

Being in the right place at the right time

Resources and barriers in the transition from youth to senior in a Danish elite football club

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This instrumental case study investigated the internal and external resources and barriers in football players' transition from junior to senior in an elite football club. Data was gathered through interviews with two coaches and five players who recently had transitioned from youth to senior elite level. Thematic analysis uncovered specific intrapersonal and environmental resources and/or barriers. The findings suggest that football clubs need to both psychologically educate and prepare youth players to the transition, but also the youth players' near and professional relations in the transition from junior to senior level.

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Introduction

The transition from youth to senior is considered to be the most critical transition of a sports career (Stambulova et al., 2009). In the sport psychology literature career transitions are associated with resources and barriers (Stambulova, 2003). If an athlete has to overcome too many barriers compared to his available resources, there is a risk he cannot adjust to the changes brought on by the transition, causing the athlete to terminate his career (Vanden Auweele et al., 2004; Stambulova et al., 2009). Schlossberg (1981) suggested a definition of transition as “an event or non-event [which] results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behaviour and relationships” (1981, p. 5). Parameters such as role changes, onset, timing and duration represent the characteristics of a particular transition, while environmental factors and the characteristics of the individual interacts with the transition in the on-going process of adjustment (Stambulova et al., 2009; Wylleman & Lavalée, 2004; Morris et al., 2016).

In football, successfully transitioning from youth to senior elite is like going through the eye of a needle. For instance, Green (2009) emphasizes that just 1% of the 10,000 hopeful boys who daily play in England’s football academies are likely to make it as professional footballers (Green, 2009, p. 7). Thus, the chances of hopeful, young football players that dream about a professional career are slim indeed. In the Danish Premier Division, the turnover has decreased from DKK 3.25 to 2.06 billion from 2008 to 2015 (Storm, 2016). This decrease demands more efficient investments than previously, in spite of which a remarkably small share of Danish clubs’ budgets is invested in talent development. Instead, the major share is dedicated to salaries in the professional departments (Larsen, 2013). This seem paradoxical, as the existence of the football clubs depend on having a cost-competitive team in the future. Moreover, Morris and colleagues (2016) have recently pointed out that the athlete’s experience of the youth to senior transition has not been fully investigated, and that further research in this area can justify a more substantial financial investment in talent development.

A number of studies highlight that the internal resources needed in the successful development of a youth athlete are different from the internal resources associated with success for the professional athlete (Larsen et al., 2014; Abbott & Collins, 2004; Stambulova et al., 2009), such as being able to balance sport and school, being self-conscious, staying motivated, working hard, being able to plan and organise, and to have general social skills

(Larsen et al., 2014). However, being successful at senior elite level requires other psychological skills. For instance, Larsen and colleagues (2014) and Abbott and Collins (2004) argues that goal-setting is an important internal resource which characterizes the most successful elite athletes. An English interview study describes how youth football players expressed high motivation and anxiety before transitioning into senior football (Morris et al., 2016). Two weeks after the transition the players reported higher confidence about their ability to succeed in senior sport and maintained high levels of motivation to succeed. Findings from a recent Swedish study (Franck et al., 2018) show that athletes of different individual and team sports perceives the transition from youth to senior differently since they have to handle different issues regarding the transition. Results showed that internal resources, such as athletes' identities, motivation and their psychological skills, had great impact on the youth to senior transition. Even though external pressure from the environment and support from significant others were also found to be important, Swedish studies in different sports have indicated that athletes' internal resources are of greater importance in the youth to senior transition (Franck et al., 2018; Stambulova et al., 2012). However, these studies are primarily quantitative and focused on both individual and team sports (Franck et al., 2018; Stambulova et al., 2012). Therefore, it is difficult to conclude, whether contextual factors play a unique role in the transition from youth to senior in sports as football.

