

A comparison of the soccer talent development systems in England and Canada

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare provision for the development of elite soccer players in England and Canada. Data were collected via documentary analysis, fieldwork and formal and informal interviews with Canadian and English youth coaches ($N = 12$). The respective soccer talent development systems were compared in terms of their normative, institutional, mental states and environmental patterns (Holmes, 1991). Comparative findings showed that the soccer national governing body was responsible for talent development in Canada, whereas professional clubs assumed the primary role in the English system. Canadian coaches possessed more formal education than their English counterparts, but English coaches experienced more in-service coach education than the Canadians. There appeared to be certain discrepancies between the values of coaches and institutional level policies within each of the systems. Suggestions for future research and practice in talent development arising from this cross-cultural comparison are presented.

Key-words: cross-cultural comparison • professional soccer • talent development

Youth development is often regarded as the breeding ground for the next generation of top-level athletes. For example, the international sport successes of the former Soviet Union and former German Democratic Republic have been examined in terms of their comprehensive talent identification and development systems (Fisher, 1996). There is a great deal of concern with making intensive training and competitive programmes in youth sport responsive to the interests and developmental needs of children and adolescents (Coakley, 1993). Research examining the developmental experiences of elite young athletes and the talent development systems which serve them can help to reveal the effectiveness of youth systems and provide suggestions for ongoing programme improvement.

Talent development and giftedness, and the programmes designed to serve talented youth, have been widely examined in the educational domain (e.g. Van Lieshout and Heymans, 2000). Stemming from initial research in education, sport scientists have identified a range of biological, social and psychological issues associated with children's intensive participation in sport (Cahill and Pearl, 1993; Smith and Smoll, 1996). There has been renewed interest in sporting talent development

recently, including analysis of the role of school physical education in England and its relationship with top-level sport (Mountakis, 2001), and the risks and opportunities faced by talented German adolescents in balancing their educational and sporting responsibilities (Brettschneider, 1999). Others have examined the influence of the family context on sporting talent in Canada (Côté, 1999) and England (Kay, 2000), and the development of psychological talent among US Olympic champion athletes (Gould et al., 2001). The wide-ranging, culturally diverse, interdisciplinary nature of talent development research reflects the importance placed on understanding the costs and benefits of particular talent development systems, the pressures elite youth athletes face, and ways in which they manage their fledgling sport careers.

The comparative analysis of models of sporting talent development from different countries has implications for research and practice (Broom, 1991; Fisher, 1996). Researchers have examined youth development systems for soccer within a single county (Parker, 1996), and between European countries (Fisher and Dean, 1998). However, youth development systems for soccer across different continents have yet to be assessed. This is somewhat surprising given the global nature of soccer and certain cultural differences in the way the game is approached and played (Fisher and Dean, 1998; Kuper, 1994). The pluralistic western societies of Canada and England possess important historical, structural and normative cultural characteristics in terms of shared heritage, language and political organization. Historical forces dictate that Canada experiences a significant British influence on these cultural characteristics.

Cross-cultural research approaches offer avenues to test possible limitations of traditional knowledge within a particular societal system. However, the promise of cross-cultural research also brings certain methodological challenges (Berry et al., 1992). For example, the assumption that the labels used to identified cultural groups (i.e. 'English' and 'Canadians') refer to two distinct but homogeneous sections of society is problematic, whereas research examining ethnic groups within a particular society is scarce (Matsumoto, 1996). Culture, in its truest sense, cannot be grasped wholly because of its enormity, immense scope and breadth. However, culturally sensitive methodologies have been promoted as an important but underrepresented element of sport science research (Duda and Allison, 1990).

Developmental experiences of Canadian and English athletes have been compared previously because of the favourable functional connections between the two societies in terms of sport development and culture (Stevenson, 1990). The juxtaposition of soccer talent development in Canada and England is intriguing because both have recently undergone major changes in the structure of their youth development systems. Furthermore, soccer is a vibrant sport in both countries, with extensive participation from a wide cross-section of society. Although soccer in England is often seen to represent national values whereas soccer in Canada is portrayed as a sport for children, there are several parallels that can be drawn between the two talent development systems. Indeed, because of the youth emphasis in Canadian soccer,

analysis of their talent development system is particularly appropriate. It will be demonstrated that Canadian soccer mirrors some of the historical developments that have occurred in English soccer. Therefore, in some senses the English system provides a model for the Canadian approach. Soccer in Canada clearly differs from England in terms of its lack of professional structure and national passion for the sport. However, recent successes of players in Europe who received their early training in Canada (e.g. Owen Hargreaves of Bayern Munich) reflect the growing influence of Canadian talent development for soccer. As such, there are certain functional equivalencies and differences between the two development systems that make for interesting comparisons.

