How can you be a social club and still develop top players?

- A qualitative research of “best practice” in European top clubs as a basis to create a training model that takes the considerations of top player development in a social context.

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Club and staff description

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Sogndal Fotball, Fosshaugane Campus

RSCA Anderlecht, Fortis Foot academy

Everton FC, Finch Farm

Nottingham Forest, The Nigel Doughty Academy

Lausanne Sport, Foot Academie

Standard De Liege, Académie Robert Louis Dreyfus

SK Brann

Academy Questions
INTRODUCTION

Halfway through my UEFA A course in 2013 I had to delay it to become the head coach of BX Brussels. When I was given the position as Sports Manager in my club during the summer of 2014, I felt a great responsibility to expand my knowledge as the Head of Youth. Our club has, within 18 months, expanded from zero to a thousand players. It was also the moment to continue the UEFA A course where I left it. The timing was great. Using this assignment to learn and explore from clubs that are renowned for their knowledge of youth development has been a great experience. I tried to connect the learning process to my own club in the thesis-question. I wanted to learn from the best and be able to transfer knowledge to my club. The BX Brussels project has the foundation to be a great social project. Then, there is the football part. We want to develop great players!

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My intention has been to put the first layer by presenting the basic principle of training at a theoretical level before I move on to the lesson-learned part. All the questions I have brought to the clubs have been connected to the principles. In the lesson-learned part I intend to share a wide range of examples on how the actual clubs connected to the theory in practice. Finally, I move on to the creation of our training model.

Having conversations with coaches, physical trainers, scouts, medical staff and academy directors has been an enriching process. I appreciate the insight I have been given by Anderlecht, Brann, Everton, Lausanne, Manchester City, Nottingham Forest, Sogndal and Standard Liege.

I have chosen to write the assignment in English as linguistic skills are part of my personal development plan within the course and it will be easier to transfer the knowledge to my own club.
Thank you, to Terje Dalen for taking such interest in this assignment with his great insight. To my colleague Steven Gibas for bringing me close to his special football family.

I have to give a special thank you, too my ever present assistant, Lars Johan Myklebust. Taking interest in every aspect of the game, always with a great eye for details. Also a big thanks to Vincent Kompany for opening all doors at newly opened Ethiad Campus.

Finally, thanks to Tone, my patient and caring wife. Letting me run off in every direction around Europe while she is taking care of our beautiful children.
THEORY

TRAINING PRINCIPLES

When planning a training program there are some basic principles that always need to be considered. All principles are part of a whole concept and should not be viewed as isolated units.

Training for maximum performance includes training for physical, technical and tactical development considering sport-specific factors. Athletes also have to train psychological aspects and to complete the requirements for achieving peak performance, athletes need to be healthy and free of injuries and have a theoretical knowledge of their training so that they can take some responsibility for their progress (Bompa 2009).

A level of high activity is considered an obvious basic need and is not made a study case in this context. It is clearly a necessity for good player development that players are highly active. That you get started as quickly as possible with your activity. You need to avoid stagnant "queues" and that someone withdraws and becomes passive (Ronglan, 2008). We need to organize the session with optimal group sizes and make sure that it becomes fluent activities without unnecessary pauses. The coaches need to avoid that the time for organizing and explanations is compromising with action time.

PRINCIPLE OF SPECIFICITY

There is no doubt that football is different to other sports in terms of complexity. In today’s game, more and more resources are directed to scientific research. Anyhow, we are far behind multiple other sports in terms of the numbers game (Anderson 2013). The number one reason for this is the complexity of the game. In football, it seems that, more than in most sports the principle of specificity is very important. The principle of specificity states that adaptations are specific to the type of training stress. It follows that the type of training must be structured and planned in accordance with the requirements of the competition. (Bompa, 2009)
A key issue for athletes and coaches at all levels is efficiency of training. That is, achieving the greatest gains in performance for a given amount of work effort. Therefore, the concept of maximizing the transfer of training to performance is paramount (Young, 2006).

When we are doing our planning, we need to understand the game. Specificity in terms of what? How is the motion pattern in modern football? How does this affect the energy conversion and the muscle action? If we want to adapt our players to the speed of execution in today’s game, we would have to increase the perception skills. If we want to perform on the football pitch, we need to make the most out of our training!

**PRINCIPLE OF PROGRESSION**

Improvement of one’s performance is a direct result of the amount of quality of work achieved in training. From the initiation stage up to the elite level, workload in training has to be increased gradually in accordance with each individual’s physiological and psychological abilities (Bompa, 2009). The principle of gradual increase of load in training is the basis for all planning, from the macro-cycle to the micro-cycle. A very abrupt increase in training load that surpasses one’s ability to adapt, affecting physiological and especially psychological balance. Ultimately, such an approach may result in injuries and overtraining. If well executed an increase in training load produces a slight functional and psychological imbalance followed by an adaption phase where the athlete adjusts to the training demands. There are three options. You have increased stimulus, a load that results in adaption and higher performance. If there is lack of stimulus and the load is too low, there will be stagnation and lack of progress. If the load and stimulus are exceeded, it will lead to mis-adaption and a decrease of performance.

**PRINCIPLE OF STRESS AND ADAPTION**

To sustain increases in muscle development and performance one constantly needs to progress the program by gradually increasing the demands placed on the body. An athlete has to be exposed to an overload stimulus at regular

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intervals for the induction of training adaptations. An overload stimulus can be manipulated by changing the mode of exercise, duration, frequency, intensity, and recovery period between training sessions (Bompa 2009). These are well known statements when it comes to physical training. In my opinion what is clearly underestimated is the systematic and conscious use of the principle of overload in the technical, tactical and mental development. Some cultures would also motivate to use overload for social preparation.

PRINCIPLE OF VARIATION

The demand for more volume and higher intensity of training is continuously increasing with your ambitions. To be able to enhance continuous growth knowledge of the principle of variation in training is decisive. It is one of the key factors for adaptation to training. Skill learning rapidly increasing difficulties in learning new skills, but the degree of learning is limited by the repetition of the same training plan or training load over time. Stone et al. (1990) believes that the limitations in training variation could end in what is called "monotonous program overtraining." This means that by conducting the same training stimulus over time it will lead to a reduction or plateau in performance. Something that can be defined as a kind of overtraining. Degree of monotony in the training plan is therefore significantly related to poor performance (O'Toole, 1998).

Periodization of training will therefore limit the monotony and boredom of training which will therefore lead to greater physiological and psychological adaptations. Therefore, we need to consider variation in training to be extremely important when it comes planning of training. Variation in a micro cycle can be entered by changing training volume, intensity, frequency and exercise selection. Removing exercises from the session plan before complete adaptation has taken place, and replacing them with similar exercises will often lead to major adaptations. (Bompa, 2009)

The only limitations of exercise variation are in the coach's ability to creatively apply scientific principles. Implementation of variation should be based on a good understanding of the requirements of the game. Which movement
patterns are used, what skills are required, etc. The coach’s capacity to create, to be inventive and work with imagination represents an important advantage for successful variety in training. An extremely interesting debate is the multilateral physical development vs. the sport-specific physical development. Should kids be encouraged to do other sports for a better long-term performance? Should we be less sport-specific? Anyhow, we need a holistic approach to be successful. The sum of work done in a session or training phase must be quantified and monitored, but the total load knowing the individual and his social life is fundamental to be able to make the right evaluations and adaptations.

PRINCIPLE OF INDIVIDUALISATION

Football is a team sport but it is made of 11 different individuals. The individualization principle dictates that training should be adjusted according to each athlete's characteristics and needs. The goal of individualization is to capitalize on each athlete’s strengths, strengthen his weaknesses and eventually exploit the potential. To be able to understand each individual level of capacity we need to consider biological and chronological age, participation and training experience, fitness and health status, training and total load, and the player's rate of recovery. These analyses are a very demanding task but the coach should always strive to see his player’s individual needs (Giske, 2007). There needs to be harmony between their training and other involvements and a correct alternation between training stimuli and rest should persist. We also need to be aware of the differences of gender.