The external resources include the support that a player receives from his near relationships (parents, friends, coaches, peers) and remote environment (sports federation, education, media). In an English study (Morris et al., 2016), the players perceived family, friends and coaches as both a resource and a barrier in relation to the transition. Furthermore, the results from a quantitative Spanish study indicate that players who prioritize their sport to the same degree as their education are more harmoniously passionate and intrinsically motivated. This provide them with more resources in the transition from youth to senior (Chamorro et al., 2016). Additionally, Richardson et al. (2013) argues that the transition from youth to senior is characterized by a change from a youth environment which is characterized by support and protection to a "brutal" environment that prioritizes success and where mistakes are less accepted. A qualitative study (Tønnesen, 2015) investigated the selection process and career transitions of Norwegian football players. One of the main findings was that the communication about expectations between the club and the players was insufficient in the selection and career transition processes. The results of the study indicate that specific external

factors can influence career transitions in team sports such as football. At the same time, several scientists have suggested that future investigations into career transitions from youth to senior should explore contextual factors in particular (Stambulova et al., 2009; Alfermann, 2009; Debois et al., 2015). Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate the internal and external resources and barriers associated with a football player's transition from youth to senior in a Danish elite football club.

Method

Kruise (2008) argues that case studies are applicable when complex phenomena are investigated. Since one player's transition from youth to senior involves several significant others, such as teammates, coaches and parents, this transition is considered complex. The current investigation is an instrumental case study (Stake, 2005), the purpose of which is to gain knowledge and understand a special phenomenon (transitions) in a specific case (elite football). The elite football club AaB was chosen as case for the current study, since AaB is one of the clubs in Europe that gives most playing time to the players of their own youth programme (Dehn, 2017). Hence, multiple players in the club has experienced the transition from youth to senior.

Case: Elite football club AaB

AaB plays in the Danish Premier Division, Superligaen, and is geographically situated in the Northern part of Denmark. The club brands itself as "Northern Jutland's Team", which is emphasized by the fact that AaB cooperates with more than 120 local clubs in the entire region of Northern Jutland. AaB was founded in 1885 and is the second oldest club of the Danish Premier Division. AaB has taken part in all seasons of the Danish Premier Division since its introduction in 1991, and has won the Premiership four times, most recently in 2014 when the club also won the Cup.

In the beginning of the current study, 14 out of the 24 first team players had transitioned from the club's youth team. With such a high rate of home-grown players, it is interesting to investigate resources and barriers associated with the transition from youth to senior in AaB.

Participants

We interviewed players, since they can pass on information about their own experience of the youth to senior transition, and thereby provide profound understandings of the transition that can be transferred to other similar contexts (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, we carried out a focus group interview with two coaches, since the coach is one of the most important factors in the development of an athlete (Bloom, 1985; Côté et al., 1995; Côté et al., 2010), and thereby has abundant knowledge regarding players' transition from youth to senior.

Five players and two coaches participated in the current study ($n = 7$). The inclusion criteria for the players were that they had been part of AaB since U15 and they had transitioned to the first team. Four out of the five players had transitioned to the first team at the same time while the fifth player transitioned to the first team three years earlier. This player was no longer part of the club and played at a lower competitive level during the interview phase. One of the four other players had been sold to a higher ranked club abroad prior to the interview phase. The coaches were included as they work with transition players on a daily basis at the club.

Semi-structured interview

The data of the current study was collected through interviews with the participating players and a focus group interview with the participating coaches. The interviews were considered elite interviews since the participants are considered elite individuals (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). In an elite interview it is important that the interviewer acquires knowledge about the transition from youth to senior, limits the use of academic language and has acquired knowledge about the participant's social situation and life story (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2015). Therefore, background knowledge on both the case and the participants was collected prior to the interviews. The interview guide consists of open-ended questions with four main themes derived from Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), which stands for process, person, context, and time. *Process* is considered a key theme in the current study as it represents all activities that support development, which in the particular context of football can be any kind of formal and in-formal training. Any *Person* assumes to possess individual characteristics which in turn influence the direction and speed of the development. A person is furthermore embedded in different micro and macro environments such as their

club, team, family, etc. and is simultaneously embedded in different time periods: micro, meso and macro time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Two interviewers asked questions and follow-up questions during the interviews to obtain information about the participants' perceptions of the youth to senior transition (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The use of two interviewers was chosen because the participants are used to answering questions from the media about themselves and the club. Also, it strengthens the reflection of the interviewer that he does not have to keep the conversation afloat by himself (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2015; Bechhofer et al., 1984). To facilitate a comfortable setting for the participants, the interviews were conducted in the club house at AaB's training facility (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The interviews with the two players who were no longer part of AaB was conducted using Skype and at the player's education university campus respectively. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) argues that the use of Skype in qualitative research is a flexible method to solve logistic issues, which was the case since this participant lives abroad. However, building confidentiality with the participant can be a challenge if the participant has a reserved personality. Yet, this was not deemed the case with this particular participant (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). The interviews lasted between 36 to 72 minutes, and inspired by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) different types of questions (introductory, follow-up, specifying, projective, structural and interpretive questions) were employed to facilitate participants reflecting over questions and gaining new knowledge. The interviews ended when the participants had no further contributions on their experiences with the youth to senior transition. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. With inspiration from *Member Reflection* all transcriptions were e-mailed to the participants for them to read and reflect with the opportunity to send back corrections (Smith, 2017). One participant had one correction to his transcription as he changed one of his statements saying he was "the best at the youth team" to being "one of the best at the youth team". In addition, all transcriptions were approved and uploaded in the software NVivo (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013) where the analysis was conducted. To anonymize the players and coaches, the participants were provided with an alias.

