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Talent development abroad. Young football players' experiences and challenges on being recruited to English academies

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the current study was to gain insight into talented Norwegian football players who made a club transfer to an English football academy, by investigating the players' choice of academy, main challenges upon arrival, how they settled in both athletically and socially and their day-to-day life in the academy. Eight Norwegian players registered in an English professional football academy between the ages of 16 and 18 years were interviewed in retrospect. The challenges that the players met were mostly related to their efforts to develop as players, such as going into an extremely high-performance environment, which was quite different from what they perceived in their original club. Even though the transfer to an English professional club seemed like the natural choice to make, the players experienced a cultural shock not just athletically, but also socially and emotionally in their everyday life in a host family.

Introduction

Recruitment to European professional football clubs' academies is primarily directed at local or national players, but during recent decades the academies, particularly in England, have increasingly been internationally oriented and recruited young players from all over the world, and especially from European countries.¹ Common for all players recruited to professional academies is that they meet multiple challenges. For example, the transition process from a non-professional club to a professional academy where they need to adapt to the demands and expectations of a highly competitive professional environment is probably one of the biggest challenges.² For young players, transferring to an academy in another country increases the challenges related to both the athletic and social (culture, language and environment) aspects. Schlossberg³ refers to the challenge of moving abroad as a big opportunity, but also a potential risk for loss of support and social identity. Normally an academy transfer happens in the players' teens, a period which is often highlighted as socially and mentally critical, and which for an athlete can be overwhelming, challenging and potentially lead to ill health.⁴ Even though earlier research has indicated that professional clubs are concerned with the whole person,⁵ it is natural to assume that they would focus more on the on-pitch activity than on the off-pitch activity.

Research has shown that players who had taken the step of joining an English Premier League academy reported that adaptation to a higher intensity and physicality in training, in addition to reduced playing time, was challenging.⁶ However, they also reported that moving abroad and

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settling into a new country was challenging, and added to all the other challenges they perceived. Bourke⁷ argued that there is a potential for cultural shock which can influence the players' development both as football players and as people. Even players from England are helped to settle into soccer academies, according to Weedon,⁸ where clubs usually help the players find and get settled into new homes with host families or a group of fellow players. When a player transfers to a professional academy and into a more closed community with professional coaches, parents' influence over the athletic part of their child's career may wither.⁹ Nevertheless, social support from parents is essential for their ability to cope with transitions,¹⁰ and social support from parents is critical to making a successful transfer to a professional academy.¹¹ Sothorn et al., in their exploratory study of the mental health and wellbeing of professional academy footballers in England, found the main themes to be the perceived demands of professional academy football and self-criticism, uncertainty and avoiding sanctions from significant others, and assuming the identity of a professional academy player.¹² To the extent that some young players made a successful transfer, their mental skills and ability to adapt to their new everyday life are crucial. Research has highlighted that motivation,¹³ resilience¹⁴ and self-confidence¹⁵ are mental factors that contribute to one's success in dealing with a transition and establishing oneself in a new club.¹⁶ For an academy to be supportive of players in finding functioning coping-strategies and developing coping-skills is key, because it can ease the developmental process from the academy into the first team.¹⁷ Richardson et al.,¹⁸ however, pointed to the development of mental strength as a possible positive effect of a transfer to a professional academy and living alone. Still, a focus on the mental health and wellbeing of professional academy footballers in England is scarce.¹⁹

Most of this research has been conducted in the English football academy context which introduced the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) in 2012, and where a traditional masculine culture of professional football still dominates²⁰ and which has been found to embed an early specialization approach to youth and junior football development leading to intensified training and playing time demands and pressure from coaches.²¹ Champ et al.²² found in a study of elite youth footballers that single-minded dedication to professional football was still dominant in 2020 where over 1,000 boys are contracted to a professional football academy between the age of 9 and 16. Knowledge about the players' perceptions of the transition to a professional academy in England is evidently needed to make it as normative as possible, and to help the players in this process. Premier League clubs have a history of recruiting Norwegian football players. On the 30 January 2021 Martin Ødegaard became the sixty-ninth player from Norway²³ since the introduction of the Premier League in 1992. This puts Norway at number 10 among foreign countries outside of the United Kingdom (UK) who have players in the Premier League. Both Sweden and Denmark have 65 players each for the same period.²⁴ The number of Norwegian players in Premier League academies for the period is, however, more uncertain. At the current time the number is 7.²⁵

