

# Evaluating Effective Player Development In Football

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Measuring player development accurately is very difficult, this is because changes are constantly occurring within a process and over the period of time. As Player Development Advisor to The Football Association for five years (and having been involved in international football since 1982) I would suggest the time for evaluating development is upon us. The following framework may offer a consistent evaluation of development programmes.

If we are attempting to measure development we must first of all define our desired outcomes and then ensure they are consistent - even then we will probably find that the formula is neither simple or fully objective.

## Current evaluation

The winning of games or selection to age group teams are simple measures and can be measured easily but are they good indicators of a successful development process? These two examples are often used but unlikely to reflect effective development and will probably be misleading on their own. Therefore, what are the factors which identify a successful development programme?

Consider the following academic example:

When measuring "learning", it is often the outcome on a given task that is taken as an accurate indicator that some level of learning has taken place.

However, in football this interpretation can be misleading especially if the developing player has learned something but has not yet been able to demonstrate it via a football performance.

The same argument may be made for a development process.

In any single time frame, measures may be an indication of how much development has taken place. However, the true extent of the range and depth of development may be hidden until a later stage.

It is understandably important to have some measure or collection of measures that will offer indications as to whether the development

processes are working. The complex nature of development and learning has to identify which criteria which can be used in trying to measure effective development systems.

The football **quality** the individual player demonstrates will be the crucial measure of a successful programme.

## Time scales

Evaluation of effective player development must be time defined for accurate measurements to be taken.

Consider the time-based issues involved in trying to measure a process whilst it is still

progressing. Which time frame should be considered, 1 year, 3 years, 5 years, 10 years?

Often a variety of different time frames are used to reflect different aspects of the development programme at different ages.

Time frames will be important if the development process is a long term commitment. In this case a graduated or staging system of evaluation for a successful development programme may be beneficial. Therefore, can age group indicators be considered at varied ages; eg. 9 years old through to 21 years old?

- Most effective player development programmes are based on a ten-year process.
- If the decision is to measure half way through the process, effective development may appear unsuccessful.
- After ten years the process may be complete and producing a successful development outcome.

Alternatively, is accurate measurement of the player development process only possible after adulthood is reached?

The criteria for evaluation may be measured subjectively or objectively.

- Objective measures are the easiest to collect.
- Subjective opinions may be equally effective for the evaluation process.

## Objective Measures: -

### Numbers and Volume

Using objective measures as evaluation tools will mostly measure "volume".

- Some examples;
- Number of players in club 1<sup>st</sup> team.
- Number of team starts at senior level.
- Number of players progressing from team to team.
- Number of matches and tournaments played.
- Number of games: won - lost - drawn.
- Number of players used.
- Number of players retained in the system.
- Number of players new into system.
- Time spent on the field of play (experience measure).
- Hours spent on developing the player.
- Cost of the development system.
- Providing players for football, eg market value of player.
- Staff cost/hour of development.
- Staff to player ratios.

## Add your own measures here.....

Key Issues - Quality or Quantity?

- Maximising the player's potential is the highest outcome that a successful developer of young players can achieve.
- Identifying the potential for the level of football quality is the key to the player's development outcome and has to meet the standard required by individual clubs
- A highly efficient youth coach with an effective development programme may rarely provide a player for 1<sup>st</sup> team selection.
- The reason behind this dilemma lies with the initial assessment of the potential football quality the player possesses.
- The playing standard of the club will establish the quality required.
- This may limit the number of players who meet the standard required.

- Obviously, the higher profile clubs will have greater expectations, therefore, the more difficult it becomes to find and develop the "quality" aspect of players.

This outcome is reliant on two factors:

- 1 having the expertise of assessing the "quality" of the players football ability in the recruitment and early development phases
- 2 providing valid opinions with regard to the players "potential" for ongoing improvement which will meet the club standard

Question for you to address:

How is the "football quality" of the player evaluated?

### Subjective Measures:- Quality

The critical evaluation factor will be the football "quality" the player demonstrates.

Some examples:

Opinions from coaches regarding current playing ability.

Opinions from coaches regarding playing potential.

Comparison to other players within the age range considered.

Comparison to past players who established a bench mark.

How does one club programme compare to others in England?

### Add your own measures here.....

### Review:

The review of recruitment and development strategies around the world demonstrates three major factors which if not established are likely to compromise the desired outcomes;

- 1 Time scales and opportunity to play: 10 year cycles of learning are not unusual. Development response will be affected by;
  - The environment created by the coach.
  - Geographical and cultural influences.
  - Club expectation over time.
- 2 The creation of effective teaching and learning environments:
  - This process may include many alternatives.
  - Problem solving is one example.
- 3 Identifying and evaluating current football ability and the potential for improvement: If first team status is the measured outcome;

- Effective talent identification will be essential if the player is to develop to the club standard.
- Recognise that realistic expectations for 1<sup>st</sup> team selection is often age related.
- The higher standard leagues will limit the 1<sup>st</sup> team opportunities for young players.

Question for you to address: **How is effective development measured when league position and winning trophies are removed from the evaluation?**

### Talent identification examples:

- 1 Identifying "current performers" who are able to compete successfully, demonstrate effective understanding and be physically and psychologically able to deal with the competition demands.
  - These players are more likely to be identified for winning matches now.

Question for you to address: **Does the player also possess potential for further improvements?**

- 1 To identify "potential performers" who may be currently having difficulties in competing consistently, either technically cognitively or physically within the competition demands.
  - These players are more likely to be identified for a longer development period and they may need some allowances for their stage of development in the match assessment recorded by the coach or scout.

Question for you to address: **Does the player possess potential for further improvements - if so, how much and when?**

- 2 To identify any combination of the first two examples.
  - These players are more difficult to assess in matches or development courses. The players will demonstrate varied stages of maturity which may confuse opinions.

Question for you to address: **Does the coach or scout understand the changing characteristics of maturation and how does having this knowledge affect their expectations and assessments of the players?**

### Reminder:

Age groups classifications:

Age references are for players who represent the norm for their year group. For players above or below the norm, adjustments have to be made in order to accommodate their age (eldest/youngest) within the year, or their advanced or delayed stage of technical, psychological, cognitive, physical or social maturity.

The interpretation of age reference has to address these issues.

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