

‘SHOWCASING THE STARS OF TOMORROW’: THE CASE OF NORWEGIAN NATIONAL YOUTH FOOTBALL TEAMS

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Synopsis:

The present study aimed at identifying the (strategic) predictive value of the selection to the national youth football teams on future selection to the Senior A national football team in Norway, as well as, whether players selected for the national senior team have, previously, been selected for various national youth teams. In line with previous research on youth talent selection, it was identified a low predictive value of selection to U15 on future selection to the senior A level. However, the predictive value increases with level of age. It might be questioned if resources spent on the U15 national youth teams could more effectively be used on general talent development programs for a larger amount of players.

Abstract:

PURPOSE

UEFA describes the U17 and U21 national youth tournaments as “showcasing the stars of tomorrow” (2015). The present study is set out to identify the (strategic) predictive value; that is, (1) whether male U15 players advance to the national senior team; and (2) whether male players selected for the national senior team have, previously, been selected for various national youth teams.

BACKGROUND

Peterson (2004) demonstrated that the path to the Swedish national Senior A team, not necessarily is via youth national teams. Martindale, Collins and Daubney (2005) refer to several studies highlighting the poor predictive validity of junior performance standards for later success.

METHOD

All players during the period 2003 – 2013 who participated in one of the Norwegian youth national teams, (U15, U16, U17, U18, U19 and U21) were included in the analysis. Data was retrieved from the match statistics and player profiles available at the Norwegian Football Federation webpage (http://www.fotball.no/Landslag_og_topppotball/Landslag/). As a basis for a

forward analysis, both the number of matches of all youth national team players from U15 – U21 during the decade under examination, and the number of matches (if any) in senior A national teams were recorded. As basis for a backward analysis, the number of matches for all senior A players in the same period were counted, as well as, their eventual previous matches at younger national teams.

RESULTS

The forward analysis revealed that no players with matches at the U15 team in 2003 (N=16) have yet been selected for the senior A team. The predictive value of selection to the youth national teams for future selection to the Senior A national team were increasing with age level, with 45% of the 2003 U21 players (N=32) later being selected to the Senior A. The backward analysis revealed that 25% of all players selected for the Senior A team in the examined period (N=135), having 1 match(es) at the U15 national team. The amount of those players representation at national youth teams were generally increasing with age-level, and 81% had also been selected at the U21 level.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Since U15 players rarely reach Senior A level, and since Senior A players have rarely previously been selected for U15 it seems like the Norwegian U15 national team does not “showcases the stars of tomorrow. The results confirm the findings from Swedish football that the path to Senior A level in Norway does not necessarily go through national youth teams (Peterson, 2004). It is also evident that the predictive value of selection to U15 for later Senior A selection is low, confirming Martindale et al. (2005) review of the literature on talent selection. However, the predictive value of the selection to national youth teams, increases with age level, showing a high correspondence between selection to the U21 and later selection to the Senior A.

It might be argued that there is still a possibility that players from one of the youth national teams in 2003 might still be selected for the Senior A national team. Those players are today between 27 -33 years of age and 16 of them are, at present, playing at top national level.

Selection to the U15 national team in 2003, does not seem to have been a prerequisite for later selection to the Senior A, and might generally be related to a lack of talents in this age cohort, poor talent selection, poor talent development or a combination of those factors.

CONCLUSION

Given the low predictive value in the selection of players to the U15 for later success at Senior A, it might be questioned if resources spent on national youth teams in Norway could more effectively be used on general talent development programmes for a larger amount of players. This depends on whether the focus is on developing players in a long-term perspective or if focus is on winning the UEFA tournament per se.

References:

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