The overall purpose of this study was to explore and compare the talent development systems for youth soccer in England and Canada. Specifically, comparisons were drawn between these two countries in order to identify and examine significant issues related to normative, institutional, mental states and environmental patterns (Holmes, 1991). Such comparisons may reveal new modes of thinking that offer possibilities for programme evaluation and development.

Method

This investigation is part of a larger research programme designed to develop explanations for talent development in professional soccer. Data for this investigation were drawn from documentary analysis, fieldwork and formal and informal interviews. Previous research and official publications of the relevant soccer governing bodies formed the starting point for this inquiry. Field observations were carried out with five professional youth academies in England and two national youth team camps in Canada to understand more about the contexts of talent development. In these settings, informal and formal interviews were conducted with professional and international coaches from Canada ($n = 6$) and England ($n = 6$). Furthermore, demographic information was collected from 33 elite adolescent soccer players from Canada ($n = 19$) and England ($n = 14$).

Data were analysed by following Holmes's (1991) methodology for comparative investigation of sport and physical education. Holmes's approach is based on analysing contemporary situations (using the concept of 'patterns') with a view to suggesting solutions to apparent problems and future programme improvements. The four patterns used to frame comparative analysis are: (a) the normative pattern; (b) the institutional pattern; (c) the mental states pattern; and (d) the environment pattern. The normative pattern refers to official requirements and regulations that establish the aims and objectives of a particular system, or parts of a system. The institutional pattern refers to the institutions which are responsible for implementing the policies established via the normative patterns. Institutional patterns include descriptions of the structure, organization and operation of relevant institutions. The mental states pattern involves analysis of the beliefs and views of people who work within the system under investigation. The environment pattern refers to geographical and demographic influences that may impact upon the structure and delivery of a system.

Comparative findings

The first stage of implementing a comparative methodology is to analyse social, historical and political dimensions of the countries concerned (cf. Fisher and Dean, 1998). Whereas an extended comparison of England and Canada is beyond the scope of this article, it is feasible and necessary to briefly review pertinent sociohistorical issues relating to the talent development systems for soccer in the respective countries.

Sociohistorical context of talent development for soccer in Canada

The Canadian men's national team qualified for the World Cup Finals once (Mexico 1986) when they failed to register a victory and were unable to score a goal. In recent years, the team won the Gold Cup tournament (a competition for national teams from the Caribbean, Central America and North America) in 2000, and finished third in 2002. The resurgence of the Canadian national team has been spearheaded by the head coach, Holger Osiek, a German national with previous World Cup-winning experience as an assistant coach. Despite the Gold Cup successes, the Canadian team had a FIFA (Fédération International de Football Association) world ranking of 74 in March 2002, having risen from 92 in December 2001 (FIFA, 2002).

In the late 1990s, the Canadian Soccer Association (CSA) commissioned an investigation into the feasibility of a national Canadian professional soccer league. It was concluded that a professional league would not be feasible from a financial perspective (Adamson, 2001). Nonetheless, the CSA proposed the Canadian United Soccer League (CUSL), which was meant to be in operation in 2001, but has yet to be implemented. The CSA claims that this league will be in operation by 2004 (CSA, 2002). The financial plan for the CUSL has been severely criticized by the existing professional clubs. At the time of writing, the future of a national professional soccer league in Canada looks uncertain.

One of the most significant problems faced by the CSA is that soccer is not a major sport in the context of Canadian society. The 'second class' nature of soccer was highlighted by Denis Coderre, the Minister for Amateur Sport in Canada, who said 'There are 700,000 soccer players in Canada but they don't win anything, so why should we put any money into it?' (CBC TV interview, 10 July 2001). The fact that the minister for *amateur* sport was commenting on soccer reflects the lack of professional structure to the sport in Canada.