PRINCIPLE OF ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

To reach top performance in football we need to develop players that are independent and conscientious about their development. In coaching, we need to involve and discuss the player’s progress with them. The players should relate the objective information received from the coach with the subjective assessment of their performance. The players will eventually be able to understand the positive and negative aspects of their performance, what he
needs to improve and even understand, how to go about to improve in the future. A player, like a musician, should listen and notice where he sings a false note. This will allow him to make the appropriate corrections in training. (Bompa, 2009)

Just as important is that the players need to learn to take care of their well-being off the pitch. The players should learn that it is normal to face difficulties. They should learn how to share it and solve it together with others. The active participation should be a positive safety net that makes the player care about his performance and what affects it badly.

The players should take an active role in establishing objectives in accordance with their abilities. The coach needs to guide and create a safe path. The player will sometimes need to be protected from his own ambitions. The downfall could be too great if the bar is set to high. A conscientious attitude towards training should be reflected by setting achievable objectives that have to be aligned with the interest in training and desire to succeed.

**PRINCIPLE OF INDIVIDUAL AND HOLISTIC STIMULATION**

The holistic approach develops players to be critical, confident and independent. It aims to make learning a process of self-improvement that explicitly recognizes the self and the social context of learning and teaching, and recognizing the needs of the individual learner in the interaction (Paul 2001).

The quality of the learning experience is obviously important, and the focus on improving the quality of the teaching and learning situations is a positive development in football. The results of applying the approach are the development of critical, confident, independent learners capable of taking responsibility on the field. The holistic approach is based on the view that teaching is a social activity. The essence of the social activity consists of the roles played by the learner and the teacher. The holistic learner is assumed to want to achieve the highest aspect of awareness of knowledge, and appreciates the value that it adds to his or her life. The holistic coach is assumed to want to develop the learner as a critical, confident, independent player who can find
solutions in difficult situations. The interaction between the coach and the player is a social act that needs to take into account the personal, professional, social, and human needs of the learner. These needs are not only the need to learn and improve, but also the need to be heard, the need to be praised, the need to be accepted in the team. A coach should get to know his players and should teach the players to know themselves and claim ownership of their development.

The holistic approach is about coaching the whole child. Football is not just about teaching technique and tactics, but involves the social and psychological development too (Gjerset 2006). Coaching children is not just about winning games, but about teaching essential life skills.
QUALITATIVE METHODS

Qualitative research is a form of research focusing on the experience of meaning through close field observation and in-depth conversations (ECA rapport). In this assignment, my qualitative approach has been around site visits and conversations with club staff. With the purpose of creating a solid platform, the questions have been connected to the basic principles of training with a view on the technical, tactical, physical and psychological aspects of the game.

I feel privileged to get the opportunity to make a research at such an enriching level. I consciously picked the clubs and the staff to have a wide range of input. Talking to clubs of different sizes, different countries and cultures has given me a broad selection of opinions. Given the stature of the personnel, I have been lucky to meet, it has not been either possible or desired to sit down and make a traditional interview. I have met them in different circumstances discussed and exchanged opinions, always with my questions in the back of my head.

I rate this form of observations and conversations very highly on a methodical level. With this approach, I probably have more and better information than if the survey had a tighter structure.

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LESSON LEARNED

“It is a cliché to say that the future belongs to the youth, but few clichés ring as true as this one. Youth development is a key issue and will always remain so. Each football club has developed its own initiatives when it comes to youth development and there is a lot to learn from each other on this front.”

Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, Chairman, European Club Association.

It seems clear to me that all the clubs we visited believe that future success starts with the recruitment of talent; you will need a well-equipped youth scouting department. There is high pressure on a club’s scouting system to select talent early enough, before other clubs get hold of them. The scouting department needs to be well coordinated with the technical heart of the club. In England, they cannot sign a player until he is nine. However, the battle starts years ahead. Everton got more than 200 scouts alone. Talented youngsters will train two or three times a week but they switch between clubs. The clubs will put great resources to win the race for their signing. Pre-academies, football schools and shadow teams are a part of a thorough selection process.

There is a clear message that the optimal youth academy cannot be sustainable without a great infrastructure and in this respect, there is no difference between clubs from different countries or size. From Sogndal to Manchester City you can see great pitches and other quality assets that allows maximum development of the individual.

Great knowledge of the game and the learning process of the child is an absolute necessity if you want to be successful in youth development. You need highly qualified staff to be dedicated and coordinated. The demands are high. To train any Anderlecht team from u-11 to u21 team you need to have at least a UEFA A degree. It will have to be supplemented with either a professional career or a master degree.

STUDY IN THE ARENA

Words like “Game based” and “Opposed” were clearly expressions we talk a lot about when we sum up our visits and conversations. From the observations
made in Manchester City, all activity from u8 until the first team were game based. The differences from what they actually did when asking a range of questions were finally big from club to club. Lausanne in Switzerland do at least 25% of their total load without the ball. In Everton, there is also great emphasis on physical work, but until the age of 12, everything is with the ball. This was visually clear to us seeing the youth players in the different clubs. Everton players reflecting powerful play and powerful players while City players were of all shapes looking dynamic and quick. In their training there is a great range coming to club specific development. Everton are very flexible in their criteria. They look for the best players and do not have a special profile. The players they look for need a set of characteristics like eagerness and obvious motivation. In City, they have a specific profile for each position in their future first team. An A and B profile for each position gives them a kind of security and flexibility. Anderlecht is also very specific and demanding in their criteria. Anderlecht’s key position on the field is the controlling midfielder. The player profile says he needs to show tactical potential in build-up play, he needs to have perfect ball control and quick passing ability. He should have a good diagonal cross and possess a shot from the second line. Capability of infiltration between the lines and ideal balance between offensive support and defending tasks. He needs positive aggressivity and power in one on one duels. Finally, he will have to back this up with great endurance. With the experience of the staff in these top clubs, they are able to identify the kid’s positions quite early. It’s individual, but often discovered/ decided early. Unless the position is really set in stone (i.e. Lionel Messi, Cesc Fabregas) from a young age, they move the player around a bit for him to acquire a range of skills. For example: sometimes playing a boy who is most probably a left back on the left wing.

In City, the players do all their activity under the supervision of the Academy staff while at Everton they encourage the kids to follow other activities if they want to. In school or outside, there are no brakes as long as they report what they are doing. On tactical specificity, Everton always play with diamond structure in their teams. If it is 11v11, 8v8 5v5, high pressing game and
playing forward with high tempo should always be preferred. From our observations, they backed up their words with their action of work. Great physical preparation in the gym backed up with high tempo in all actions in training. Lausanne has a philosophy to be «a master of the small spaces» and always offer support around the pitch. This resulting in a lot of small sided games in training. They adopt best practice exercises from clubs around the world: the River Plate, Barcelona, etc. based on the federations observations. In Lausanne, they never do any gym work. Everything is done on the pitch.

When it comes to attention to detail City take the level of specificity to a whole new level. In their study room they have an artificial grass floor, their auditorium is built as a section of their stadium Etihad, the tables in the different relaxing areas have drawn up pitches on the surfaces to encourage impulsive discussions from the players. From the U18 squad they sleep in the campus before match day to prepare for their professional life.

