

The Role of Sports Management in Youth-to-Professional Talent Development: A Quantitative Analysis of Strategies, Transition Support, and Challenges in Qatari Football

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This investigation examined the role of sports management in promoting talented youth football players to professional teams in Qatar, specifically evaluating talent development strategies, transition support mechanisms, and organizational challenges. **Methods:** A cross-sectional quantitative survey assessed talent discovery, development, transition support, and challenges in promoting youth players in Qatar football. Validated questionnaires were administered to 117 professionals (97.4% male; 82.9% players, 19.7% coaches, 10.3% administrators). The instrument evaluated three domains on 5-point Likert scales after content validity assessment by experts. **Results:** Talent development frameworks showed positive implementation (3.91 ± 1.07), with highest agreement for competitive exposure (74.4%) and sports-educational environments (73.5%). However, transition support mechanisms demonstrated lower effectiveness (3.27 ± 1.56), particularly in first-team integration (55.6%) and player-coach communication (54.8%). Primary organizational challenges included transfer regulations (70.1% agreement), external pressures (65.8%), and educational program provision (59.9%). Infrastructure adequacy showed minimal concern (44.4%), reflecting successful facility development. Professional experience exceeding 10 years characterized 53% of respondents, providing robust experiential insights into system effectiveness. **Conclusion:** While Qatar has established comprehensive

talent identification frameworks, significant gaps exist in youth-to-professional transition support and organizational integration. Key recommendations include implementing standardized monitoring protocols, enhancing youth-professional team integration, and strengthening psychosocial support systems. Success requires coordinated interventions at structural, policy, and operational levels while leveraging Qatar's advanced infrastructure. These findings contribute to understanding talent development challenges in emerging football nations while providing evidence-based recommendations for enhancing development pathways.

KEYWORDS: Career transition; organizational behavior; personnel management; program evaluation; sports administration; talent identification; vocational guidance; youth sports.

1. INTRODUCTION

The systematic development of youth football talent represents a critical challenge for sports organizations worldwide, particularly in emerging football nations seeking to establish sustainable elite player development pathways [1]. While established football nations have implemented well-defined talent development frameworks, emerging nations face unique challenges in adapting and implementing these systems effectively [2, 3]. This challenge is particularly relevant for Qatar, which has made significant investments in sports infrastructure and youth development programs as part of its national sports vision.

Research indicates that effective talent development in football requires integrated organizational structures that facilitate both athletic and personal development [4]. These structures must address multiple domains including technical skills, tactical understanding, physical development, and psychosocial competencies [5]. However, the transition from youth to professional levels remains problematic, with evidence suggesting that many talented young players fail to successfully navigate this critical period [6].

The complexity of talent development in football is reflected in several interconnected challenges [7]. First, organizational barriers often create discontinuity between youth and professional environments, limiting young players' exposure to professional standards and expectations [2]. Second, cultural disconnects frequently emerge when youth players lack appropriate role models and mentorship during their development [6]. Third, many clubs prioritize short-term results over long-term player development, potentially compromising the systematic progression of talented individuals [3].

Recent research has highlighted the importance of psychosocial support in talent development [8]. Studies demonstrate that psychological characteristics and social support mechanisms significantly influence a player's ability to transition successfully to professional football [5, 9]. However, many development programs inadequately address these aspects, focusing instead on technical and physical parameters that may be less predictive of long-term success.

The establishment of effective talent development pathways requires strategic alignment between youth academies and professional teams. Evidence suggests that successful programs integrate educational components with football development, recognizing that holistic development supports both athletic achievement and personal growth [10]. This integration becomes particularly crucial in contexts where traditional football development models must be adapted to local cultural and institutional frameworks.

Qatar presents an interesting case study in this regard. As an emerging football nation with substantial resources and ambitious development goals, Qatar has invested significantly in youth football infrastructure, exemplified by initiatives such as the Aspire Academy. However, the effectiveness of these investments in producing elite players depends largely on the quality of sports management systems and their ability to facilitate successful transitions to professional football [2, 11].

Several critical gaps exist in current understanding of talent development in emerging football nations. While extensive research has examined talent development in established football nations, limited evidence exists regarding the adaptation and implementation of these frameworks in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, the interaction between organizational structures, cultural factors, and individual development trajectories remains inadequately understood, particularly in emerging football nations [12, 13].

This investigation employs a comprehensive methodological approach, combining quantitative analysis of development outcomes with qualitative assessment of organizational processes. This mixed-methods approach allows for a detailed examination of both structural elements and human factors influencing talent development success. This research aims to address these gaps by examining the role of sports management in promoting talented youth players to professional football in Qatar. Specifically, it will investigate three key aspects: (1) strategies for discovering and developing youth talent, (2) mechanisms facilitating the transition from youth to professional football, and (3) challenges facing sports management in achieving successful player progression while maintaining team performance.