Sociohistorical context of talent development for soccer in England

Soccer is the premier sport in British society, with 92 professional clubs in the English league structure. Soccer occupies a central role in the lives of young English males in

particular (Skeleton, 2000). In 1966 England defeated Germany 4–2 to win its first and only World Cup. Since 1966, England qualified for the World Cup Finals in 1970, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1998 and 2002. In March 2002, England's FIFA world ranking was 12, having slipped from 10 in December 2001 (FIFA, 2002).

In the 1970s soccer talent development in England was run under the conditions of the government-sponsored Youth Training Scheme that provided apprenticeships to youth in a variety of industries. During the 1980s, seeking to develop a progressive youth training policy, the English Football Association (EFA) developed a national school of excellence at Lilleshall National Sports Centre in Shropshire, along with 147 regional centres of excellence throughout the country. The EFA was primarily responsible for talent development through its national team programmes and schools of excellence, but some professional clubs had independent youth development systems. As a result, talent development was conducted in a piecemeal fashion, lacking structure and an overall framework (Fisher and Dean, 1998). Fynn and Guest (1989) speculated that disagreements over the control of youth development during the late 1980s impaired the progress of young players in England.

By the mid-1990s, in the face of intense media pressure after England failed to qualify for the 1994 World Cup finals in the USA, the EFA recognized that their current system was inadequate for serving the needs of young players. It was apparent that the English talent development system was considerably different from successful systems in mainland Europe (Fisher and Dean, 1998). As a result of these concerns, the English system has recently been remodelled based on successful youth development programmes at top European clubs (e.g. Auxerre, France; Ajax, the Netherlands). The critical point is that professional clubs are now responsible for talent development via their youth academies, reflecting the continued professionalization of English youth soccer that has emerged over the past 40 years.

Normative patterns

Blueprint for success

Under the leadership of Holger Osiek, the CSA produced their *Blueprint for Success* as a plan for the development of soccer talent in Canada (CSA, 2000). In fact, the redevelopment of the Canada soccer system is almost wholly the result of Osiek's vision for talent development based on his professional coaching experiences in Europe. The main agenda of the blueprint was to create and support national developmental teams for the best 200 males and females aged 15 to 18 years in annual age groupings. Eight youth teams compete internationally at least twice a year against some of the best teams in the world in order to improve player skills and overall long-term athlete preparation (CSA, 2000).

The overall goal of the CSA programme is to develop players who will be capable of helping the Canadian senior national team compete at a world-class level. An example of this developmental perspective was provided by tactical formations

adopted by a Canadian youth team head coach during a tournament in France. Rather than adhere to a single system of play (e.g. 4-4-2) the coach experimented with a range of systems in different circumstances. His rationale was that 'players will be expected to know more than one way of playing so it is my job to teach them [different systems] rather than stick to one system to get results'. This example reflects adherence to the policy of player development as a normative theme.

Charter for excellence

The latest redevelopment of the talent development system in England is based on the EFA's *Charter for Excellence* (EFA, 1998), which was introduced to provide a greater role to the professional clubs in the development of young players (Fisher and Dean, 1998). Under the *Charter for Excellence*, professional clubs are entitled to put forward their youth development systems as candidates for football academy status. This prestigious title represents the standard of excellence for youth development in English soccer.

Youth academies have a mandate to develop the potential of young players for the future. One Premier League academy director said of his academy: 'To maximise potential is the simple answer. At this point in time we are a buying club and we stock up the top end. So, our ultimate aim is to maximise the potential that comes through the door.' One policy designed to highlight the developmental perspective is that the results of competitive matches played among younger age groups are not released to the media. Only at under-17 and under-19 levels are results made public and relevant statistics compiled. Even this policy was questioned by the academy director of a major Premier League club, who said, 'I'm strongly against the under 17s [results] being published. The under 19s I'm not in total agreement with, but I can see the argument that they are older boys and should learn to live with the pressure of results.'