SWISS SYLLABUS

All the clubs seem to be aware of the importance of gradual progression, but where they end up in total load is very different. The way of controlling the load and progression is also taken care of differently. From individually highly scientific methods in City (every player from the age of 12 is monitored on every session with GPS) and Standard, down to coaching experience and traditional testing in Brann and Everton. They have a more collective approach in Lausanne. Brann have an individual development plan with a gradual increase of load where they are especially aware of the combination of school and club activity. Especially the first year of college. This is a challenge City and Nottingham do not have with their own private education centres. It is highly interesting to see that City academy players, who have all the imaginable support to stimulate the recovery process, train 5 times a week while Brann with less control and more external load trains up to 10 sessions a week. It needs to be mentioned though that they have a very strong injury prevention program. Everton have a different approach than their rivals and train more than any other club. Weekly they have 8 football sessions, 5 of
them with subsequent physical workout, plus 2 yoga classes and a session with tactical video analyses. And then there’s the match! It is important to add though, that they have a yearly gradual increase from the age of 7 with an open eye for individual differentiation. They actually make notes of every player after each training. In Anderlecht, every week has the same basic build-up. From a physical focus (endurance, resistance, force) in the beginning of the week towards technical and tactical focus as the game approaches. Their physical schedule is divided into a 6-week-cycle: Week one would contain extensive endurance training, week two more intensive endurance training. The third week of the cycle they will turn to interval training, week four would be lactate threshold training and then speed training in week five. Then they will end the cycle with a week of active recuperation.

The real particularity about Lausanne in comparison with other clubs is how strict they are about following the Swiss Federation’s syllabus. The Federation give funding to clubs that comply with the standards they set for an Academy. This includes the respect for the progression.

When it comes to the psychological aspect and training on mental techniques, only Standard of the clubs has a specific progressive training program, except from City, who said there was one in the making. All of the clubs are well aware of this aspect though. Brann have an expert from the Olympic centre as an external consultant. They practice on some visualisation techniques where they will see themselves succeed and on how to reset after a bad involvement. They want to develop players that are not afraid of failing. In Sogndal they will add a psychologist to their staff. He will get the mission to create a self-awareness program. In Standard they put great emphasis on the idea that the players actively participate in the training and the mental coach is supervising the whole process. He gives tasks and he guides the work of all the technical staff. The coaches need to be highly creative. They do not want the players’ minds to rest. New exercises will be presented basically every week. Standard use the slogan ‘disco ergo sum’ (I learn, therefore I am).
Another curiosity is the linear approach football has towards the progression from age group to age group. Most clubs start easily with the smallest kids and then gradually raise the load with age. A teenager is normally offered to train a lot more than the smaller ones. This should not be the case as the vulnerability both physically and psychologically is much higher with a 14 year old than a 7 year old. The awareness of the maturity age makes up for this general mistake in some cases.

“EVERY SECOND COUNTS”

The obvious effect of stress and adaption in physical training is well known and well documented. If a muscle is stressed (within tolerable limits), it adapts and improves its function. If the stress is not sufficient to overload the body, then no adaptation occurs. Significant improvements in performance occur when the appropriate exercise stresses are introduced into the training program. Physical fitness is largely a reflection of the level of training. When an athlete is working hard, fitness is high. The overload must be there for consistent improvement to occur. What about the technical and tactical aspects of the game? Would not the same rules apply? I do think so! Think of the brain as a muscle. It is! On developing vision and awareness, mental overload needs to be incorporated into the sessions to challenge the player when preparing to play a much faster game. In addition, when we know that muscles adapt specifically to the nature of the exercise stress, (The most obvious example of specificity is that the muscle exercised is the muscle that adapts to training) then we should see the practical connection on how the principle of specificity and overload will be a powerful combination. We need to train with the highest possible tempo, playing the actual game. An isolated good first-touch will not get you far, your body shape and sense of positioning will help, but constant small looks around you is a necessity to know what is going on around you so you can make use of your fundamental skills.

Going to an Everton game, you can see that they have a very demanding crowd. They expect high tempo and great effort. They want to see that the
players care and that they fight for their shirt. It is great to observe the way they train their youth and see that it is coherent with what their fans want to see. In all categories, they always encourage the players to play with tempo. “Play quicker”. The build-up of a session is very competitive and usually contains competition throughout. When they win in training they celebrate, they care. This is overload and specificity in practice. In Manchester City, you can see a conscious approach on mental overload. Every corner of the academy is made for the players to think about their attitude and approach to training. “Every second counts” is one of many slogans. Pictures of key moments that changed the outcome of an important game. The players have to write key words on the wall themselves, they have to propose attitudes and strategies to deal with certain scenarios, all on the walls of the corridors and rooms that the players walk through on a daily basis.

BRAIN CENTRED LEARNING

As football is such a complex sport, the absolute need of traditional variation is limited in terms of physical impact. One of the reasons football is loved all over the planet is the diversity and complexity that makes our game the most difficult to foresee. The danger of monotony has to be looked at beyond the obvious. In football, the need of variation is traditionally often misunderstood and interpreted in the wrong direction. For the sessions not to be too straightforward the coaches traditionally set up exercises for isolated skill practice or physical training, often for the sake of variation. Most players have been putting themselves through hours of isolated practice they find boring and mentally painful. Some players will quit but most will persevere thinking of the minutes they will get playing the actual game. When looking at the top clubs the variation of training is great, but mostly in a sport-specific way. They clearly take into account key elements of variation by changing training volume, intensity, frequency and exercise selection. City play a lot in small spaces, but are also aware of the importance to expose the players for the “real distances” on a pitch. The distances will be coherent to the stage of the players. If the u 12 play an 11 vs 11 game, they adapt the field and make it smaller. In
Everton, there is a structure that guarantees a mix of stability and variation. All the training sessions start and finish the same way (ball on the wall, pitch work, gym). The rotation of tactical themes guarantees some sort of variation and so does the oral input with the rotation of coaches. They have 5-week cycles on tactical themes and last year Roberto Martinez installed that the team coaches from U15-U18 will rotate teams in the same cycles. They do weekly Yoga session to work on stress control, composure and self-discipline. In Everton the players are encouraged to participate in other activities and sports, school activities etc.

Anderlecht have a very interesting variation of tactical-technical approach. To keep both coaches and players sharp and focused, the technical director describes every six-weeks, new targets. These goals have to be present in games and afterwards evaluated in match reports.

There is an incredible level of sport-specificity to what City do. They do off pitch activities like mountain climbing etc. but more like a random team building activity. Other sportive activities are not a part of the development plan in any of the clubs we visited. They use other sports as team building, mental distraction and fun activities. They have table tennis and pool in different areas of the academy. In City, control of the total load is very important while in Everton they encourage their players to do all the activities they want with a close eye on their performance. Sogndal Fotball takes into account the fact that the kids could explore and gain from doing other sports, so additional training in the academy is done in a time where it will not collide with other sports.

At a level where you are able to control and pick up the physical and psychological impact to a great extent, the need of variation in the wider range is maybe not such a necessity, but I believe the feeling and experience of doing other sports could add something to most players’ game. Standard agrees with me. With their brain centred learning they aim to have in depth knowledge of skill acquisition. The foundation phase is based on a multi-sport approach to guarantee a child’s general development.
Multilateral development will bring a basic package to build on for future sport-specific activity. Do not be easily fooled by extremely rapid development. There are many examples of how rapid development turns out to be a short career. It is also a misunderstood and frightening trend in our society that we want to see a finished product too soon. The research work of Job Fransen, a sport scientist from the University of Gent in Belgium states that children should sample a variety of sports rather than focusing their effort on one single sport. A better development of the fundamental movement skills is encouraged by his research.