The aim of the current study was to gain an insight into how talented Norwegian football players who made a club transfer to an English football academy managed the transition, and especially what they perceived as challenges upon arrival, how they settled in both athletically and socially and their day-to-day life in the academy.

Methods

Participants and procedure

Eight Norwegian players registered in an English professional football academy were interviewed in-depth related to their experiences in retrospect after having been a part of academy football (see Table 1). The criterion for being included in the study was that they had to be part of a professional academy between the ages of 16 and 18. All the players with the exception of one was 16 when they

Table 1. Information about the participants.

Pseudonym	Age at arrival	Duration of stay	Academy player period	Parents in England	Player experience before transfer
<i>Alf</i>	16 yrs	3 yrs	2010–2020	None	First team
<i>Bent</i>	16 yrs	2 yrs	2010–2020	None	First team
<i>Chris</i>	16 yrs	3 yrs	2010–2020	None	Junior
<i>Dag</i>	16 yrs	2 yrs	2000–2010	None	Junior
<i>Espen</i>	18 yrs	2 yrs	2000–2010	Mother	First team
<i>Finn</i>	16 yrs	3 yrs	2000–2010	None	First team
<i>Geir</i>	16 yrs	3 yrs	2000–2010	Mother year 2–3	First team
<i>Hans</i>	16 yrs	2 yrs	2000–2010	Mother	First team

moved to the academy. Each player was contacted by the first author, who explained the purpose of the research, the format of the interviews and issues of confidentiality and withdrawal. All participants gave informed consent.

Seven of the eight interviews were conducted by phone, and the last by personal encounter, and lasted between 25 and 53 minutes, with a mean interview length of 35 minutes. Every interview started with general questions intended to obtain background information and ‘warm up’ the participants to get the conversation started. The questions asked were largely prepared beforehand as leads into a topic of interest, with the intention of helping the participants get into the relevant themes. Follow-up questions were conducted when further explanations and depth were needed. We asked general questions about them being in the English academy compared to their club in Norway (i.e., what were the biggest challenges when you came to the academy in terms of how you had it before?) and more specific questions about how they coped in their new situation in the academy (i.e., did you have any strategies for overcoming the obstacles you encountered?). Naturally, interviewing players about their experiences related to their youth could be challenging and highlights some ethical issues in terms of addressing difficult situations the players had to handle. We asked the participants about their situation both as footballers (i.e., sometimes during your stay did you feel that you doubted yourself or were anxious about your own achievements?) and as a young person living abroad and away from family (i.e., to what extent did you miss family?). This was one reason as to why we interviewed players in retrospect, allowing them to both have a distance from the period, but also to add their reflections on making the transition. In addition, all informants were given an opportunity to contact the interviewer if they had any negative thoughts or concerns that had been activated related to the interview. None of the informants took advantage of this opportunity.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions ensured the informants’ confidentiality by the use of pseudonyms for each player, and ethical approval was in accordance with and approved by the Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services (no. 901,487).

Data analysis

The data analysis follows the six steps of a thematic content analysis as suggested by Braun et al.²⁶ To begin with, the first author transcribed, read and re-read the data. Second, the first author generated initial codes by analysing the data in an inductive way and presented them to the last author who acted as a critical friend.²⁷ During the third step, the remaining three authors stepped into the analysis process and discussed how to structure the findings into higher-order themes. Special attention was paid to how the players perceived the challenges upon arrival, settling in and their day-to-day life in the academy. Fourth, the themes were elaborated by returning to the raw interview data to clarify questions (e.g., how challenges upon arrival impacted their performance on the football field). In the fifth step the research group reviewed and refined the subthemes and final categories. Finally, the sixth

step was highly intertwined with the analysis, since authors often went back to the categories in the report writing process. An example of this was how we returned to the raw data, which was in Norwegian, to ensure that it was represented in a suitable way in the final categories. The final presentation of the findings compares the different aspects of the players' transfer to a professional academy in terms of choice of academy, challenges upon arrival, settling in athletically and socially and finally their day-to-day life in the academy. Participants were given the opportunity to read through the transcribed material from the interview if they desired and make necessary changes to the transcribed material. No participants wanted to read through the material, and transcripts were approved for analysis.