2. METHODS

2.1. Study design

This cross-sectional descriptive study employed a quantitative approach to examine the role of sports management in promoting talented youth football players to professional teams in Qatar. Potential confounding factors, including age, sex, and training experience, were controlled through stratified analysis and multivariate regression models.

2.2. Participants

The study sample comprised 117 sports professionals recruited through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different roles and experience

levels within Qatar's football sector. Inclusion criteria required participants to be actively involved in Qatar's sports system as players, coaches, or administrators. The sample demographics revealed a predominantly male cohort (97.4%, n=114) with diverse age distribution: 64.1% aged 18-24 years (n=75), 17.9% aged 25-34 years (n=21), and 18% aged ≥ 35 years (n=21). Educational backgrounds varied from secondary school (45.3%, n=53) to postgraduate qualifications (6%, n=7). Notably, 53% (n=62) possessed >10 years of sports experience, and 84.6% (n=99) had prior youth player experience (Table 1).

Table 1. Sample distribution according to the variables

Variables	Classification	N	Percentage (%)
Age	18-24 years	75	64.1%
	25-34 years	21	17.9%
	35-44 years	13	11.1%
	45-54 years	1	0.9%
	55 years & more	7	6%
Sex	Male	114	97.4%
	Female	3	2.6%
Educational level	secondary school	53	45.3%
	diploma	10	8.5%
	bachelor's degree	47	40.2%
	Postgraduate studies	7	6%
Experience in the sports field	Player	97	82.9%
	Coach	23	19.7%
	Administrator	12	10.3%
	No direct experience	12	10.3%
Role in the sports field	Player	73	62.4%
	Coach	15	12.8%
	Administrator	9	7.7%
	Other	20	17.1%
Years of experience	< 1 year	10	8.5%
	1-3 years	9	7.7%
	4-6 years	20	17.1%
	7-10 years	16	13.7%
	>10 years	62	53%
Ever been a youth player?	Yes	99	15.4%
	No	18	84.6%

Participants were included if they were professionals in the sports field in Qatar, aged 18 years and older, and had experience in either playing, coaching, or administrating football. Exclusion criteria included individuals without any experience in the sports field and those under 18 years of age.

This cross-sectional study adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Local Ethics and Research Committee of Ministry of Sports and Youth of Qatar (Reference: ERC/MSY/2024/103). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. This study adhered

to the Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) guidelines to ensure comprehensive and transparent reporting.

2.3. Procedures

2.3.1. Research instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed through comprehensive literature review and expert consultation [14-16]. The instrument contained three main sections examining:

- a. Talent identification and development strategies
- b. Youth-to-professional transition management
- c. Implementation challenges

Each section comprised six items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). Content validity was established through review by two independent experts in sports management and youth football development. A pilot study was conducted with 20 participants to refine the questionnaire and ensure the clarity and relevance of questions. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.85, indicating high internal consistency.

2.3.2. Data collection

The questionnaire was administered electronically via Microsoft Forms to ensure standardized data collection across all participants, including players, coaches, and administrators. Data collection occurred over six weeks, with reminders sent to non-respondents. Trained personnel monitored the distribution and collection process to ensure data quality. Responses were processed systematically, with each assigned a sequential identification number for tracking and organization. Each response underwent thorough auditing and coding procedures to maintain data quality and accuracy (Table 2).

Table 2. Participants' responses categories.

Description	Averages
Strongly Agree	5.00 – 4.21
Agree	4.20 – 3.41
Neutral	3.40 – 2.61
Disagree	2.60 – 1.81
Strongly Disagree	1.80 – 1.00

2.4. Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using JASP (version 0.19.2) and Microsoft Excel (version 16.91). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations,

were calculated to characterize response patterns. Agreement percentages were computed to quantify consensus levels across participant groups. All statistical tests employed a significance level of $\alpha=0.05$.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Talent identification and development strategies

Analysis of talent development practices revealed generally positive perceptions (overall 3.91 ± 1.07), with mean scores ranging from 3.84 to 4.00 (Table 3). The highest-rated aspect was the provision of competitive opportunities against advanced teams (74.4% agreement, 4.00 ± 1.05), followed by the establishment of supportive sports-educational environments (73.5% agreement, 3.95 ± 1.04). Implementation of customized training programs based on best practices received 70% agreement (3.90 ± 1.08), while comprehensive talent identification programs garnered 68.4% agreement (3.91 ± 1.08). Technical and tactical skill development resources were rated slightly lower (67.5% agreement, 3.87 ± 1.05). Notably, continuous performance monitoring showed the lowest agreement (64.1%, 3.84 ± 1.13), suggesting potential gaps in systematic talent tracking.