A-B-C-D

Most European elite academies are based on a thorough scouting and selection process. The consequences are highly competitive squads in every age group. This makes the organisation less complicated and the need of differentiation by movement between age groups is small. By not selecting all their players, differentiation gets more important in Sogndal than in Anderlecht. Sogndal needs to work hard with a long-term perspective to create a competitive squad. They need to take care of all players to contain a group of players at all. Individual follow up is great in both clubs though, but with a different perspective. Sogndal is building a great structure to take care of the individual needs without segregation. There is no selection process in their basic-teams or in their academy until the age of 14. All players are welcome to train more if they have the hunger and ambition. The differentiation in the academy sessions is based on the principle of equality and make sure their players are equally matched and challenged. The club’s level of individualisation needs to match the philosophy and structure of the clubs as well as resources. In Manchester City each player is training with a GPS and an accelerometer. Every movement is measured; detailed testing and screening can allow the staff to make complete adjustments. In Everton the final target is to produce players that will one day integrate the first team. By prioritising, the best above the rest they use a philosophy where the method adapts to the player rather than making the player reach goals that are set by
the method. Each player gets his personal clips from the previous match along with all relevant statistics delivered on a personal DVD prepared by university students. They also give the statistics for the opposition team so you can compare yourself to your direct opponent and counterpart. A great step forward across clubs in recent years is the focus and awareness towards the player's maturity age. The amount of knowledge and extent of measures taken are very different. In Standard they are well aware that maturity age comes down to mental (learning) level as much as the physical level. Every six weeks City do an evaluation of the players and then grade them more in detail into A-B-C-D category every 12-weeks. The parents also receive a rapport. It is followed up by parent conversations two times a year. In Everton, they value human resources above scientific measures. They have many coaches on few players and are able to work on individual aspects whenever they like. They often stay behind after a session with players to practice on a weakness. It could be running shape, passing etc. It is more down to experience and feeling in Anderlecht and Everton than in City and Standard. A general trend is that the physical program gets more and more individualised every year. The program starts out similar but gets more and more individual. Professional clubs in England are allowed to have as many as 270 youngsters between the ages of 8-19 on the books, and with Nottingham Forest`s resources they prefer to work with smaller numbers (around 100) to give their young players more concentrated coaching and support. A great proof of the great attention to the principle of individualization.

“WORK IT OUT”

Today`s game is about finding solutions, and finding them fast. You need to sort your options well. Knowing what to do in the world`s most complex game demands solution oriented players. The first step needs to be applying active participation in your coaching. In Sogndal`s new development model the main motivation by bringing in a mental coach is to gradually develop self-dependant players. With limited resources they need to create a culture were
the players take responsibility for their own development. The club want players to take responsibility for their own development and also give them a "toolbox" for life, regardless of whether they become professional football players or not. In Brann’s weekly program there is always a sequence of the players individual development plan. The last 20 minutes of the session, the players are left alone to train on specific targets they have personally set.

Standard De Liege’s model “Brain centred learning in football” is very interesting in this respect. Their target is to create a training environment where the players are coaching in a very innovative and structured way. They need to visualise and understand the training content and see the logical progression in the whole programme. Regularly the players need to take notes of a session and follow up by coaching the same exercises to their teammates. The whole ethos of the academy seems to be about constant and universal learning which eventually should be useful beyond the football pitch. The players are encouraged to become “masters” of their own development. Full ownership is considered the highest level of motivation and drive.

City give no clear instructions to their youngest players. They ask questions, remind players, and encourage them to look and find the answers. To City, active participation is fundamental in their coaching. The older players will do their match video analyses in front of their teammates from time to time. Self-awareness is important in the learning process. Everton seems to be extremely encouraging in their coaching. “Work it Out” is their favourite quote. They are much louder and pushing in their coaching than City though. They want to create solid, eager and honest players. They do not want to lose their “Britishness”. They want to have players who can tackle, head the ball, play with a lot of energy but bring in elements of a more continental style. Blend the best from both.

Everton feel the total load is too big if they demand the players to take personal notes from training, the coaches do it. In Sogndal they do it the other way around. An interactive training diary is used by the players to keep track of all activity and total load.
There can be no doubt that focus on education and combining football with school will build the character of a player. His personality and mental strength are decisive on the pitch. The focus on education, school results and the disciplinary behaviour of players is in the core philosophy in most clubs nowadays.

Brann put great emphasis on seeing the whole human being. It is important for them to create a supportive group dynamic. New players are patiently taken care of and given time to find his place. Eventually the players should cherish each other’s progress and success. They do not have accommodations for their players to live, but they eat together at least twice a week.

Manchester City will first install a set of basic rules of general respect and. There is no slack in this respect, expectation for discipline and respectful behaviour is set high. They have a psychologist to coach the coaches on how they should work with the player’s mentally. Every day they are exposed to sentences that make them aware of the reality of top-level football. When they see that a player is in the danger zone of not maintaining the level demanded by the club, they always make sure that the players has a new club lined up and they try to stay in touch with the player even after he has departed. The parents are always a part of the process. With their private school system, they have great access and full overview. They have a parent conversation two times a year. For the future City will develop an off the pitch program when they start their accommodations with players living on the site. A designated couple will be living there as their foster parents. Additional family apartments are built on site for visiting families to stay for longer periods of time if needed.

In Sogndal their vision is based upon four core values. Ambitious, developing, inclusive and honest. They want to be ambitious and demanding but focus on long-term development. They aim for development for the whole human being and the whole organisation. They emphasise inclusion and create a feeling of belonging. To be able to reach these targets they need an honest approach.
Being the big club in their region, they aim to bring their values to the community. They regularly arrange training for talents in local clubs so they will develop a sense of belonging.

On the social side, Nottingham Forest actively go into schools and use their brand to motivate children to do well in anything they undertake. They also organise events like "Soccer Schools" or parallel teams such as Futsal teams to get young people devoting their time to something healthy. The program is equally effective beyond the limits of the Nottingham area as illustrated by their "African Adventures" program in which they bring funding and experts in various areas to Ghana to help the local community.
“The youth of Brussels, in all its municipalities, is a truly multi colored mix and I strongly believe in its qualities and potential that are at present written off much too quickly. I grew up in Brussels. I’m one of them and I know that with the effort in the right place they’re capable of anything... if they’re given the chance.” Vincent Kompany

BX Brussels is about giving children that chance. The chance to believe in their qualities. The chance to fulfil their potential. The chance to succeed in the future.

As a football club BX Brussels is a great resource to society. We have the potential to facilitate positive learning experiences both on and off the pitch. Our young members go through a bio-psycho-social development in a football context. This is a non-linear process. Learning is non-linear. Talent is non-linear. Our young players live out some very fragile, tender and complex years that can also be their most fun and joy filled days. Traditions can and should be challenged. Values, attitudes and behaviour along with joy and passion can amplify throughout the club and echo in to the future. Their future!

When we are giving the children of Brussels the chance to succeed in the future, we are talking both on and off the field. We believe in a holistic approach to our players, and we are convinced that this philosophy will give us as a club, but also the Brussels community, a reward bigger than the effort. As an example we have a social department which is giving the players follow up in school and extra language lessons. Our players shall flourish!

“We start from scratch” was the name of this project in the beginning. Because that’s what we did. We started from scratch. Literally. No name, no colours, no players. The journey so far has been exceptional, and at this point BX Brussels are located at several places around Brussel, giving the chance to over 1000 players.
Starting a football club from scratch in Brussels can be challenging. The established clubs in Brussels are already turning down players because they don’t have enough pitches available. This is also challenging for us. There are a lot of kids wanting to play, and we have to turn some of them down because of the fact that we are lacking pitches. For us it is really important to give as many players as possible the chance to play for BX.

We have a mission. We should create a training model that takes the considerations of top player development in a social context. Our social context. Our social project. Our players. Their potential. We want to fulfil our players` potential, both on and off the field!
Creating Our Training Model

When you create a training model there are certain steps you need take to be sure that you create a solid framework. These steps are divided into 4 phases. You need knowledge of the game and you need to know the basic principles of training. Then you have to combine this knowledge with the context and the vision of the club. The next phase is to define your periodization and create the macro, meso and the micro cycle. Phase three is about putting your plans into action. Finally, you need to evaluate the work and adjust your model in accordance with your evaluation.
KEY FACTORS

There is a lot of knowledge in the world of football, and development is important for us. However, the key factor for us is to prioritize and select the knowledge in such a way that we can make the most of it in the context of BX.