Results

Choosing the academy

An important part in the process of making the move to a professional academy is choosing the right opportunity and the right club. The players in this study had different reasons for choosing 'their' club. A common factor, however, was the impression the players had of the clubs as talent development environments, and that they perceived the chances of reaching the senior team as better compared to other clubs. In addition, the player Finn highlighted another reason as an important factor:

'My impression at the time was that there was a slightly shorter path to the professional team in that club, in addition to the fact that they were more "forward", they got back to me faster and were actually a little more ... seemed a little more interested in recruiting me as a player.'

Also, the club's history of progressing academy graduates to their first team and a positive trial period were highlighted as factors that impacted the players' choice. All players stated that they were impressed by the club's stature and professionalism in their first meeting with the club they eventually chose, which seemingly influenced their choice.

Parental support before making the transfer

Nearly all the players point to their parents' essential support of their development as soccer players. None of the players perceived that their parents played a vital role on the practice field or as coaches, but they perceived that their parents laid the foundations outside the practice field so that they could focus on their development. As Bent stated, if he gave it one hundred percent himself, his parents always backed him:

'They were like: If I give it one hundred percent and they saw that I gave it all that I have, they would always back that, and that they have done. They had a really big impact always providing the appropriate conditions that would allow me to play my best, so that I could focus 100% on being as good as possible.'

Others describe their parents as their biggest supporters and as giving them a lot of positive reinforcement before making the transfer abroad. Espen highlighted his parents' unconditional support throughout childhood, without any pressure. One of the players, Hans, however, described supporting parents, but considered himself to have the responsibility for his own development:

'Nothing really. It was me who thought it was fun to play football and practise and train. So, I have received support, but it was easy to get support since I was showing skills at an early age. It is me who took responsibility for my development all the way really. Like today, I have not had any Martin Ødegaard²⁸ dad, to put it that way.'

Even if the choice of going to a foreign football academy was their own, they received support from their parents both before and during their stay in the academy.

Challenges upon arrival: self-esteem boost and then confronting the reality

When the players were introduced into a new club environment they had to adjust to their new situation, something they did in different ways. Some of the players came from their local football club, and signing a professional contract with a professional academy helped their self-confidence before arriving, but that quickly changed after arrival, as exemplified by Bent:

‘It starts off well and you are on a real high when signing a contract and getting into a professional club. But you suddenly find yourself as one out of many, in that there are a lot of good players there. Then you get a little dent in your self-confidence right away.’

The players’ descriptions could be interpreted as going from a club environment where they felt like a ‘big fish in a small pond’, then they sign an academy contract in a foreign country which additionally boosts their self-confidence, and then they face the reality in the new environment, which lowers their self-esteem. They become a small fish in a big pond, surrounded by players at the same level as themselves impacting their status in the team and club. In the new environment, they experience higher tempo and intensity in training, and more internal competition between the players. They had to impress their coaches in order to get valuable playing time. It quickly dawned on all the players that they had now entered a culture that was both tough and challenging, and some players described this as a non-normative transition making it challenging when you arrive because it is hard to prepare for it, as described by Finn:

‘It’s hard to know what to expect when you arrive. But it was a tougher environment than what I expected. More focus on performance and less focus on your own well-being on and off the field. If you perform well, they are happy.’

