

(PP) FOOT PASS: A CONSTRUCTIVE AND DISTINCTIVE QUALITY SYSTEM FOR YOUTH ACADEMIES OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL CLUBS

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Introduction

In professional football (clubs), the efficient throughput of home grown players to the first team is considered as the central goal of each youth academy. Therefore, all primary, supporting and managerial processes of this 'R&D-department' have to be designed in a professional way to ensure optimal quality any time. It is fundamental that it results in well educated players in order to create added value for the club.

In an effort to ensure the future (success) of (Club) Football, the Belgian Football Association has implemented the professional quality management system 'Foot PASS'. With the long-standing implementation of this project, the federation wants to emphasize the importance of a high-quality youth academy with regards to a (more) efficient development of 'home grown' talent. Besides, they try to guide the clubs and their youth academy directors in particular, through the unavoidable process of professionalization (Schoukens & Van Hoecke, 2005).

Methods

At the core of the project is the computerized Foot PASS instrument. In short, it can be described as a sport specific and (multi)functional quality (assurance) system that can be used for several purposes (Van Hoecke, et al., 2004).

First and foremost, the co-ordinating football association is using this evaluation system for the objective assessment and certification of their clubs. Furthermore, the accompanying monitoring tool helps them to (re)direct the strategy towards an effective and efficient support of the youth academies under consideration.

On the other hand, the academy directors of the clubs are using this frame as a useful management tool in order to optimise their internal systems and processes. A better understanding of the quality determining factors and (more) positive evaluation of the organisational elements (e.g. facilities, procedures, systems) will enhance satisfaction by all stakeholders (players, parents, coaches, etc.) and largely determines the success of the academy.

Results

In Belgium, the professional football clubs have been evaluated recently for the second time. In comparison with the first evaluation in 2003, a practical audit has been added to the existing documentary audit. In this way, the practical value of documents as well as the application of standardized processes was evaluated during several training sessions and matches.

Table 1 shows the average scores of 22 professional youth academies (18 clubs of the first and 4 of the second division) on the different dimensions of the foot pass evaluation. In general, the average total score (TOT) is almost 60%, with a maximum of 79,9% and a minimum of 42,1%. Scores above the norm of 60% are found for organisational structure (ORG), the football formation system (FOR), internal marketing (INT), external relations (EXT) and facilities (FAC). On the other hand, lower average scores were found for strategy (STR), support (SUP) and effectiveness (EFF). It is significant that 15 clubs fail for medical, mental and social support, which are considered as secondary but important services in the

context of professional academies. Moreover, more than half of these clubs are considered as not effective in youth formation, with an inadequate throughput of home grown players as the most important reason.

Table 1: Percentage scores of professional football academies (N=22)

	TOT	STR	ORG	FOR	SUP	INT	EXT	FAC	EFF
Average	59,5	57,8	60,9	63,0	41,6	64,8	68,7	62,8	47,8
Max	79,9	90,8	90,2	85,2	72,6	86,2	91,1	91,2	78,8
Min	42,1	33,1	26,7	43,3	18	47,2	35,4	34,4	20
Medium	59,3	55,1	67,9	62,5	41,7	63,9	68,8	61,0	47,1
Shortage	4	7	6	3	15	2	1	4	13

Discussion

Notwithstanding the fact that the supporting actions (post audits, management courses, quality manual with best practices, etc.), which have been done between the two measurements, are considered by the academy directors as helpful, the professional quality of the youth academies in question is still of a moderate level. Moreover, a further professionalization of these youth academies is essential and demands for significant investments. In most cases, it is primarily a matter of strategic management on club level. It is the management of the club which has to decide, first of all, what exactly they expect from their youth academy. If it is clear that this department has to create an added value for the realisation of the core product, they have to treat it in a proper manner. However, the study has shown that a vast amount of the clubs has no vision at all about this topic.

References

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