Manchester City’s level of specificity is out of this world. There is no way we can rebuild their facilities or in other ways get the same level of specificity. The most important thing they do when it comes to specificity, is to have all their activities game based, or at least opposed. That we can copy, that is free. We know that football is one of the most complex games, and that the principle of specificity applies here, more than in most sports. The transfer from training to competition must be as high as possible. Verheijen refers to functional technique. He says that in football technique is the execution of a decision. Therefore, game insight and technique cannot be viewed separately from each other (Verheijen 2014). We believe that you should introduce the action and gestures in a complete game phase. This is also consistent with the Global Methodology described by Liberós were he points out that it allows us to work simultaneously with tactical, technical, physical and psychological aspects (Liberós 2013).

What we see around in the different clubs is that they play with high tempo, and always encourage the players to play faster. “Play faster!” was actually one of the most used coaching expressions in Everton. In Lausanne they try to be “a master of small spaces” and in City they also had a focus on fast play in small spaces. We also know that this is the trend all around the world, and if we want to adapt our players to the speed of execution in today’s game, we would have to increase the perception skills of our players. Our global view is good in this case, and we should always work on the players’ awareness. We even have one dedicated station in our model where the main focus is on the perception skills.

In BX we will build on our human resources. We have professional coordinators and professional social coaches. It is important to continue the development of our volunteer program. We need to reach out and create
passion in our community. We have to extend our collaboration with the university and make use of their sports management students. This is not enough to compensate for the experience of the coaches in Everton or the résumé of the coaches in City. But we can learn from them, and we can transfer “best practice” from the best in the world. We can at least adopt their didactic methods and their hardworking approach.

When it comes to early specialization within football, we have seen that clubs have different approaches. We know that early specialization can give some benefits, but we believe in a holistic approach to our players, and with that view there is no doubt that multilateral physical development is beneficial for our players in the long run. Bearing this in mind we should always encourage our players to do other activities when not playing football. Our abilities to see the whole person, not just the player, must become our hallmark.

The biggest clubs try to select the best youth players. They start from the age four and up. We know that selecting the right players at an early age is difficult and no matter how good the scouts are, it’s not science. Actually, what we do know is that we do not know! The result is normally that the best players at that moment, the early bloomers, are picked. Inner drive and future potential is difficult to spot, and we believe there is a lot of potential top players, late bloomers, who never get the chance to display their full potential. This is where the major clubs stands out. They have a selection process where they only pick the best players. This ensures that the players are always perfectly matched. On top of this, they have an extreme focus on individualization. This is in essence the most important thing the most renowned academies do. To be able to individualize to such a level demands a lot of resources. We don’t have the resources to do that. What we believe though, is that with our amount of players and with good coordination we can maximize the differentiation, and in that way catch up the lead that the academies have.
MAXIMIZE THE ACTIVITY

Research suggests that children under seven or eight years of age are primarily motivated by pleasure, play and the sheer joy of movement. They do not want to play serious games. Instead, they want to run and jump and chase and hide because they feel good. By coincidence, these sorts of actions are good for the developing bodies and minds, but that is not why children do them. For young children, play is enough. As they get older, children enter their ‘skill hungry years’. This is the time when they have a drive to learn new skills. They continue to seek out the pleasure of movement, but they also need to have a greater sense of mastery (Bailey 2014).

Research also shows us that sports participation drops by 30 percent for each year of age, after ten years of age and according to a report from the National Alliance for Youth Sports, over 70% of children drop out of organized sports by age 13 (Dilworth 2014).

Children begin playing football with no emotional attachment to the game. They need to have an experience that makes them want to come back. An experience that makes them want to play independently from adults. We need to make sure that when they are finished with every training session, the one thing they want the most, is to play more football. If we are able to do this, we believe that we can keep most of our players from when they are five until they are adults.

So how can we do this? Is it possible to give the players the opportunity to move and play all the time, enjoy themselves and still learn a lot?

We believe so! We believe that we can get all this with our global approach on football development.
TRAINING MODEL

We have taken the challenge to give as many children as possible the chance to play football for BX. To be able to create quality within the quantity we have made a model based on a rotation system.

Figure 2 - Training Model U6-U9. Great emphasis on small sided games and fundamental movement skills.

Figure 3 - Training Model U10-U13. Station 4 will be doubled to be in accordance with the KBVB matches for this age group, 8v8. Introducing Sport-specific Movement Skills.
With these models we will be able to have over 100 kids on the field at the same time, working in groups from 4 to 16. To be able to do this we need to have a clear organization where the players can unfold within the framework.

Our global approach to football should be reflected in the model. We believe that we have succeeded with this given that six out of eight stations are game based. This is also a focus supported by both the Norwegian and the Belgian federation.

In Switzerland they have seen a trend that players need more balance and coordination training now, compared to earlier years. And they believe it is mostly due to lack of free play and physical movement before they start in the academy. We believe this is a trend also in Brussels, so we have devoted to of the eight stations to fundamental movement skills (FMS).

In Manchester City they say that every second counts. 13th of May 2012 with the clock showing 93.20, they scored the winning goal against QPR and they won the Premier League. Now they are using this moment to inspire their players to make the most of every second in every training. This is something that we also can do. The key here is quick and smooth rotations, no stagnant “queues” and keep the pauses to a minimum. If we can do this, the kids will
be in activity “all” the time and the movement, involvement and the enjoyment for each player will be significantly increased. In addition we know that a high level of activity is a necessity to develop good players, so this is a win-win.

We know that there are a lot of players on the field at the same time. Also a lot of balls. We are aware of the practical challenges and it will be beneficial with some practical equipment which will help keeping the activities organized. We will have a circle of attention with every station. In the circle of attention the coach gathers the players of his team. He then gives them a quick brief of the training, and then the players go to their starting stations.

The second thing that would be beneficial are small barriers to keep most of the balls within the station. These barriers are made out of plastic and are easy to put out/ collect. They are also ideal for commercial printing.

And of course; we know that this is a radical change of the football in BX and that all changes needs a transition phase. This can be done step by step, and we believe that within two years these models can be fully up and running.

MAXIMIZE THE DIFFERENTIATION

For BX all players are equal in worth. Resemblance and equivalence is not synonymous to all being equal, but it is an acknowledgement of us all being different and that we should facilitate the challenges in accordance with the players’ wishes, maturity and preconditions. This meaning that we, through differentiation, treat the players differently, but in a positive way. We know that development is age related, not age dependent, so for us differentiation in youth football is to be able to offer all our players training sessions and matches matching each player’s level at that moment. Sometimes they should be challenged on a higher level and sometimes they should be able to dominate on a slightly lower level, but mainly they will be equally matched. In BX we work with a principle of 25%-50%-25% level exposure.

We cannot, and don’t find it necessary, to pick the best players in each age group and give them a better football education than the rest. We believe we
should see the whole child. This means that they should be able to go to the training with their friends, be in the changing room with their friends and even train on the same pitch as their friends. We also believe that all players should train and play matches on the level that they are at that moment. This means that the player might not play with or against his friend that exact training session. To be able to honour both our holistic view and our view on differentiation, we need to put a lot of players on the pitch at the same time. This is where we have an advantage over most others; we have a lot of players. This meaning that we can differentiate in a way that most others will find difficult. We know that chronological age is relative to development, and with that in mind we will differentiate across the age groups.