Data analysis

Inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis of the transcriptions was conducted using a theoretic thematic analysis. The thematic analysis was divided in six phases. In the first phase all transcriptions were read thoroughly multiple times for familiarization of the data. The second phase was

completed using an inductive approach, which is a suggested method in a case like the current as the transition from youth to senior has not yet adequately elucidated (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). For that reason, all relevant quotes regarding the youth to senior transition were coded and named in accordance with their contents. 74 codes were identified in phase 2. In phase 3 the 74 codes were reduced to 12 themes by merging codes that was considered to represent the same meaning. The analysis was carried out searching for semantic themes, which is done in order to identify the personal perceptions and opinions of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme was identified when it had high relevance to the transition from youth to senior (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In phase 4 the themes were revisited in order for the researchers to determine the essence of the respective themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During phase 4 one theme was discarded. In phase 5 the themes were named in accordance with their content. In phase 6 every theme was described and supported with quotes (Smith & Caddock, 2002). This developed a greater understanding of the content of the themes and from this understanding multiple themes were merged bringing the number of themes down to 9. Subsequently, two high-order themes internal and external resources and barriers were created in which the 9 low-ordered themes fitted. In the current study explicit resources or barriers were identified, while some resources can also function as barriers and vice versa. The identified resources and barriers are illustrated in Figure 1 (overleaf).

Analysis

The purpose of the current study was to investigate which internal and external resources and barriers in the transition from youth to first team are perceived by players and coaches in a Danish elite football club.

Internal resources: Psychological skills

Both players and coaches described psychological skills among players as important for the young players' possibility to adjust to the new settings in the club's first team. Coaches emphasize that an intrinsic desire to develop and an ability to take responsibility for their own development is essential for players in order to successfully transition into the first team.

Sepp (coach): "(...) if they do not aim to improve all the time and try to gradually develop their skills all the time in the areas that they

can improve. If they don't possess that drive, then we can bend over backwards all we want. We have experienced several examples in this regard. Then they will be de-selected. So that intrinsic desire towards learning and to improve, I think it is crucial, unless you are so insanely talented, that you already possess the required competencies, but I have seldom seen that."

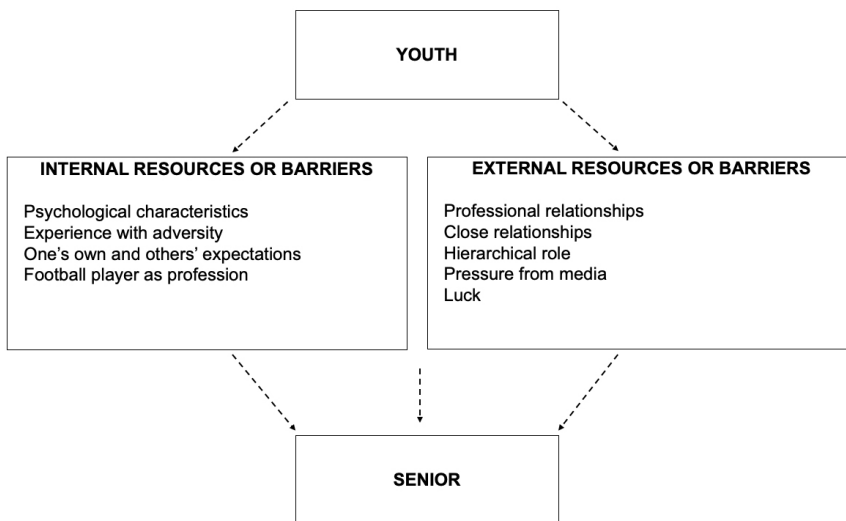


Figure 1. *An overview of internal and external resources and barriers in the transition from junior to senior football player*

One of the coaches stresses that taking responsibility for your own development, and performing when it matters, are important resources. Furthermore, the participants reported that psychological skills such as volition, the ability to accept lack of playing time and setting long-term goals are resources. In addition, the coaches express that a lack of these psychological skills is a barrier.

