioning.

Recently, Martindale and colleagues (Martindale, Collins, & Abraham, 2007; Martindale et al., 2005) have elaborated on the concept of talent development environment (TDE) and developed a psychometric instrument, the Talent Development Environment Questionnaire (TDEQ, Martindale et al., 2010), to examine effective talent development processes. The purpose of this study was to build on the initial work of Martindale and colleagues and longitudinally explore the influence of the TDE on youth elite football academy players' psychological well-being, and thereby try to lessen the gap in the literature on the talent development environments relation with youth elite athletes' well-being. Previous research has shown that the well-being of athletes in this age may be at risk due to the high demands from parents and coaches (Ommundsen, Roberts, Lemyre, & Miller, 2006) or those of schoolwork and their sport (e.g., Brink et al., 2010; Gustafsson, Kenttä, Hassmén, & Lundqvist, 2007). Hence, identifying environmental factors associated with these young athletes' well-being is of importance.

Talent development environment (TDE)

Many factors contribute to athletes' development and success (Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffet, 2002); however, one of the most crucial factors influencing athletes at all levels of performance is the quality of the coaching environment (Martindale et al., 2005). In an extensive literature review, Martindale et al. identified four reoccurring themes in the talent development literature reflecting facets of effective TDEs: (1) long-term aims and methods, (2) wide-ranging coherent support and messages, (3) emphasis on appropriate development rather than early selection, and (4) individualized and ongoing development.

Grounded in these facilitating facets of the TDE, Martindale and colleagues developed the Talent Development Environment Questionnaire (TDEQ, Martindale et al., 2010), intending to capture athletes' experience of the identified key features of effective TDEs. More specifically, a seven-factor structure was proposed, including: (1) long-term development focus, (2) quality preparation, (3) communication, (4) understanding the athlete, (5) support network, (6) challenging and supportive network, and (7) long-term development fundamentals.

Recent research has established the ecological validity of the TDEQ, showing that it can be used to discriminate between environments of higher and lower quality (Martindale, Collins, Douglas, & Whike, 2013). More specifically, Martindale and colleagues compared TDEQ scores between athletes in what they labeled "higher quality" and "lower quality" environments, based on the environments process quality and long-term productivity. In their study, five environments were rated as "higher quality" and five were rated as "lower quality" by expert judges and athletes' mean scores on the TDEQ factors were compared. The findings from a MANOVA indicated a significant difference in the overall TDEQ scores between the higher and lower quality environment. The results further displayed significant differences on the factors *Quality preparation* and *Understanding the athlete* in favor of the "higher quality" environments. Although these two factors were the only ones revealing significant differences, three additional factors (*Long term development focus*, *Communication*, and *Long term development fundamentals*) showed positive trends with small effect sizes in favor of the "higher quality" environments. These positive features of the TDE captured in the TDEQ have also been positively related to facilitating motivational factors, such as intrinsic motivation and mastery-approach goals, and negatively

related to extrinsic motivation, mastery-avoidance goals, and performance goals (Wang, Sproule, McNeill, Martindale, & Lee, 2011).

Talent development environment and well-being

The potential influence of the TDE on athletes' healthy development has been stressed by several researchers, implying that a high quality TDE can facilitate athletes' psychosocial development and well-being (e.g., Burgess & Naughton, 2010; Côté, 1999; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). It has also been argued that a TDE lacking these key features (e.g., long-term focus, healthy support network, de-emphasis on early success) may result in increased stress and a heightened risk for burnout, de-motivation, and drop-out (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Isoard-Gautheur, Guillet-Descas, & Lemyre, 2012; Strachan et al., 2009). Previous research has examined how coaches, parents, and peers influence youth elite athletes' well-being, which all can be considered important factors in the TDE. For example, increases in perceived autonomy support from the coach over two competitive seasons have been related to increases in youth elite football players' well-being and decreases in their ill-being (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2012). In a longitudinal study among youth elite swimmers, a task-oriented parent-initiated motivational climate was positively related to decreases in trait anxiety over the competitive season (O'Rourke, Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2011). In addition, the coach- and peer-created motivational climate has been related to youth athletes' moral attitudes and well-being, with positive associations shown with a task-oriented climate and negative associations shown with a performance-oriented climate (Ntoumanis, Taylor, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2012). Although qualitative studies, mostly with retrospective designs, have found that the TDE appears to be crucial for young elite athletes' well-being and sport development (e.g., Carlson, 1988, 1993; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008), the prospective influence of the TDE on youth elite athletes' well-being, however, remains to be examined.

Objective of the present study

The objective of this study was to examine the predictive ability of perceived TDE on youth elite football players' well-being. Because well-being is suggested to be a key factor in a holistic approach, which in turn has been found to increase the chance of successful talent development, this study could generate knowledge about the potential association between TDE and well-being. The association between TDE and athletes well-being, however, is a largely overlooked topic within talent development literature. We adopted a longitudinal design and examined whether initial latent class based on perceived TDE could predict the level of and change in well-being over a one-year period. Because subjective well-being has been suggested to capture both emotional and cognitive components (e.g., Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003) we choose to use scales representing both of these aspects. We assumed that a latent class analysis (LCA) would provide a comprehensive view of the athletes' perceptions of the TDE beyond what would be possible with the TDEQ factors as individual predictors. LCA also offers several advantages compared to traditional cluster analytic techniques (cf. Pastor, Barron, Miller, & Davis, 2007), but the usage of LCA in the sport psychology literature is uncommon. LCA is a person-centered approach that assumes an underlying latent variable that determines an individual's class membership (Nylund, Bellmore, Nishina, & Graham, 2007). The goal of LCA is to sort individuals into groups of individuals who are similar to each other and different from other groups (Marsh, Lüdtke, Trautwein, & Morin, 2009). In comparison to traditional cluster analytic techniques,

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