**Figure 5: Differentiation model. With the relative age as starting point, we take several aspects into consideration before we determines where we should match each player.**

There are a lot of different aspects we need to consider to ensure correct differentiation. Our model shows which considerations we take when we define our groups. Great coordination is required in this process and this will be handled by our professional coordinators.
MAXIMIZE PARTICIPATION

Research suggests that young players only retain 18% of concepts that are learned passively but 68% of what which is learned actively. (Sullivan, 2013) We have a strong belief in our philosophy and our belief in active participation is not smaller. The theory supports it and the best coaches do it. We can also do it!

The holistic coach is assumed to want to develop the learner as a critical, confident, independent player who can find solutions in difficult situations. The interaction between the coach and the player is a social act that needs to take into account the personal, professional, social, and human needs of the learner. These needs are not only the needs to learn and improve, but also the need to be heard, the need to be praised, the need to be accepted in the team. A coach should get to know his players and should teach the players to know themselves and claim ownership of their development.

To make the players claim ownership of their own development is also what we call active participation. One of the strategies when you work with active participation, is not to give instructions, but to rather ask questions and make the players find the answer. This is a common didactic method used by the most renowned academies at the moment. It is also within our philosophy, and it is clear that this is one of the didactic methods that we should transfer to our coaches.

As mentioned we have a lot of human resources in the club. Not everyone is well educated in the sport of football, but we believe that if a coach has the right attitude and the passion, we can help him/her to develop into a good coach for BX. To do this we have hired one coach who is responsible for “coach the coaches.” “Coach the coaches” is an internal coaching program in BX. Here we develop the coaches into becoming a BX-coach. The first course has a really fundamental social approach. They reflect and learn about behaviour around, and communication with, children. The next courses will work more on the holistic approach, and also how to stimulate active participation. Every year
they will attend our internal coaching courses and also we demand them to follow the Belgian federation’s courses.

To make it “safer” for a player to become an active participant, it is important to create a safe to fail learning environment for all our players. This means that the training sessions are a place where they can try and fail, gain experience, get confident, try again, fail again and get encouragement. Here we are also talking about the holistic approach, and to make sure that the club really can focus on the whole player, we have hired professional social coaches which will have a clear responsibility on this part.
In our global view of football, the player’s whole development circles around different basic, tactical principles. This means that there is always an overarching tactical principle. Even if we always have a principle above, it does not mean that we always have a direct focus on tactics during training sessions. Within each tactical principle, we have several different themes. For instance, when the tactical offensive principle is penetration, one of the themes will be 1v1 offensive. When all technical themes are subordinated tactical principles, the training sessions will progressively result in a great understanding of the game.
Tactical periodization is a good way to systemize the planning, and our macro model is shown above. It is our half-year plan, and we go through this twice a year. When we put two opposing principles together, we call it a basic concept. Our meso cycle shows our basic concepts. After being through the attacking phase, the defensive phase and the transition phase, we move to the next basic concept. Our micro cycle is therefore the period that we are working with each principle.

Our tactical periodization is based on our global approach. In every meso cycle the coaches will have different goals they will try to reach. Every training session will be planned with a focus on the micro cycle and the themes within. The coaches will adapt their coaching to each theme and have three fixed coaching expressions in use every training. Two of them are permanent while the third is alternating given the theme.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

Nurturing our kids’ talents and create great future players should be the main role of our club. All clubs have their own traditions and we need to create ours. There is no single recipe for success. There is always more to learn. There are always other options. I believe that the most important though is that based on knowledge and research you are able to make some choices. We need to be daring and make changes to improve. When the direction is set in accordance to our vision, we must follow our philosophy and pursue our objectives with perseverance. It is not only a question of resources; it is a question of knowledge, spirit and belief.

I have always been of the opinion that the environment actually shapes a player more than any coach. That even the most talented coaches need to respect this fact. The creation of the environment are the key to development. With our way, we have the idea to work towards a BX environment. You start with the relation between the individual, the respect and the attitude towards learning and improving. Our goal must be to bring this not only to the team we coach, but also to the whole club and finally you have positive impact on your entire community.
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“We start from scratch” was the name of this project in the beginning. Because that is what we did. We started from scratch. Literally. No name, no colors, no players. The journey so far has been exceptional, and at this point BX Brussels is located at several places around Brussels, giving the chance to over 1000 players.

Starting a football club from scratch in Brussels can be challenging. The established clubs in Brussels are already turning down players because they do not have enough pitches available. This is also challenging for us. There are a lot of kids wanting to play, and we have to turn some of them down because of the fact that we are lacking pitches. For us it is really important to give as many players as possible the chance to play for BX.

Using this assignment to learn and explore from clubs that are renowned for their knowledge of youth development—create a training model that takes the considerations of top player development in a social context. Our social context. Our social project. Our players. Their potential. We want to fulfil our players´ potential, both on and off the field!

As the head of youth in an ambitious club, I want to expand my knowledge of youth development. Learning from some of the best across Europe and trying to bring this knowledge to my staff in Brussels is a big motivation. There is a great challenge in BX, as we will try to keep quality within quantity. An incredible amount of resources is put into youth player development across Europe. I need to figure out what key factors we can transfer to our club and create a training model to make the maximum out of our potential.
METHOD:

In this assignment, my qualitative approach has been around site visits and conversations with club staff. With the purpose of creating a solid platform, the questions have been connected to the basic principles of training with a view on the technical, tactical, physical and psychological aspects of the game.

My intention has been to put the first layer by presenting the basic principle of training at a theoretical level before I move on to the lesson-learned part. Here I intend to share a wide range of examples on how the actual clubs connected to the theory in practice.

The following clubs have been a part of this survey; Anderlecht, Brann, Everton, Lausanne, Manchester City, Nottingham Forest, Sogndal and Standard Liege.

I have chosen to write the assignment in English as linguistic skills are part of my personal development plan within the UEFA A course and it will be easier to transfer the knowledge to my own club.

SUMMARY:

It has been a great journey. Getting to know so many competent and great football people. I could have written multiple pages on each single club on its own, but I believe the selection process has been a great learning experience. The comparisons and similarities between clubs of different sizes, different countries and cultures has given me a broad selection of opinions. There is a clear trend that the successful clubs are very conscious about their didactic methods, involving the players in the development process, considering the whole person when it comes to the total load. There is a clear message that the optimal youth academy cannot be sustainable without a great infrastructure. We need to train with the highest possible tempo, playing the actual game with quality. With the creation of our training model, I have been trying to transfer the knowledge that is suitable to my club and our context. There is so much to learn, there are so many competent people, so many great clubs. It’s been hard work, it’s been a pleasure. Enjoy the read!
MANCHESTER CITY, ETIHAD CAMPUS.
Manchester City's academy has since its new incarnation in 1998 produced more professional players than any other Premier League club. To date, the club has produced 15 graduates who have received full international call-ups from their various countries; 14 that have represented their respective countries at the 'Under-21' or 'Under-20' level; 35 who have progressed on to become City first team players at some point; and more than 60 that are currently playing professional league football. Carrington is responsible for such graduates as Micah Richards, Michael Johnson, QPR's Nedum Onuoha and Shaun Wright-Phillips, Fulham's Dickson Etuhu and Stoke City's Glenn Whelan and Stephen Ireland. Even with those results, City has totally renovated their youth structure and taken the concept of a training complex to a completely new level. The brand new(opened the week before I visited) City Football Academy or Etihad Campus is indeed special, arguably the most sophisticated and high-tech training ground in world football, where the facilities simply have to be seen to be believed.
There are a total of 16 outdoor pitches, including the main Academy Stadium pitch, a protected first-team pitch for set-piece work and 14 other playing surfaces, plus two half-pitches for goalkeeper training. Such is the attention to detail that there are different grass surfaces on which training can be alternated to suit the surfaces of different opponents. There is also an indoor artificial pitch at the Academy, it is of course the biggest in the country.