Richard (coach): "(...) Those steps are hard to take, and it is about the mental game and the determination to get through the situation. And to be patient, because the things they think happen in a month might take two-and-half years, so I think that's one of the biggest challenges for some, and the ones who don't really understand this are in for a tough time. (...) Here, it can take some time, so this firmness, this will to practice and have a long-term perspective on things. If they don't have that, they are in for a very tough time."

Several players report that they spend time training on their own, which can be interpreted as a method to take responsibility for their development. Frank who now play at a lower domestic level, concedes that he did not possess the same drive as one of his teammates.

Frank: "I had this mindset that I was extremely willing to do everything to become as good a player as possible, while (first team player) also had this same mindset. But he didn't show it and he did even more. He was lifting weights when he was supposed to, but also when he was not supposed to. After team practice, he would have a shooting practice and was just always trying to improve, become as good as he could."

Both coaches and players perceive that possessing various psychological skills are important in the transition from youth to first team. If a player does not possess the required psychological skills it can be a barrier for the player's transition to the first team.

Internal resources: Experience with adversity

All participants mention that having experienced adversity as a youth player is an important resource in the transition from youth to first team. This statement can be exemplified by the fact that the four players in the current study who were still playing at AaB or at a higher ranked club abroad during the interview phase experienced adversity during their time as youth players in the club.

Morten: "Up and down. Is how I would put it. I started out when I was 8 and I played at all the first teams at U12, U13 and U14 and it went well from U13, U14 and U15 and when we moved up to U17 it went downhill for me. I was still very small. I wasn't as physical as some of the others, so several times I was thinking about quitting because the competition was so stiff. But I kept on working at it and in my second year as U17 it paid off. I developed a lot at this point. It went really quick."

Morten is still at AaB and described how he used the experienced adversity as a youth player to deal with the transition from youth to first team by working even harder. Frank, who now play at a lower domestic level only experienced adversity as he became a first team player. In addition, this

player reported that he could have benefitted from having experienced adversity as a youth player.

Frank: “(...) it was a bit like a bed of roses for me. The years as youth player. When I think back, those might have been the best ones of my football career so far. Because firstly, you didn’t experience this pressure that came with joining the first team. Secondly, from when I was 13 to 18 years old, I would describe myself as one of the best youth players at the club all those years.”

As pointed out, Frank is no longer at the club and during the interview he assessed that his lack of adversity as a youth player was one of the reasons, he did not make the transition from youth to first team.

Internal factors: Own and others’ expectations

In relation to the youth to first team transition the players had perceived how they themselves and the club had expectations regarding them and other players. The expectations were both highlighted as a resource and a barrier for the players.

Morten: “(...) in my own head I had some expectations for myself and some things I knew I could do, but I just couldn’t realize it, and at first that was very frustrating and again this was down to, if I had played with some U19 players then it wouldn’t have had any influence on me, then I just would have, well, played really well. But it affected me a lot. A little bit negatively.”

The following quote describes how a player perceive how high expectations put on by the environment becomes a barrier for another player.

Allan: “(...) there have been expectations to (current first team player) who was going to be the replacement for (current first team player). And also (former first team player), who was going to be the next great thing, I mean, he had been selected for all youth national matches since U15, you know, and he was supposed to take over in the defence. In contrast they had no expectations of me, so I think that I might have had an advantage. Of course, there were expectations, but they weren’t as high regarding me, which may have made it possible for me to concentrate a little bit more on myself (...).”

The theme points out that high expectations from the environment can be a barrier in the transition from youth to first team as it can be perceived as a pressure for the players. Meanwhile, own expectations can be both a resource and a barrier in the youth to first team transition.

Internal factors: Footballer as profession

The transition from youth to first team and the completion of high school usually happen simultaneously, which was also the case for all players in the current study. Besides the transition to the first team this is also the transition into life as a professional footballer, in which the players no longer go to school. The coaches express that players enter a less stressful time as they experience a high increase in spare time. Four of the players perceived the gained spare time as a resource, while one player perceived this as a barrier as he started to lack meaningfulness in his existence.