The pressure of always having to prove yourself and the sole focus on developing yourself as a football player proved to be a challenge, especially because all their new teammates had a higher level of performance compared to their former club, and therefore they always had to show their best side in practice. They also perceived that ‘playing for the coach’ was important. If you were not among the group of 11–13 best players, they perceived less attention from their coaches, which was a new challenge for many of the players as stated by Chris:

‘It was a little more brutal. In Norway everyone should feel good, everyone should fit in and everyone should thrive, and everyone should receive the same treatment. It’s kind of not like that over there, if you are one of the best, you are maybe the person the coach talks to the most or the one who gets the most focus.’

Espen reflected on that tougher competition and culture and how it impacted him and the reasons why it was like that:

‘I’m maybe a little naïve and becoming a cynical bastard on the football field, it isn’t really me. We are not used to having the same level of competitiveness. Everyone plays football for fun and trains to be good, and the vast majority end up with a decent life even if you do not do so well on the football field. That is not the case for everyone.’

The players perceived that the tough and competitive environment stems from the importance of succeeding as a soccer player, and they assumed that for many of their teammates it was their only opportunity to ‘survive’. This was a new experience and far from what they had experienced in Norway. Therefore, the internal rivalry was difficult and something they reflected upon:

‘Much tougher teammates, you could have fun in the locker room, but realised very quickly that here are people who do not want you to be there, because you are taking their place.’

Not all players perceived the transfer as very difficult, and they describe the settling in process as comfortable, even noting it as being easier than at home, because of all the arrangements around being a player in the club, as Alf noted: ‘There weren’t that many challenges, I think. I actually think it was less challenging than back home, because here everything is just arranged for you, clothes, equipment and stuff. So, you just have to play.’

Settling in socially

The players' perception of the support they received settling in socially was quite different. Some of the players did not experience any support or interest from the club outside of the time they spent training there. They felt that they mostly sat at home alone in their host parents' house, which some of them considered challenging: 'Very bad (laughing). Zero. Nothing. At the time when I was 18 years old, I lived with a family outside of the city. So, I was home alone much of the time' (Dag).

Other players on the other hand experienced adequate support and perceived that the staff in the club cared about them, having designated people who were responsible for the connections to the host parents and regularly contacted them to ask how they felt about their living arrangements and how they were managing the new situation.

'I received quite good follow-up: they have people who are responsible for the contact with the host families. Constantly asking how things are going and if everything is fine. At the end of each year, I was in a way asked whether I wanted to continue to live here' (Chris).

Missing family: influence on performance

The players' experiences of leaving home and going abroad to play football varied.

'It was tough. It was very, very tough. When you're over there for trial periods you stay there for like 10 days or two weeks. But then you know that you are going back home. But then suddenly, you are there, you have moved there and it's a challenge to be far away from my parents.'

Other players experienced the transition as less difficult, and pointed out that then they could focus on training and becoming a better football player. Such a strategy contributed, as the quote below indicates, to their becoming pre-occupied with focusing on their own development, which in turn contributed to them having less time to think about friends or family:

'It was actually quite alright to be far away from my parents. I could just do as I wanted and focus on playing football, preparing myself for next day's training. Which is what I wanted to do. I felt that I almost forgot about the things around me, both family and friends in a way' (Finn).

Day-to-day life at the academy: fear of failure and pressure to perform

All players experienced that the coaches encouraged them to try difficult tasks such as technically difficult passes to develop and learn. Some of the players often felt pressure to consistently perform at the highest level, even in training sessions, as explained by Dag:

'Because of the pressure on not making mistakes, rather than focusing on doing well. So, as I experienced it, there was often too much pressure which influenced the way I played. Rather than challenging myself, I mostly took the easy way because I didn't want to make mistakes. So sometimes the fear of making mistakes grew bigger than the will to perform well.'

This was further reinforced by the perception of his coaches, where he was often afraid of getting told off by his coaches: 'When you don't perform well and make mistakes, you like get told off and when that happens you do not feel very big and great.' This fear of making mistakes was also partly related to time periods, since the end of the season meant a selection process where only a few players got a professional contract, as described by Alf:

'It was probably really last year, at the end of the season, we got to know who would get such a professional contract and who not. So, the whole last season was really full of pressure and stuff. Because only 4–5 out of 15 were to get a new contract. So, the whole season was just about being the best at training and fighting. So then of course you put extra pressure on, but I did not put extra pressure on myself, I would say that it was not like I sat at home and thought that I must be the best at training tomorrow and things like that.'