In both the first team and youth part of the building there are three gyms, each focusing on a different area – strength and conditioning, pilates and technical skills. There are ultra-sound rooms, several physio and massage rooms, as well as a hydrotherapy area that includes six different pools. There is a cold plunge pool at just four degrees, hot plunge pool at 36 degrees, resistance pools in which players can walk against a current to aid their recovery from injury, as well as a three-lane main swimming pool, which also contains water pressure jets to aid player recovery. Adjacent to the pool area is the first-team changing room, a circular design to avoid cliques and to maintain a more inclusive environment. There are multiple players’ lounges, with designer chairs, sofas, dozens of giant flat-screen are actually everywhere you look throughout the entire complex - as well as computer terminals for the players, pool tables and a refectory where the players can eat before and after training.
A weatherproof video cart films every City training session from pitchside, so the club’s video analysis teams can do their work to the maximum extent.

City also have a ‘player care department’, which caters for all the off-field needs of the players, in particular those from overseas who may find it difficult adjusting to the English culture.

After the opening of the academy, City no longer stay in hotels before home games, in the campus there are 32 suite bedrooms for the players and coaching staff, based on four-star hotels, all based on modern hotel designs and tailored to suit the needs of the players, including specifically-made beds and blackout blinds. The Academy accommodations are equally impressive, with 40 rooms for aspiring young players, as well as additional accommodation for parents and relatives if they need to stay overnight. There is an additional parents’ area, where families can spend time while youngsters train and play. The administration and welfare area are designed to ensure young players receive the best education and advice as their careers progress.

MARK ALLEN, HEAD ACADEMY DIRECTOR:
Mark is born in Llanrumney, England. He joined Manchester City in 2009 following almost two decades in the media industry. He played himself for Swindon Town Football Club in the early 1980s when he was awarded a scholarship to study business and accountancy at the University of San Diego – with his success featured in the Echo in 1983.

He then worked for broadcaster HTV while playing semi-professionally for clubs including Cwmbran and Port Talbot. Mark then spent 14 years at music network MTV, where he became managing director of the broadcasting division, and worked as managing director at London-based Deluxe Digital before joining the Sky Blues.

In City, he as a head of academy is the leader of all the professionals working on the greatest football facility in the world!
I would like to thank Mark for his great hospitality and for shearing his and City’s knowledge.

RODOLFO BORELL, HEAD TECHNICAL DIRECTOR:
Rodolfo is a former Barcelona and Liverpool coach. Rodolfo Borrell has the role as Global Technical Director in Manchester City.

Borrell, 43, was appointed at Liverpool by Rafa Benitez in 2009 after being credited with helping to develop young talents such as Lionel Messi and Cesc Fabregas while at Barcelona. During his four-year spell at Anfield Borrell oversaw the development of Raheem Sterling Jon Flanagan and Suso, who have all made significant first team contributions.

In City he link up with former Barca colleagues Ferran Soriano and Txiki Begiristain. At the Etihad Campus he will help develop City’s coaching ideals throughout their various franchises across the world, including 2015 MLS newcomers New York City FC and Australian outfit Melbourne Heart.

Borrell was famously Lionel Messi’s first coach at Barcelona’s famed La Masia academy. He is recognised for his expertise in youth football and is expected to help drive forward City’s massive ambition. It was great talking to a coach with those incredible reference points.
SOGNDAL FOTBALL, FOSSHAUGANE CAMPUS
Sogndal is renowned to get the maximum out of their players and have a history of being a player development club. They produce own players from their area to play in the top division even if they work with far smaller numbers than competing clubs across the country. Sogndal has also been able to build an impressive infrastructure working close together with the local college and university. Players such as Tore Andre Flo, Jostein Flo, Eirik Bakke, Håvard Flo, Terje Skjeldestad, Tommy Øren, Per Egil Flo and Even Hovland has broken through their ranks.

SEBASTIAN KALDESTAD, HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT:
Currently working as a Head of Development in Sogndal Fotball, Sebastian has been living through seven head coaches and are a proof of Sogndals consistency in the youth development area. He has broad working experience within the club. He has held the position as Youth coach, First team match-analyst, Coach coordinator and Academy Director. He has a broad formal sports and pedagogic education with a University degree. He also has been working for the Norwegian football federation. Thank you for the numerous of conversations.
“RSC Anderlecht has to profile as a high quality youth academy in order to act as an example for youth formation and to act as a relay station between national clubs and international top clubs”

Herman Van Holsbeeck, General Manager RSC Anderlecht

Anderlecht is the most successful Belgian football team in Belgium and in European competitions. The club is widely renowned for producing great players. The financial competition from other leagues has taken their prospects away from the club too soon in recent years. When it comes to producing talents, the whole of Europe wants to know their recipe. The club has produced many outstanding talents over the past few years. Manchester City captain Vincent Kompany spent three years in the first team before moving to Hamburg for 10 million Euros in 2006. Romelu Lukaku scored over 100 goals for Anderlecht youth teams and made his debut for the first team at 16 before a multi-million pound move to Chelsea followed two years later. Adnan Januzaj is another who played his trade at the club. The list of outstanding players produced at the club is long but far from finished. They have a goal of producing two players for the first team each season. The youngsters coming through must be able to play first division and Champions League football between ages of 18 and 21. A great example of the present is Youri Tielemans, the 17-year-old sensation already approaching 50 games in the first team!

OLEG IACHTCHOUK, U14 ACADEMY COACH:

Oleg played for my team last season; he is now brought back to Anderlecht in their youth setup. He currently coaches the elite U-14 team. Oleg first made a name for himself in the Ukrainian Premier League as a 17-year old, on match day 1 he scored a hat trick against Shakhtar Donetsk! He finished the season as the club’s top scorer with 10 goals for a team that barely avoided relegation. He also made a lethal partnership with Andrei Shevchenko for the Ukrainian
U-18 national team in the European Championship were he became the team’s top scorer.

Iachtchouk’s talent caught the eye of many European clubs, PSV, proved the greatest interest. He finally signed for Anderlecht. He made a good start in Anderlecht but then became injured for long periods of time. In some seasons, he barely played at all because of recurring injuries, yet Anderlecht extended his contract in 2001 for another five years! In 2006, he left the club, having played 119 league matches and scored 31 goals during ten seasons. He also played in Greece and later had great spells for Cercle Brugge.

EVERTON FC, FINCH FARM

Everton’s Academy is based at Finch Farm on the outskirts of Liverpool. It is famously renowned for being one of the most successful academy set ups in England having produced the likes of Victor Anichebe, Richard Dunne, Tony Hibbert, Francis Jeffers, Leon Osman, Jack Rodwell, Ross Barkley and of course Wayne Rooney.

The club officially moved to Finch Farm in 2007 and now uses it for all academy teams as well as the first team. The main building is designed to satisfy all the needs of players and staff. There is a fully equipped gym, a hydrotherapy swimming pool which is adjacent to the physiotherapy room, an indoor artificial pitch, a media centre, a room specifically for video analysis and of course all the necessary commodities such as dressing rooms and catering services. In the coming years there are plans to add accommodation for the full-time academy players. The exterior boasts 10 full size football pitches including one artificial and one exact recreation of the pitch at Goodison Park as well as specialist training areas for strength and goalkeeper training.

JOHN DOOLAN, U15 ACADEMY COACH:

John is very experienced in terms of English football having over 550 appearances in the Football League ranging from Conference to League One
with clubs such as Mansfield Town, Doncaster or Blackpool. After ending his playing career he took on coaching at the club he supported as a boy, Everton FC. He has been in the youth set-up for the past 7 years working with the U15 team, contributing to the rise to the first team of many players including of Ross Barkley.