Frank: “(...) I completed high school and became full-time professional in AaB, so that summer I didn’t do much else besides playing football and after about six months I started to feel bored doing just that, (...) so in December, I started taking a few classes (...) basically just to do something, because it could be long days when you show up for practice at nine o’clock and you’re back home at one, while your friends are in school or working or something like that. Then I thought, I missed out on something in my life that could be more meaningful, you know, something I could do after one o’clock instead of just lazing on the couch.”

Transitioning from student and youth player to become a professional football player is perceived differently by the players. The coaches and the four players who are still at the club or playing abroad considered the increased amount of spare time as a resource in the transition as they were now able to focus exclusively on football, while the player who is now playing at a lower domestic level considered spare time gain as a barrier that influenced the unsuccessful transition into the first team.

External factors: Professional relationships

All participants expressed that the relationship between the players and the coaches changes with the youth to first team transition. The relationship between coaches and players in the youth teams was described as closer

and friendlier, as the coaches would take their time to talk with the players about things that does not regard football and would provide more in-depth feedback. In the first team there is a greater distance between the head coach and the player and the sole subject of conversation is football. The players perceive this greater distance between head coach and player by less contact and the individual feedback from the head coach is less detailed than it was in the youth team.

Sepp: “I actually think we are in a pretty good place regarding contact between head coach and young players. (The head coach) is doing a pretty good job in that department, but they don’t experience it in anywhere near the same degree as with the U19 coach. During their youth years they basically get feedback, photos, evaluations every single match. This one-on-one contact is not something they get with the head coach. That is limited to much more general focus points, (...) that’s new for them.”

The perceived changes from the youth to first team can create doubts among the players regarding what is needed to work on to develop as a player. Continuity of the coaching staff throughout the transition is emphasized as a resource by the coaches and players. Continuity is achieved through the A+ coach of the club whose responsibility within the club is to act as linkage between the youth and first team for the players going through this transition.

Michael: “(...) there is someone like Richard for example who takes part in some of the youth team practices as well, and who follows you all the way through your development and talks to you, and guides you on the things you can improve, and about what you are doing well and should carry on doing. So, in that sense, when you transition, and he keeps on doing that, then you feel, ‘it doesn’t feel so unnatural being here after all’.”

At the transition to the first team the relationship between the players changes. While the players on the youth team consider each other as friends, the players on the first team consider each other as both friends and rivals, whom in spite of this need to function as a cohesive unit. The interviewed players state that the first team players were good at meeting them and integrating them into the first team, which helped them in the transition. Four of the five interviewed players transitioned to the first team at the same time.

These four players experienced that transitioning alongside multiple youth teammates created a sense of comfort. The player who is now playing in a higher ranked club abroad, conveys that this made the transition easier.

Allan: "(...) I think maybe, one of the things that have made it easy, was the fact that we were six young players transitioning at the same time. So, we know each other really well and have been playing together for a lot of years already. But when you transition with those guys and already have some relationships in the team and you know them really well personally, so that if it's not going well for (former first team player), then I can try to motivate him and the other way around as well, because obviously we're rivals but we want to help each other. But I think that has made it easier for all of us that we were six players joining the first team at the same time."

The professional relationships of the players are considered both resources and barriers in the transition to the first team. Continuity provided by the A+ coach, the welcoming of transition players to the first team by senior players, and multiple youth players transitioning at the same time is considered resources. However, the greater distance between head coach and new teammates who now are considered rivals are barriers.

External factors: Near relationships

The close relationships such as parents, family, friends and girlfriends are all considered to be important and influential relationships in relation to the transition to the first team. However, these relationships can both support and hinder the players in the transition to the first team. The players especially used their families to support them when they faced challenges and adversity in the first team. The same is the case for friends and girlfriends who can provide them with a much-needed haven away from the club. However, both coaches and players had experienced that the relationship, with family and friends can be barriers. This is the case if the support provided by these relationships is not in accordance with their emotional relationship with the player.

Sepp: "In the worst scenarios, the parents have completely forgotten that they need to have a good relationship with their kid. So, when they come home, they look at the performance of the player and this is when they lose it."

All players perceived the support from their parents as a resource, who supported them and helped them in regard to the challenges they faced.