Table 3. Section 1: Strategies for discovering and developing young talent

NO.	Items	Mean	SD	% of Agreement
1	Sports management establishes comprehensive programs to identify football talent in youth categories.	3.91	1.08	68.4%
2	Sports management provides the necessary resources to develop technical and tactical skills for talented players.	3.87	1.05	67.5%
3	Sports management implements customized training programs to develop young talent based on best practices.	3.90	1.08	70%
4	Sports management fosters a sports-educational environment that supports the growth and development of talented players.	3.95	1.04	73.5%
5	Sports management allows talented players to compete against higher-level teams to enhance performance.	4.00	1.05	74.4%
6	Sports management ensures continuous monitoring of the performance and development of talented players throughout the season.	3.84	1.13	64.1%
	Overall	3.91	1.07	70%

3.2. Youth-to-professional transition support

The assessment of transition support mechanisms revealed lower overall ratings (3.27 ± 1.56) compared to talent development strategies (Table 4). Psychological and moral support during transitions received the highest agreement (64.1%, 3.75 ± 1.14), followed by efforts to reduce training methodology gaps between youth and professional teams (60.7%, 3.66 ± 1.14). Individual development planning showed moderate agreement (59.8%, 1.26 ± 3.63), while collaboration with first-team technical staff received 58.1% agreement (3.68 ± 1.13). Notably, core transition elements such as first-team training integration (55.6%, 3.67 ± 1.16) and regular player-coach meetings (54.8%, 3.61 ± 1.14) showed the lowest agreement levels, indicating potential systemic gaps in transition management.

Table 4. Section 2: Supporting the transition to the first team

NO.	Items	Mean	SD	% of Agreement
1	Sports management provides opportunities for talented youth players to join first-team training sessions.	3.67	1.16	55.6%
2	Sports management offers psychological and moral support to talented players during their transition to the first team.	3.75	1.14	64.1%
3	Sports management collaborates with the first-team technical staff to ensure a smooth transition for talented players.	3.68	1.13	58.1%
4	Sports management designs individual development plans for each talented player to meet the first team's requirements.	1.26	3.63	59.8%
5	Sports management organizes regular meetings between talented players and first-team coaches for guidance.	3.61	1.14	54.8%
6	Sports management strives to reduce the gap between youth and first-team training methods to ensure integration.	3.66	1.14	60.7%
Overall		3.27	1.56	59%

3.3. Organizational challenges

Analysis of organizational challenges revealed several significant barriers (overall 3.35 ± 1.48 ; Table 5). Player transfer regulations emerged as the primary challenge (70.1% agreement, 3.85 ± 1.01), followed by external pressure from stakeholders (65.8%, 3.89 ± 1.11). Educational program provision for non-sporting development

showed moderate concern (59.9%, 3.73 ± 1.09), while financial support (58.2%, 3.56 ± 1.30) and human resource limitations (58.1%, 3.68 ± 1.20) demonstrated similar agreement levels. Infrastructure adequacy showed notably lower concern (44.4%, 1.36 ± 3.18), suggesting relative satisfaction with physical facilities.

Table 5. Challenges facing sports management

NO.	Items	Mean	S. D	% of Agreement
1	Sports management faces difficulty securing the financial support required for developing talented players.	3.56	1.30	58.2%
2	Sports management suffers from a lack of specialized human resources for nurturing young talent.	3.68	1.20	58.1%
3	Sports management encounters challenges in providing advanced educational programs for talented players in non-sports fields.	3.73	1.09	59.9%
4	Sports management struggles with inadequate infrastructure to sufficiently support the development of young talent.	1.36	3.18	44.4%
5	Regulations governing player transfers between clubs affect talented players' opportunities for rapid development.	3.85	1.01	70.1%
6	External pressures from fans and media influence sports management decisions regarding developing talented players.	3.89	1.11	65.8%
Overall		3.35	1.48	59%

4. DISCUSSION

This investigation provides empirical insights into sports management practices supporting youth football development in Qatar, revealing both strengths and challenges in current talent development systems. The findings demonstrate varying effectiveness across three critical domains: talent identification and development strategies, youth-to-professional transition support, and organizational challenges.