Institutional patterns

Canadian institutions

The CSA is primarily responsible for the development of young players. Specifically, provincial (i.e. county/state) associations play a key role in the development of young players, identifying talented athletes, providing access to qualified coaches and competitive opportunities at the national level. Players are selected by their respective provincial associations to attend one of five National Training Centres (NTC) across the country. NTCs offer approximately four hours coaching per week from qualified coaches (conducted in gymnasiums during the winter months). The majority of coaches are employed on a part-time basis. During the summer months provincial representative teams are selected. Organizing training sessions for provincial teams is logistically difficult. For example, the Edmonton NTC provides coaching for players

from the cities of Lethbridge and Saskatoon. Lethbridge is a six-hour drive from the south of Edmonton, while Saskatoon is a six-hour drive from the east. As a result, players also play with amateur local club teams, but the schedules of these teams often conflict with provincial team training.

As of March 2002, there were four professional teams competing in the US A-League. The A-league is a standard below Major League Soccer (MLS), which is the premier professional league in North America. Professional clubs in Canada have limited talent development programmes that are not coordinated with the NTCs. Professional talent development for young players is mainly organized via three Premiere Development League (PDL) teams located across Canada. The PDL is designed to prepare under-23-year-old college players for A-league competition. PDL players are employed on a non-contract basis so as not to contravene US NCAA regulations. The talent development situation is further complicated by a proliferation of soccer 'academies' which are essentially after-school soccer programmes where children (or more specifically their parents) pay for access to coaching. Furthermore, some school boards have developed soccer programmes in conjunction with their educational agenda. As such, talent development in Canada is complicated, piecemeal and lacks professional structure, which inhibits the development of young players.

English institutions

Professional clubs are primarily responsible for talent development in England via their youth academies. There are currently 39 academies in operation in England and Wales, and all Premier League clubs are required to operate an academy (EFA, 2002). Academies recruit players for coaching and (modified) competitive games from 8 years old, and ultimately offer three-year scholarships for players aged 16–19. At the scholarship level, two teams may be operated (under-17 and under-19), and 'scholars' must receive a minimum of 12 hours football instruction per week. Academy coaches are employed on a full-time basis, but many clubs may employ part-time coaches to assist with younger age group teams. There are facilities, curricular and coach-education requirements established by the EFA that academies must satisfy to maintain their status.

Mental states patterns

The mental states of people operating within certain elements of a system reveal how institutional and normative patterns actually operate 'in situ'. Beliefs held by those who deliver official policies and practices have a significant impact on the effectiveness of institutional mandates. As such, analysis of mental states patterns provides an important link between the theory of talent development policies and the practice of those operating talent development programmes. Mental states represent the thinking that pervades the system, and this thinking varied from policy level to local practice level.

Ability and relative age-advantage

Although normative and institutional patterns in both Canada and England are designed to emphasize player development, some of the mental patterns that dominate the thinking of coaches at youth levels may still prioritize performance over potential. For example, one coach in England said one of the factors he used to select players was 'the physical ability of the boy, because if a kid's not physically capable of coping with Premier League football, he's never going to be able to produce'. Interestingly, a coach of a club with less financial resources and a huge emphasis on developing players for the first team said, 'One thing we have noticed is that our players are quite small compared with other clubs [with greater financial resources]. It's just something we've been looking at.'

An indication of the views of people working within the respective systems was provided by analysis of the birth-months of 33 adolescent players who provided demographic information during fieldwork. Above average ability as a child is considered as a prerequisite for entry into elite adolescent soccer, a trend that has been mirrored in other performance domains (Ericsson et al., 1993). It has been suggested that ability is often equated with physical size by coaches (Starkes et al., 2001), which may be related to relative age-advantages (based on birth month and eligibility dates). Generally, as Table 1 shows, more Canadian athletes were born in the early part of the year (i.e. January–July), whereas more English athletes were born in the latter half of the year (i.e. July–December). Specifically, the mean rank of birth month for Canadian athletes was 13.39, whereas the mean rank of birth month for English athletes was 21.89, reflecting a statistically significant difference (Mann-Whitney $U = 64.50$, $p < .05$) in the mean rank order of the months when players in each country were born.