Frank: “(...) there is no doubt that especially my dad but my whole family in general were good at talking with me. They could follow me all the way, and they have done an extremely good job as parents in supporting me no matter what happened to me.”

The close relationships can function as both resources and barriers in the transition to the first team. All participants emphasized that the right kind of support is very important and can support the players in the transition into the first team.

External factors: Change in hierarchical status

All players mention that the transition to the first team entails a new role that the players need to accept. The players go from the top of the youth team's internal hierarchy to being at the bottom of the senior team hierarchy. Further, the players experience that this role change made the transition to the first team more difficult. The new hierarchical role entails that players transitioning to the first team feel respect towards their new teammates. Two players perceived their respect for their new teammates as barriers, since it entailed difficulties performing at their best level in practice.

Frank: “(...) another thing was that I probably had too much respect for the players in the first team. You know, when you're a kid they are your idols and you look up to them, (...) the first three to four weeks I was almost scared of just touching them, because they were my idols for such a long time. (...) But that's something I've been thinking about afterwards, and what I could have done differently, and of those things, even though it sounds completely basic, was to just wipe the floor with someone. It sounds completely wrong, but... Not to command respect, but just not to have too much respect for your teammates. I had way too much respect for my teammates, and then I had this mindset that I didn't want to make any mistakes, and that doesn't make you a better player.”

In addition, all the players express that the environment in the first team is more serious and the internal rivalry is much higher than in the youth team.

Further, the coaches state that the evaluation of the players' performance is even more blunt in the first team, which the players need to adjust to.

External factors: Media pressure

Both coaches and players emphasize that the transition to the first team provides an extra challenge, since the players have to deal with the opinion of the media regarding their work. Many players feel that being in the spotlight of the media creates a pressure, since they have to deal with both positive and negative publicity.

Allan: "All of a sudden you find yourself in an environment where people talk about what you are doing and have opinions about the work you're doing. And in the season that we joined the first team, things didn't go the way AaB had planned, and then of course critics showed up, and I actually think that was the toughest thing to deal with, because you had never tried that before. (...) You have to be able to deal with those critics."

External factors: Luck

Several players imply that luck plays a role in transitioning successfully to the first team. One of the players quickly got into the starting line-up, while some of the others had to deal with lack of playing time. One of the players who did not receive much playing time experienced that his luck changed when the club got a new head coach a few months into the season.

Michael: "(...) I don't know if I was ready. I wouldn't say that I wasn't, because I felt that I was ready to step up, but the first six months I hardly played. I had one game with the first team, but it was all about learning and it was a difficult time and I didn't really get the chance to play. Luckily, we got (new head coach) and then in the spring I played a lot."

In the transition from youth to first team the head coach is the difference between playing time and a place in the selected team. For that reason, a new head coach or an injured teammate playing the same specific position on the field can greatly influence the transition from youth to first team.

Discussion

The current study investigated the perceptions of the resources and barriers in the transition from youth to first team in elite club football players and coaches. Findings suggest that players and coaches perceive a number of internal and external resources that influence the transition from youth to first team in elite football.

The participants suggested a number of internal resources in the transition from youth to first team. These findings are consistent with earlier research that highlight psychological skills as being essential for the development of a player in the transition to first team (Larsen et al., 2014; Stambulova et al., 2009; MacNamara et al., 2010). For instance, intrinsic motivation was considered important in relation to the transition. This has also previously been highlighted as an important resource in the youth to senior transition in football (Chamorro et al., 2016). Co-determination is a factor that is associated with intrinsic motivation (Lepper & Hodell, 1989). For that reason, it is important for clubs at both the youth and senior level to facilitate settings in training, where players can be influential. Previous research emphasizes that psychological skills can be trained through specialized training (Williams & Reilly, 2000). Therefore, it is important that elite football clubs who aim to develop their own players from their youth departments, develop and conduct mental training courses, since they can develop the necessary psychological resources (Larsen et al., 2014). Another important finding in the current study is that experience with adversity can be an advantage for a youth player in the transition to the first team. Collins et al. (2016) emphasizes that experience with adversity is favourable, but that the way that different athletes react to adversity is more important than experiencing it. Through retrospective interviews Collins et al. (2016) found that world class athletes can be distinguished from lower level athletes from the way they act when faced with adversity. While Collins et al. (2016) argue that it is more important how an athlete react when faced with adversity than it is to just experience it, the current study indicates that experience with adversity is an important factor. Experience with adversity as reported in the current study was experiences as youth players. This indicates that experience with adversity is an important resource which is acquired by youth athletes in any sport and which makes the way athletes react when faced with adversity less important in those early years of development. This finding suggests that experience with adversity is an internal resource that is acquired prior to the transition from youth to first team.