The relatively high overall agreement (3.91 ± 1.07) regarding talent development strategies suggests Qatar has established comprehensive frameworks for identifying and nurturing young football talent. The strong emphasis on competitive

exposure (74.4% agreement) through initiatives like the Al Kass International Championship aligns with research demonstrating the importance of appropriate competitive challenges in talent development [5]. This structured approach to high-level competition appears essential for preparing players for professional football demands. The emphasis on sports-educational environments (73.5% agreement) reflects growing recognition of holistic development approaches. This finding supports Larsen et al.'s [6] assertion that successful talent development environments must integrate athletic and academic development. The implementation of comprehensive talent scouting and technical skill development through the Aspire Zone Academy demonstrates commitment to structured development pathways. However, the lower agreement regarding continuous performance monitoring (64.1%) indicates potential gaps in systematic talent tracking, which Collins et al. [17] identified as crucial for maintaining development trajectories. The implementation of customized training programs (70% agreement) suggests room for improvement in individualized development approaches, particularly given Haugaasen et al.'s [3] evidence that standardized programs may not optimally serve diverse talent pools.

The lower overall rating for transition support mechanisms (3.27 ± 1.56) reveals significant challenges in facilitating youth-to-professional progression. The moderate agreement regarding psychological support (64.1%) aligns with previous findings highlighting insufficient psychosocial support in football academies [6, 18]. This gap is particularly concerning given evidence that psychological factors significantly influence successful transitions to professional football. The relatively low agreement regarding first-team training integration (55.6%) and regular player-coach meetings (54.8%) indicates structural barriers between youth and professional environments. These findings echo Relvas et al.'s [2] identification of organizational separation as a key obstacle to smooth transitions. The data suggests that more competitive teams present greater transition barriers, potentially forcing talented players to seek opportunities elsewhere or abandon high-level participation. The moderate agreement on reducing training methodology gaps (60.7%) suggests partial recognition of this challenge, though implementation appears incomplete. Webb et al. [5] and Mills et al. [19] emphasize the need to prepare young players for professional football's psychological demands, yet current support systems appear insufficient for this preparation.

The identification of transfer regulations as a primary challenge (70.1% agreement) reveals regulatory constraints potentially limiting talent progression. This finding extends previous research by highlighting specific institutional barriers in emerging football nations. External stakeholder pressure (65.8% agreement) represents another significant challenge, supporting Slack's [13] and Li et al. [20] observations regarding environmental factors' influence on talent development decisions. The moderate concern regarding educational program provision (59.9%) and human resource limitations (58.1%) suggests organizational capacity constraints requiring strategic investment, as emphasized by Maqueira et al. [4]. However, the lower concern about infrastructure (44.4%) indicates Qatar's significant investments in physical facilities, aligned with Qatar Vision 2030, have successfully addressed this

traditional barrier to talent development. The impact of Qatar's relatively small sporting community appears to amplify external pressures on management decisions, potentially hindering smooth talent progression [21]. This finding suggests unique challenges in emerging football nations that may require context-specific solutions.

Limitations and future research

This study presents several limitations. The sample predominantly comprised males (97.4%), potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to female athletes. Furthermore, the focus on Qatar's specific context may limit the direct applicability of the findings to other emerging football nations. Future research should investigate the effectiveness of specific transition support interventions, such as mentorship programs and psychological counseling. Examining the impact of regulatory reforms on talent progression pathways is crucial. Cross-cultural comparisons of talent development systems in emerging football nations can provide valuable insights into best practices. Finally, long-term studies are needed to evaluate the long-term outcomes of enhanced psychosocial support mechanisms on player development and career trajectories.

Practical implications and recommendations

The empirical findings support several key recommendations for enhancing talent development in Qatari football. First, implementing standardized monitoring protocols across development stages would strengthen talent progression management, particularly through integration of technical and psychological metrics. Second, structural reforms are needed to enhance youth-professional integration, including aligned training methodologies and regular collaborative sessions between academy and first-team environments. Third, policy-level interventions should address regulatory constraints while developing stakeholder management strategies to balance development goals with external pressures. Fourth, investment in specialized staff - including both technical experts and mental health professionals - is crucial for supporting youth-to-professional transitions. These recommendations should leverage Qatar's advanced infrastructure while aligning with Qatar Vision 2030's sporting objectives. Implementation requires coordinated action across organizational levels, with particular emphasis on strengthening psychosocial support systems and standardizing development pathways. Success depends on maintaining clear communication protocols between all stakeholders while establishing regulatory frameworks that facilitate smooth talent progression without compromising development standards.

5. CONCLUSION

This investigation reveals both progress and persistent challenges in Qatar's football talent development system. While comprehensive frameworks exist for talent identification and development, significant gaps remain in youth-to-professional transition support and organizational integration. External pressures and regulatory constraints emerge as key barriers to effective talent progression, while infrastructure development demonstrates successful strategic investment. The

findings suggest that addressing these challenges requires coordinated interventions at structural, policy, and operational levels, with particular emphasis on strengthening psychosocial support and transition management systems. This research contributes to understanding talent development challenges in emerging football nations while providing evidence-based recommendations for enhancing development pathways.

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