In addition to feeling pressure about performing, some players put more pressure on themselves by thinking about what friends and family would think about them if they failed to succeed. Especially when it comes to proving your skills to yourself and others and proving that the choice of signing with a professional English club was the right one, illustrated by Bent when he went back to Norway after leaving the club: ‘I thought a lot about what was about to hit me when I got home, what others would think at home. At that young age you want to convince all others that the choice you made was right.’

Outside the practice field: the living situation

The mothers of four of the players moved with them to the UK, and these four lived with their mothers for large parts of their stay at the academy. All players did, however, at some stage of their stay live with host parents, and one of the players, despite having positive experiences with his host family, nevertheless moved in with his mother who came over from Norway after a short period of time. Some of the differences between the players were in their experiences of social integration with their host family. One of the players lived with a host family during his trial period at the club, but had to stay with a different family when he moved over until his mother moved over with him after the first year, while others changed host families a lot, such as Bent:

‘I had five different host families over the course of 1.5 years. The first family was a total disaster, and I lived with them for quite some time (. . .) It was challenging that you always felt that you were stepping on someone’s toes, and that you kind of couldn’t have a social life.’

Some of the players described how their living arrangements had an impact on their performance, related to being mentally exhausted when living with their host families. One of the players who felt this way was Chris, who lived with a family for 9 months before it was decided that he could move out. Trying to settle into three or four host families, he ended up getting a room at the club’s training facilities, where he also experienced challenges:

‘It was a challenge living at the training facilities as well. You feel like, not that you are locked up in a prison, but there’s cameras everywhere, people who watch you and security measures. Even when you go to the grocery store, they almost look into your shopping bag to see what you bought.’

Naturally this also made him consider his new ‘life’ as quite different from the one back home:

‘The greatest challenge for me was really the day-to-day life, because it was totally different from what I was used to. I found out that the most important thing was just to keep on doing the normal things and there will come better periods where you are enjoying yourself.’

Other players addressed the challenge of not knowing what to expect in this ‘new’ life. The lack of parents around was mentioned by quite a few of the players, and even described as influencing their performance in a negative way.

Most of the players did however get frequent visits from their family, which contributed to reducing the degree to which the players missed their parents and family. Others also highlighted their new life in a big city, while coming from a rural part of Norway, which was also something new to get used to. This lack of social support when moving away from their parents, and for some the adjustment to living in a big city, were also challenges for some of the players, especially in periods when they did not perform as expected, as described by Bent:

‘You start to dig yourself into a hole and think: “I don’t want to be here, what am I doing here? It’s not going well with soccer and I am not even with my family . . .”. It’s hard not having them there, especially when the soccer isn’t going well.’

Even if there were individual differences in how the lack of closeness to their parents affected their day-to-day life at the academy and their ability to perform, all the players stated that at one time or another they missed their parents and their home surroundings.

Conclusion

The aim of the current study was to investigate players' experience and perceptions of the transfer to an English football academy, specifically related to: challenges upon arrival, how they settled in both athletically and socially, and their day-to-day life in the academy.

Despite following their dream of being recruited to an English football academy, the players quickly came to realize how their new development environment was different from what they had been used to in Norway. In the process of settling in athletically, many of the players described a culture shock in terms of the level of competition and intensity in training,²⁹ and even more in terms of the performance-centred environment and coaching approach.³⁰ Most players described a situation of going from being one of the most outstanding players to being one in a crowd, going from being a 'big fish in a small pond' to being a small fish in a big pond. The club's approaches were also described as far from Norwegian cultural beliefs based on: focusing on fun, including all players, a close coach-athlete relationship and equality.³¹ This new approach made the players partly engage in self-handicapping, and thereby hinder their own development. They focused more on self-preservation, which was further reinforced by the players' fear of becoming injured, since the pressure on the players seemed constant and an injury could compromise the players' opportunities in the future. From a player development perspective, one might ask whether the Norwegian organizational approach to football is naïve and hinders the players' likelihood of succeeding, since the players are not familiarized with the mental and environmental expectations in professional European football. Others would argue that the likelihood of succeeding is so small that it is naïve to expect a large proportion of the players taking their chances in an English academy to succeed in what is probably the most demanding talent development environment in the world.³² These results would indicate a need for more studies on how foreign players perceive their experience of English professional football academy, both to help the players adapt to their new environment, but also whether the choice of making a club transfer to English professional football is a good one overall for the individual player.

