

Measuring the performance of professional youth academies: The case of the Bundesliga

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Aim of paper and research questions

As a consequence of the incremental player and market movements following EU legislation and the Bosman ruling, the percentage of national and home-grown players decreased significantly in most of the European leagues. In Germany, for instance, the number of foreign players has doubled since 1995 (DFL, 2009). According to the Professional Football Players Observatory (2007), the average percentage of club trained players in the 1. Bundesliga was only 24% in the season 2006/2007.

Since both the German Football Association (DFB) and Professional Football League (DFL) have recognised concern regarding these figures, a system for quality and performance management (Foot PASS) has been implemented in the clubs of the 1. and 2. Bundesliga, in order to optimize the talent identification and development process and to increase the productivity of their elite academies. Notwithstanding the fact that the PASS model is considering the whole input-output process, the focus of this paper is on the effectiveness of these departments. Therefore, the main research questions deal with the identification and evaluation of a relevant set of performance indicators, reflecting the actual productivity of these profit-oriented clubs with regard to the development of young players as valuable assets.

Literature review

The majority of authors (e.g. Chelladurai, 1987; Frisby, 1986; Koski, 1995; Papadimitriou & Taylor, 2000; Shilbury & Moore, 2006) agree that effectiveness requires measuring multiple criteria and the evaluation of different organisational functions using different characteristics, and it should consider both means (processes) and ends (outcomes). The criteria must be sensitive to the specificity of the organisation and should reflect the whole input-process-output cycle (Chappelet & Bayle, 2005).

However, when goals are clearly identifiable, consensual and measurable, the goal attainment approach can be put forward as an appropriate way to evaluate effectiveness (Cameron, 1986). Since youth academies of professional football clubs can be considered as deliberate, rational and goal-seeking entities, the evaluation of effectiveness can be focussed on the output and/or outcome. In these high competitive service enterprises, football academies aspire to develop players for the first team or (at least) generate income through the sale of marketable assets (Stratton et al., 2004).

Research design and data analysis

Data was collected during individual audits in the clubs by means of the 'Professional Academy Support System' which can be considered a relevant framework to measure the actual and potential performance of a youth academy in a professional football club. The instrument

consists of checklists questioning relevant indicators regarding the enablers (CSFs) in order to evaluate the potential performance of the football academy and to measure the actual results of the club with regard to talent development (Van Hoecke et al., 2006; 2007; 2008). Most of the measures of productivity are related to the central goal of these youth academies; i.e. the result of the talent identification and development system, indicated by the flow of talented players to the senior teams of the club and/or other comparable teams.

In the season 2007/2008 this Foot PASS system has been used for the objective assessment and certification of 34 'Leistungszentren', i.e. the youth academies for the various Bundesliga clubs: 18 of the Bundesliga, and 16 of the 2. Bundesliga.

Results

Table 1 shows some descriptive statistics concerning the indicators used to measure the output of these youth departments.

Effectiveness	Mean	Max
Local Players in 1st team	5,4	14
Home Grown Players in 1st team	4,6 (18,5%)	10 (40,0%)
Home Grown Players in 1st and 2nd team	10,5 (22,4%)	18 (36,7%)
Playing Time for HG Players in 1st team	2,1	5
Transition of Youth Players to the 1st team (last 5 yrs)	9,7	15
HG Players in professional teams (Bundesliga level)	10,9	25
Playing Time for HG Players in professional teams	6,7	22
HG Players in U17 team (throughput)	4,6 (21,7%)	11 (52,4%)
HG Players in national teams (U18 > A-team)	2,7	7

Table 1: Indicators of effectiveness and descriptives for the Bundesliga (n=34).

Discussion and conclusion

In general, there is some evidence for the strategic concern of the governing bodies with regard to youth development and the progress of talented players into the professional environment. With an average of 5,4 local players (at least 3 years in the club between the age of 15 and 21) and 4,6 home-grown players (at least 5 years in the club before the age of 21) in their first teams, the percentage of club trained players is still on a moderate level in the Bundesliga clubs. Despite the fact that these results are comparable with the Belgian situation, significant differences ($p=.05$) are found between the 1. and 2. Bundesliga.

These figures confirm the results of the football leagues questionnaire, conducted by Ineum Consulting (2008), where the 2. Liga clubs are still less productive compared to the 1. Liga clubs (i.e. 6,5 vs. 5,0 and 5,2 vs. 4,0 for resp. the local and home-grown players). Moreover, considering the playing opportunities for these players, the return on investment can be labelled as low. Consequently, it would appear necessary to increase the efficiency in order to reduce the risk of investing in youth development (i.e., financial and time intense investments) and create an added value for the clubs. This is even more true for 2. Liga clubs since significant differences are also found between 1. and 2. Liga clubs for the total scores of the Foot PASS evaluation (i.e. 59,2% vs. 50,3%).

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