The analysis also suggested a range of external resources and barriers, which play a role in the transition from youth to first team. Participants expressed that the support they receive from their near relationships are decisive for a successful transition. This is in accordance with several studies on the transition from youth to senior, which also emphasizes that the emotional support that athletes receive from their closest relatives is decisive for their development (Pummell et al., 2008; Bruner et al., 2008). Furthermore, Schlossberg (1981) and Goodman et al. (2006) stress that support systems (e.g. family unit) have an influence on transitions. In addition, the current study shows that the support from parents and family can be a barrier in the transition from youth to first team (Morris et al., 2016; Gledhill & Harwood, 2015). The coaches in the current study elaborated on this by telling that parents can impose an unrealistic self-image on the player and thereby impede his development if the support they provide is not based on their emotional relationship. Therefore, it seems decisive that support from the close relationships rely on the emotional relationship and not the sport performance.

A unique finding in the current study indicates that luck plays a role in the transition from youth to senior. In that transition, the young players compete with their experienced teammates for specific positions on the football field. Luck was evident, since several players in the current study reported that they were given the chance to play in the first team when an experienced teammate was injured or following a change of the head coach. Thus, luck can determine that players need to overcome lack of playing time, which Stambulova and colleagues (2009) have described as a barrier related to the transition from youth to senior. As far as we know, luck is not previously identified in empirical research about the youth to senior transition. From a theoretical perspective, luck has been described in Gagné's (2009) model depicting development of talented people, Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent. Gagné describes the parameter chance, which is the developmental influence that the athlete does not have control over. Since luck seems to be a factor in the development of an athlete, this underline that the development of an athlete is not a linear process, only dependent on the individual, but just as much the organization of which the athlete is a member. The implication of this finding for players and coaches is that a high performance level in a team-sport such as football at the youth stage is not a prerequisite for a high performance level as a senior, since organisational factors such as competition for specific positions in the coach's starting lineup can be a barrier for a capable youth player's transition to the first team.

Since luck seem to be a factor in the transition from youth to senior it is also important that expectations of new senior players are considered by the club, close relationship and the player himself. The players in this investigation experienced that high expectations in the transition to the first team was a barrier, while low expectations were perceived as a resource. This indicates that both the professional and close relationships to the players need to pay attention to their articulated expectations of the players, so the players do not put unnecessary expectation demands on themselves. This could risk the players getting too perfectionistic, and thereby having a higher degree of anxiety and lower self-esteem, because they are afraid to make mistakes (Flett & Hewitt, 2005). This indicates that the degree of expectation should be adjusted at an individual level, and that the primary focus should be on further development, which is also suggested by Vanden Auweele and colleagues (2004). However, this is a delicate balance in the first team of a professional sports club, where the equivalent of success is winning football games (Richardson et al., 2013). While Morris and colleagues (2016) recommend that players are educated in dealing with their expectations for the transition from youth to senior, the current study indicates that close and professional relationships such as parents and coaches may also need some sort of education in how to communicate their expectations.

Conclusion

Research in the youth to senior transition in sports have primarily been focusing on the importance of athletes' internal resources. Results from the current study show that elite club football coaches and players have experienced a number of internal and external resources and barriers in the transition from youth to senior in Danish elite football. The participants in the current study indicated experience with adversity and psychological skills as important internal resources that seem to influence a successful transition. Furthermore, the participants had experienced that the expectations from both themselves and the near environment and the life as professional footballer can function as both resources and barriers. The participants of the current investigation also indicate that the close and professional relationships can be both external resources or barriers that influence the transition from youth to senior. Furthermore, the participants experienced that the players' new hierarchical role in the senior team and the media pressure were barriers that the players had to deal with to adjust to the transition to

the first team. Finally, the participants had experienced the importance of luck in the transition to the first team, where coincidental injuries or change of head coach would provide them with the opportunity to play in the senior team. The current study suggests a number of internal and external resources and barriers that both players and clubs can try to improve. But at the same time the current study suggests that it is also about being in the right place at the right time.

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