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**TIM DEVINE, ACADEMY DIRECTOR:**

Tim has progressively worked his way up the ranks of elite football in the Merseyside area. Formerly Education and Welfare Officer at Liverpool FC he then made the switch to Everton FC where he became Head of Academy Management. In June 2014 he was given the role of Academy Director as an interim before the switch was made permanent in November of the same year. His appointment was part of many changes in the Academy. The objective is for Tim to work closely with U21 coach David Unsworth and Professional Development Co-Ordinator Joe Royle to maintain the level of performance of the academy and push on to new heights.

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**NOTTINGHAM FOREST, THE NIGEL DOUGHTY ACADEMY**

In recent years, the Nottingham Forest first team has struggled to reach the levels of the team that dominated England and Europe in the early 80s. However, their academy has always been held in very high regard. Known as “football purists” they have a history of producing technically skilled players but cannot hold on to them for too long. Recently they have brought striker Patrick Bamford through their ranks and lost him to Chelsea while centre back Jamaal Lascelles and goalkeeper Karl Darlow (tipped by some to be the successor for Joe Hart for England) have had to be sold to Newcastle.

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**LAWRIE DUDFIELD, FOREST EDUCATION CENTER:**

Lawrie’s road to working with Nottingham Forest in the Community started as a professional footballer. The highlight of his career being playing for Leicester City in the Premier League. After spells in lower league clubs such as Notts...
County and Hull City he retired in 2011. His approach to the next phase of his life was to earn the right to work in football full-time again by starting as a volunteer in the Nottingham Forest Community program. He has now worked his way up and is currently Delivery Development Manager.

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**LAUSANNE SPORT, FOOT ACADEMIE**

Lausanne Sport work with an interesting structure. Since 2005 they have created an association called Team Vaud Foot Espoirs (TVFE) which regroups 9 local clubs under one umbrella in order to get the official level 1 “Academy” label. In recent years, this has paid dividends as the team reached the Swiss first division and Europa League producing several youth team internationals along the way.

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**GEOFF GIBAS, HEAD OF ÉCOLE DE FOOT**

Geoff has a very long career in football in three countries. Every step of the way he has been linked to a university and a football club. This process started in Belgium where he was professor of Business at Solvay as well as coaching for national league sides UR Namur and RJ Wavre. He then moved on to Monaco where he specialised in the Marketing of luxury goods at the International University of Monaco. His work in football at AS Monaco was two-fold as he was both trainer in the école de foot and specific physical and technical coach for the U18 team. His latest move took him to Switzerland where he works at Les Roches Gruyères UAS alongside his role as Head of the école de foot at Lausanne Sport.
STANDARD DE LIEGE, ACADÉMIE ROBERT LOUIS DREYFUS

Standard has always been one of the best teams in the Belgian top flight. They cannot constantly compete financially with the likes of Anderlecht but they do have a history of producing top class players through their academy “Académie Robert Louis Dreyfus” which was opened in 2007. The most potent illustration is the midfield duo of Marouane Fellaini, Axel Witsel which, with the help of Steven Defour transferred from Genk, led them to two league titles in succession. Nowadays, the core of that team is reincarnated in the Belgian national team. More recently, names such as Eliaquim Mangala, Christian Benteke or Kevin Mirallas, have also come through.

DAVID GIBAS, HEAD OF SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

David has a vast range of experience in football in Belgium and internationally as a lower national league player and coach. But his main area of expertise comes from his academic background. After completing his BSc. in Psychology at the Université Catholique de Louvain in Belgium he started his specialisation in sport by undertaking a MSc. Sport and Exercise Psychology at Bangor University in Wales. This paved the way for his PhD Sports Science (co-funding Management) at Université Paris Sud (France). In September 2013, he was officially instated as Head of Sport Psychology at Standard de Liege.

SK BRANN

Brann is historically one of the major clubs in Norway in terms of public interest, and hence there are high expectations for the club every season. Last season they relegated with a budget matching the top clubs in the Norwegian Premier division and a spoken goal to reach top three. Historically they are not known to produce their own players, but since they overhauled their youth program in 2007 they have been very successful. In recent years they have been one of the clubs that have given most youth players their debut at first team level. Most of these players have been raised in their own academy, and
last season culminating with Boys 19 winning the Norwegian Cup and being rewarded qualification for the Youth Champions League.

YNGVE MYHRE

Yngve joined Brann in 2007 and was therefore ending last season as one of the longest lasting coaches in the whole club. Educated as a physiotherapist, his main tasks has been injury prevention and physical training, both for Brann and Olympiatoppen. Continuously he has kept working on his competences with several formal and informal courses. Over the years he has built both reputation and experience, and starting this season he has been brought to Sogndal as head of the medical team.
ACADEMY QUESTIONS

Questions of principles: Emphasis on mental, technical, physical, tactical and social abilities.

How do you take into account the principle of progression in your youth development?

- Do you have clear targets for each attribute for every age group or do you only work with a final target?
- How do new players adapt in the club? I guess you train more, how do you take that into consideration?
- What amount of training hours do you want to reach for the different age groups and how is your progression?
- How do you mentally prepare a kid to be a first team player?
- Do you work on the tactical concepts with all the kids? Individual concepts or team concept.
- How do you work on the tactical concepts with the smallest kids? And how do you progress?
- Is there a philosophy within your club for the progression within a training session? (Easy → Difficult, difficult → easy, quite the same level everywhere...)

How do you take into account the principle of specificity in your youth development?

- How much of the training is with the ball? And how many players share the same ball?
- Do you work on mental training specifically, like with visualisation or teaching the kids other concrete techniques?
- To what extent do you take into account tactical aspects of the game in your training? Differences between age groups?
- When do you start to define position profiles? How early do you do specific training for different roles? Technical/Tactical/Physical? Do you have a player profile program? Ex: Future fullback in the club need to look like..
How do you take into account the **principle of stress and adaptation/overload** in your youth development?

- **How do you challenge the kids to develop on the technical level? On the tactical level? On the mental level? Is the space important to you? Do you often play on small areas or what is your philosophy? How do you overload technical training?**

- **Do you work on the social aspect of the players’ careers?**

- **How do you teach the kids to deal with off the pitch issues? Do you develop safety and security within or do you push them to handle pressure?**

- **How much organised football should a 5-8 year old train? Etc.?**

How do you take into account the **principle of variation** in your youth development?

- **How do you make sure your players keep the motivation? How do you balance specificity and variation?**

- **Are other sportive activities a part of your development plan?**

- **Do you encourage your kids to do other sports or what is your point of view?**

- **Is there a philosophy within your club for the variation within a training session?**

How do you take into account the **principle of individualisation** in your youth development?

- **How is your training set up? Does every age group train apart?**

- **How do you work with differentiation and individualisation?**

- **Do the players in the same age groups have the same amount of training hours?**

- **How do you handle the difference in level within an age group? What is your policy?**

- **On the physical side, do the kids have the same program?**

- **How are your relations with the school? Control of the total load.**

- **Control and evaluation of the training? Evaluation of the athlete?**
How do you take into account the **principle active participation** in your youth development?

- How would you describe your teaching/coaching philosophy? Do you especially embrace some didactic methods?
- What kind of players do you want to create?
- Is active participation important in your coaching? If, yes, for which age groups do you find it most crucial?
- Do you apply concrete mental training techniques in the youth programme?
- How is your attitude towards awareness and perception training?
- Do the kids have to do written reports, like a training diary?

How do you take into account the principle of **individual and holistic stimulation** in your youth development?

- What are your scouting criteria?
- How do you select players?
- When do you select players and why?
- How many of the kids in the early selection process do progress all the way?
- Do you have any statistics that tell you which players succeed depending on their time of arrival in your academy?
- When a player is no longer good enough, does the club have a philosophy/plan for how to deal with it?
- How important are the social values to your youth development? What means do you have to work on and follow up that aspect?
- To achieve success, direction and perseverance are key words. What is the most important area of focus in the club if you had to narrow it down?