Helsen et al. (1998) showed that prior to 1997, when the FIFA international

Table 1 Athlete birth months for Canadian and English soccer players

Month born	Sample	
	Canada ^a	England ^b
January	6	1
February	–	1
March	1	–
April	2	–
May	1	–
June	3	1
July	3	3
August	–	–
September	1	3
October	1	4
November	–	1
December	1	–

^a $n = 19$ ^b $n = 14$

soccer eligibility age group cut-off birth date was 1 August, beginning in the 6–8 year age group, players born in the early part of the selection year (August–October) were more likely to be identified as talented and selected to higher levels of coaching. In a follow-up investigation of the post-1997 era, when FIFA changed the eligibility date to 1 January, Helsen et al. (in press, cited in Starkes et al., 2001) found that players born in January–March were now more likely to be identified as talented. 1 January is widely used in the Canadian system because it is geared toward producing players for international competition (and delivered by the CSA). However, the English professional clubs has been less inclined to adopt this ruling (because they are not responsible for the English national team), and players are still grouped by their school grade eligibility date of 31 August. Therefore, variations in birth month between English and Canadian players demonstrate that soccer players in both countries appear to have benefited from relative age effect. There are robust findings that children with relative age effect advantages are selected to higher levels of competition in soccer, with consistent evidence from youth international to professional levels (Barnsley et al., 1992; Brewer et al., 1995; Verhulst, 1992).

Despite the evidence for relative age advantages several English coaches spoke passionately about the importance of a developmental perspective. For example, one academy director said, ‘Winning the youth cup . . . Is that saying you’ve got a good academy? It certainly helps, but if none of those youth players make the first team then it’s been a waste of time.’ Similarly, another academy director explained some of the difficulties he faced in promoting a developmental perspective to fans and club directors: ‘What you have to get across to people is that it’s not about results, it’s development. Obviously if you are getting battered 12–0 every week they are not going to develop. [But] I don’t mind losing as long as I see my players develop.’

The selection of children with relative age-advantages may be based on coaches’ beliefs regarding talent selection whereby the strongest players are selected for higher levels of coaching and competition (cf. Fisher and Dean, 1998; Starkes et al., 2001). This suggests that the values of some of the key people in the talent development process (i.e. coaches) may vary from values established at the policy level. If a truly developmental perspective were adopted there would be no need to select the older, stronger children because all those with potential, irrespective of size, would be chosen for higher levels of performance. It appears that coaches and academy directors were aware of the demand to adopt a developmental perspective, but evidence for the full endorsement of this policy was found wanting.

Competitive exposure

Under the English *Charter for Excellence*, adolescent players are restricted to a maximum of 30 competitive games per season, and if this rule is violated the offending club is liable to have its academy licence revoked (EFA, 1998). In the past, the English system has been criticized for an overemphasis on competitive games that has resulted in increased incidence of injury (Fisher, 1996; Fisher and Dean, 1998;

Roderick et al., 2000). Reducing the number of competitive games young English players participate in is an integral part of the redevelopment of English soccer, based on the belief that young English players do not practise technical skills enough. However, English coaches still believe that production in a competitive game is the measure by which young players are judged, so competitive exposure remains a crucial part of talent development in the English system. As one academy coach said: 'The importance of a Saturday is still crucial in the eyes of all English coaches. It's the guide that everybody uses to make their assessment to choose players.'

Canadian coaches emphasized the importance of exposing their players to competitive situations. This involved moving talented players up to play in older age-groupings, which resulted in more challenging competitive situations. Canadian coaches were more concerned with increasing competitive/challenging experiences. One national-level coach explained how he tried to 'constantly challenge players in training [at national team camps] and encourage them to challenge themselves and avoid bad habits when they go home [to their club teams]'. As Canadian players reach 15 years old, there is a deeply entrenched belief that they must move to Europe to train and play with professional youth teams if they are to experience soccer success. As such, the most talented Canadian players at under-17 and under-19 international level are based with European clubs.

Coach education levels

There appeared to be some disparities between the relative educational levels of the coaches involved in the respective systems. All coaches possessed advanced coaching qualifications (FIFA 'A' licence) and high-level playing experience. All Canadian coaches interviewed had at least an undergraduate degree, and three possessed a masters degree in a sport-science discipline. The majority of English coaches were former professional players who did not possess other education beyond their coaching certification. However, two academy directors in England possessed undergraduate teaching degrees, which suggests that formal coach education is a concept that is beginning to win favour in England. Fisher and Dean (1998) suggested that English clubs historically have not placed particular importance on recruiting coaches with educational and developmental knowledge. Some authors have suggested there is a disaffected attitude towards education in English soccer (Parker, 1996; Skeleton, 2000). It appears this trend might be changing at least in the case of academy directors. Additionally, all academies are required to employ a full-time welfare and education officer to assist players with academic decisions such as college courses and post-football career planning.