Even if the challenges off the field would often be described as less important, some of the players also struggled with their living arrangements, moving between host families, making the living situation less than optimal. Despite the academies' wish to help the players find and get settled into new homes with host parents or a group of fellow players,³³ the removal from their original family and their social network can influence the players' development both as football players and as people.³⁴ Whether or not it is described as a shock, it impacts the players' everyday life.

The rational reasons for joining the academies were the players' impression of the clubs as a talent development environment and, for some of the players, the chance of reaching the senior team. The choice of club was described as the players' own but also as one supported by their parents, and it gave an extreme boost to their self-esteem, since they are among the few who actually get the opportunity to be recruited to a professional academy. However, they quickly met challenges upon arrival in their new club and new country, where some of the challenges are what could be described as non-normative,³⁵ and where the players had difficulty predicting how the first months would be. Naturally, most players were uncertain about what to expect and were more concerned about the athletic part of the stay (playing football) than about their everyday challenges. Few of the players described having worried about moving to England or predicted that the social part of the stay would be problematic or bring challenges.

When talented football players in their teens are introduced to a professional academy, their focus is on the opportunities to develop as football players and to try to become a player in the professional team. As already highlighted by the players in this study and earlier by Holt and Mitchell,³⁶ the reality of the short- and long-term challenges was quickly apparent to the players, with the long-term reality

being that after, for example, three years as an academy player, you are either offered a professional contract or released from the academy programme. The reality for these players in this study was that they never ended up as professional players in the professional club's academy, even though some were still fighting for such a contract. Many of them did, however, end up as professional players in Norwegian professional clubs. One might ask whether these players succeeded, not in achieving a professional contract in the English academy, but in a Norwegian club. Despite the lack of a contract, the players got the opportunity to develop as football players, and also to advance in their learning process by living abroad, away from their parents and friends. Earlier studies have described the success rate in professional football promotion programmes as limited, i.e., mean annual turnover of squad members in German football was 24.5% (youth academies) and 41.0% (national U-teams) and the probability of continuing in the programme three years later was <50%.³⁷ Even though the players' opportunities in terms of other clubs to choose from was not within the paper's aim, it would obviously impact the players' developmental opportunities, since an offer from one club only would mean a straightforward choice, instead of the club with the best developmental opportunities for the player. Some of the players were concerned about how their return to Norway was perceived, since they were scared that people around them would describe them as failures, which could also be related to this experience challenging their identity as a football player.³⁸ A complete commitment to a potential professional contract in the professional club of an English academy instead of a professional Norwegian club has often been debated within Norwegian football. Comparing the Norwegian and English context of professional academy football, the Norwegian context includes a closer collaboration with upper secondary schools, which indicates that the players have a safety net if they do not succeed in becoming a professional football player.³⁹ Even though many could argue that these players failed to succeed, most of them would say that the challenge they met was something they would be willing to confront again, but perhaps more prepared than in their earliest attempt.

The challenges the players met when trying to settle in both athletically and socially were mostly related to their opportunity to develop as players, going into an unfamiliar, high expectations, performance-centred environment, quite different from what they were used to in the Norwegian context. Their further day-to-day life challenges in the academy were also mostly centred around their performance and developmental opportunities, as well as around overcoming social and emotional challenges. According to the players' perceptions, the choice of being recruited to a professional football academy seemed like a natural next step as part of their potential development as football players. Even though the players did not get a professional contract in the clubs of their English academy, they learned much about themselves both as players and as individuals through the challenge of trying to reach their goal. Two limitations of the present study are the small sample size and the country specific approach, indicating the need for more studies on players from other countries/cultures going abroad to European professional football academies.