As a result of some of the concerns surrounding coach education raised by previous research (Fisher and Dean, 1998) there have been changes in the English system. English youth coaches are required to attend a minimum of 36 hours of in-service training annually (EFA, 2002). The EFA offer an influential training course that academy directors and coaches are required to pass. Coaching certification

schemes now have developmentally appropriate training, including a youth soccer specialization and advice on talent detection and development. The EFA offer these courses in order to produce better qualified coaches to work with young players.

The impact of coach education in England was evidenced by some practical examples. One academy director had just returned from an outward-bound course with his players where they were exposed to principles of teamwork and leadership. In an additional acknowledgement of the importance of sport-science work, he said, 'we probably don't do enough research into the actual practice of coaching as far as the mental side is concerned. It is something that is there and we need to work really hard at it.' In Canada, although qualification schemes for coaches meet FIFA standards, ongoing coach education and in-service training were absent. Coaches were not required to attend courses on talent detection or developmental issues. Whereas Canadian coaches possessed higher formal academic training than the English coaches, they experienced less in-service training specific to youth soccer.

Environmental patterns

Climate

A major hindrance imposed upon the Canadian soccer system is the physical environment. During winter months (November–March) outdoor soccer is only possible in the western coastal regions of British Columbia. For all other Canadian provinces, the outdoor season operates from early May to the end of August. The competitive season for young soccer players is therefore during the northern hemisphere summer, which is the off-season for European soccer. The harsh Canadian winter climate also means that international team practices must either be held at indoor facilities, or in warmer climates such as Europe or Central America. In addition to constraining international practices, the weather also creates problems for individual training. One coach discussed the self-discipline required to go for necessary outdoor training runs when the daytime high temperature is -30° Celsius (plus wind-chill).

As a result of climatic constraints, indoor soccer is a popular alternative during the winter months, but this small-sided version of the outdoor game played in ice hockey-sized arenas has many different rules that require different skills. Several international-level Canadian coaches do not believe that the indoor game is a substitute for 'real' soccer, and a favourite saying is that 'artificial surfaces create artificial soccer players'. Despite the popularity of indoor soccer at the amateur level, there was not enough interest to support teams in two Canadian cities that were awarded professional franchises (Edmonton and Montreal).

Geography

Geographically, the small size of England means that travel times are so minimal that the EFA restricts the catchment areas of youth academies. On the other hand, Canada

is the second largest country in the world, causing a dilution of soccer talent and decreased (local) competitive opportunities. These geographical factors create obstacles in the creation of a comprehensive talent development system.

Discussion

Generally the current English system reflects increasing professionalization as the clubs have assumed a greater role in youth training. In many ways the talent development system in Canada mirrored the former English system of the 1980s. The Canadian system is represented by an amateur structure whereby the CSA is responsible for youth development, and the talent development system includes several disparate groups. A primary suggestion arising from this investigation (and based on the historical development of the English system) is for the professionalization of Canadian soccer and the integration of the disparate elements of their talent development system.

If the Canadian system continues to follow a European model, professional clubs will be given a greater role in talent development. A nationwide professional league will be required for this to happen. As such, the creation of a professional league appears to be a crucial factor that will enable Canadian administrators to develop a coherent talent development system. Provincial associations and professional teams need to work together to spearhead programmes that serve the needs of talented youth. As this professional system has yet to be established, the CSA is in a unique position to learn from the historical developments of talent development in other nations. These initiatives, though difficult and time-consuming, represent the future of Canadian soccer.

English coaches had more in-service training than Canadians, but Canadian coaches possessed more formal educational qualifications. Increasing formal educational requirements expected of English coaches would present a future direction for the continued professionalization of their youth development system. On the other hand, Canadian youth development would be well advised to promote specialized in-service coach education schemes to build on the formal educational background possessed by their coaches. This implication shows how knowledge and practice can be improved through cross-cultural comparison.

One discrepancy that was highlighted in the current study related to differences between institutional and normative policies and the actual practices employed at lower levels with regard to the desired developmental emphasis in youth soccer. Coaches in both England and Canada paid lip service to the importance of a developmental perspective toward talent development. However, talent selection policies reflecting relative age-advantages permeated both systems. If coaches fully endorse the guidelines for talent detection and the nurturing of potential we may see changes in relative age distribution as developmental philosophies become more ingrained in talent development systems.

There were differing views on competition versus training, where Canadian coaches

appeared to seek increased competitive opportunities for their players, but contemporary thinking in England is to reduce games in favour of increased training. There may be several conflicting arguments about the merits of training versus competition. Evaluation research is required to understand more about the physical, technical and psychological outcomes of training to game ratios in talent development programmes.

Although the English climate may create difficult winter playing conditions, the comparative analysis here showed the availability of winter training and playing is advantageous when compared to the Canadian climate. Suggestions that Canadian soccer would benefit from operating centralized talent development systems in coastal BC (where the climate is similar to England) would be at odds with providing professional clubs with a greater role.

It appears that the English system is viewed favourably by those involved in it, but traditional values regarding conceptions of ability (i.e. relative age-advantages, size, strength), assessment of players in competitive situations and formal coach education levels persist. However, the structure of English talent development may offer a model for the future development of the Canadian soccer system. There may be a tendency to judge the efficacy of talent development programmes by the results they produce at senior level. Fisher (1996) explained how a senior EFA coach traced back the England teams for the World Cups of 1986 and 1990 to find that only one player, goalkeeper Peter Shilton, had played for England at youth level. Of course, this approach masks the picture of talent development and fails to take into account the strengths and weaknesses of respective programmes. The current study represents an initial attempt to evaluate the processes involved in particular talent development systems, rather than the outcomes of such programmes. Talent development programmes vary from country to country, and from sport to sport. Programme evaluation is an important, but under-represented, area of talent development that requires future research attention. Such research will help create programmes that serve the needs of talented young athletes involved in a range of sporting endeavours.

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Résumé

Le développement des talents des joueurs de football en Angleterre et au Canada

L'objectif de cette recherche était de comparer les dispositifs pour le développement de joueurs de football d'élite en Angleterre et au Canada. Les données ont été obtenues à partir d'une analyse documentaire, d'une observation de terrain et d'entretiens formels et informels auprès d'entraîneurs pour jeunes canadiens et anglais ($N = 12$). Les systèmes respectifs de développement des talents ont été comparés en fonction des états normatifs, institutionnels, et mentaux et des patterns environnementaux (Holmes, 1991). Les résultats montrent que les dirigeants nationaux du football sont responsables du développement des talents au Canada, tandis que les clubs professionnels assument le premier rôle dans le système anglais. Les entraîneurs canadiens possèdent un plus haut niveau d'éducation formelle que leurs homologues anglais, mais ces derniers ont de plus grandes opportunités d'expérience de formation continue à l'entraînement. Une certaine contradiction apparaît entre les valeurs des entraîneurs et le niveau de la politique institutionnelle dans chaque système. À partir de ces comparaisons interculturelles, des suggestions sont présentées pour de futures recherches sur le développement des talents et une évolution des pratiques.

Resumen

La intención de este estudio fue la de realizar un estudio comparado entre los sistemas inglés y canadiense, sobre el desarrollo de los sistemas de formación de futbolistas de élite. Los datos se recogieron mediante estudios de campo y mediante entrevistas, formales e informales, con entrenadores de equipos juveniles canadienses e ingleses ($N = 12$). Ambos sistemas de desarrollo de talentos fueron comparados desde su normativa institucional, planteamientos ideológicos y ambientales (Holmes, 1991). Los estudios comparativos

demostraron que la federación de fútbol canadiense era la responsable del desarrollo de talentos en Canadá, en tanto que eran los clubes de fútbol profesionales los que asumían este papel en Inglaterra. Los entrenadores canadienses estaban mejor formados que sus colegas ingleses, mientras que, por el contrario, los ingleses poseían una mayor experiencia práctica. Del mismo modo, se apreciaron claras discrepancias entre las escalas de valores de los entrenadores y los de las políticas institucionales en ambos sistemas. Se ofrecen sugerencias para futuras investigaciones sobre el desarrollo de talentos en cuenta este planteamiento trans-cultural.

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