Notes

1. Richardson et al., 'An examination of the migratory transition of elite young European soccer players to the English Premier League'; Larkin and Reeves, 'Junior-elite football: time to re-position talent identification?'
2. Nesti and Sulley, *Youth Development in Football. Lessons from the World's Best Academies*; Solhaug et al., 'The balancing act of combining school and football in the transition from a non-professional club into junior-elite academy football'.
3. Schlossberg, 'A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition'.
4. Drew et al., 'A meta-study of qualitative research on the junior-to-senior transition in sport'.
5. Reeves et al., 'The nature and function of talent identification in junior-elite football in English category one academies'.
6. Bruner et al., 'Entry into elite sport: A preliminary investigation into the transition experiences of rookie athletes'; Weedon, "'Glocal boys": Exploring experiences of acculturation amongst migrant youth footballers in Premier League academies'.
7. Bourke, 'The road to fame and fortune: Insights on the career paths of young Irish professional footballers in England'.

8. Weedon, “Glocal boys”: Exploring experiences of acculturation amongst migrant youth footballers in Premier League academies’.
9. Nesti and Sulley, *Youth Development in Football. Lessons from the World’s Best Academies*.
10. Van Yperen, ‘Why some make it and others do not: Identifying psychological factors that predict career success in professional adult soccer’.
11. Pummel et al., ‘Jumping to the next level: A qualitative examination of within-career transition in adolescent event riders’.
12. Sothorn and O’Gorman, ‘Exploring the mental health and wellbeing of professional academy footballers in England.’
13. Forsman et al., ‘Development of perceived competence, tactical skills, motivation, technical skills, and speed and agility in young soccer players’.
14. Mills et al., ‘Identifying factors perceived to influence the development of elite youth football academy players’.
15. Munroe-Chandler et al., ‘Playing with confidence: The relationship between imagery use and self-confidence and self-efficacy in youth soccer players’.
16. Nesti et al., ‘Critical moments in elite premierships football: Who do you think you are?’
17. Saward et al., ‘Psychological characteristics of developing excellence in elite youth football players in English professional academies’.
18. See note 1.
19. See note 12.
20. Champ et al., ‘An Exploration of the Experiences of Elite Youth Footballers: The Impact of Organizational Culture’.
21. See note 12.
22. See note 20.
23. The number of Norwegian players in the Premier League history: https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_over_nordmenn_med_kamper_i_Premier_League
24. The number of foreign players in the Premier League history: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_foreign_Premier_League_players
25. The number of Norwegian players in foreign clubs, present: https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_over_nåværende_norske_fotballspillere_i_utlandet
26. Braun et al., ‘Using thematic analysis in psychology’.
27. Smith and McGannon, ‘Developing rigor in qualitative research: problems and opportunities within sport and exercise psychology’.
28. The dad of Martin Ødegaard, Hans Erik Ødegaard, has been closely related to his son’s development and has been considered to act as his individual personal coach. He has a background as a professional football player in the Norwegian premier league and is currently the head coach of the Norwegian premier league club Sandefjord football.
29. See note 8.
30. Nesti and Sulley, *Youth Development in Football. Lessons from the World’s Best Academies*.
31. Bjørndal and Ronglan, ‘Orchestrating talent development: Youth players’ developmental experiences in Scandinavian team sports’.
32. Nesti and Sulley, *Youth Development in Football. Lessons from the World’s Best Academies*.
33. See note 8.
34. See note 7.
35. Wylleman and Lavelle, ‘A developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes’.
36. Holt and Mitchell, ‘Talent development in English professional soccer’.
37. Güllich, ‘Selection, de-selection and progression in German football talent promotion’.
38. See note 3., See note 12.
39. Solhaug et al., ‘The balancing act of combining school and football in the transition from a non-professional club into junior-elite academy football’.

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