Types, Sources, and Debilitating Factors of Sport-Confidence in Elite Early Adolescent

Academy Soccer Players

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1           Abstract

2    This study provided an original contribution to the literature by examining elite early

3    adolescent academy soccer players sport-confidence needs. Pre-interview booklets and

4    individual semi-structured interviews were used as multiple sources of qualitative data to

5    identify the types, sources, and debilitating factors of sport-confidence in a large sample (n =

6    28) of players within the youth development phase of the Elite Player Performance Plan (The

7    Premier League, 2011). An abductive approach to hierarchical content analysis found three

8    types of sport-confidence: Skill execution, physical factors, and psychological factors. These

9    types were generated from five sources of sport-confidence: Accomplishments, social

10   support, preparation, vicarious experience, and innate factors. Five confidence debilitating

11   factors: Lack of social support, poor performances, poor preparation, pressure and

12   expectations, and injury/illness were also identified. Practitioners are advised to widen the

13   sport-confidence types experienced by elite adolescent performers and broaden the sources of

14   sport-confidence such performers use to gain belief.

15      *Key Words:* Youth Sport, Sport Psychology, Qualitative, Hierarchical Content Analysis

16

17   This study examined elite academy soccer players sport-confidence. Players were confident

18   about: Skill execution, physical and psychological factors. Players gained confidence from:

19   Accomplishments, social support, preparation, vicarious experience, and innate factors.

20   Players confidence was reduced by: A lack of social support, poor performances, poor

21   preparation, pressure and expectations, and injury/illness.

1    Types, Sources, and Debilitating Factors of Sport-Confidence in Early Adolescent Academy

2                                    Soccer Players

3         Confidence has been recognized as a critical psychological characteristic influencing

4    the development of elite sports performance (e.g., Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould,

5    Dieffenbach, & Moffet, 2002; Gould & Maynard, 2009) with a number of studies associating

6    high levels of confidence with a range of desirable cognitive, affective, and behavioral

7    responses (e.g., Jones & Hanton, 2001; Hays, Thomas, Maynard, & Bawden, 2009; Vealey,

8    Hayashi, Garner-Holman, & Giacobbi, 1998). To date, two main approaches have been used

9    to explore confidence related concepts in sport; Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Bandura,

10   1977, 1986, 1997; see Feltz, Short, & Sullivan 2008 for a review) and Vealey and colleagues'

11   models of sport-confidence (Vealey, 1986; Vealey et al., 1998; see Vealey & Chase, 2008 for

12   a review). Although Bandura's self-efficacy theory has been extensively studied within sport,

13   it was not originally intended for use within sports settings. Consequently, Vealey and

14   colleagues (e.g., Vealey, 1986; Vealey et al., 1998; Vealey, 2001; Vealey and Chase, 2008)

15   have offered an iteratively evolving model of sport-confidence to provide a more sport-

16   specific conceptualization of confidence.

17         The most recent iterations of this model (i.e., post 1998) shared greater similarities

18   with self-efficacy theory and focused on the source domains performers used to derive belief.

19   The revised model also more closely resembled a social-cognitive approach by recognizing

20   the influence personal, demographic, and organizational factors had on the manifestation of

21   sport-confidence (Vealey & Chase, 2008). To help identify the sources of sport-confidence,

22   Vealey et al. (1998) developed the Sources of Sport-Confidence Questionnaire (SSCQ) which

23   measured nine separate sources of sport-confidence. These sources were categorized into

24   three broad domains: Achievement (i.e., confidence derived from mastery and demonstration

25   of ability); self-regulation (i.e., confidence derived from physical/mental preparation and

26   physical self-presentation); and social climate (i.e., confidence derived from social support,

1    vicarious experience, coaches' leadership, environmental comfort, and situational

2    favorableness). A source of sport-confidence was defined as a determinant or antecedent of

3    an athlete's sport-confidence belief. Vealey et al. also noted how individual athlete

4    characteristics (e.g., gender) and the organizational culture of the sport (e.g., competitive

5    level) influenced the development and manifestation of sport-confidence. Subsequent

6    research has supported the idea that individual athlete characteristics influence sport-

7    confidence via athletes' goal orientations (Magyar & Feltz, 2003), and notably in the context

8    of the current study, their age (Wilson, Sullivan, Myers, & Feltz, 2004).

9         Building on her 1998 framework, Vealey (2001) published the integrative model of

10    sport-confidence which provided a more holistic overview of the reconceptualized model of

11    sport-confidence. Vealey (2001) tentatively proposed that sport-confidence existed as a

12    multidimensional construct and that performers possess multiple types of sport-confidence

13    that were derived from the source domains. Vealey recognized her 2001 framework was

14    exploratory and that it should act as a starting point for future sport-confidence research. In

15    response, Hays and colleagues conducted a qualitative program of research with a sample of

16    world class performers suggesting that the organizational culture of world class sport

17    influenced the development and manifestation of sport-confidence (see Hays, Maynard,

18    Thomas & Bawden 2007; Hays et al., 2009). Hays et al. (2007) supported Vealey's proposal

19    that sport-confidence was a multidimensional construct by identifying the sport-confidence

20    types and sources salient to world class athletes. Six types of sport-confidence emerged (i.e.,

21    skill execution, achievement, physical and psychological factors, superiority to opposition,

22    tactical awareness, and athlete specific factors). Hays et al. (2007) also provided conceptual

23    clarity regarding sport-confidence types and defined these as evidence-based belief systems

24    grounded within performers' sources of sport-confidence. Nine sources of sport-confidence

25    salient to world class performers were reported (i.e., preparation, performance

26    accomplishments, coaching, social support, innate factors, experience, competitive

1   advantage, trust, and self-awareness). Some sources were unique to this group, whereas

2   others overlapped with those previously reported (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Vealey et al., 1998)

3   and there was an overriding consensus that the world class performers derived their sport-

4   confidence from preparation, performance accomplishment, coaching, and social support.

5          Beyond the identification of sport-confidence types and sources, Hays et al. (2009)

6   examined the role of sport-confidence in relation to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral

7   responses it elicits, and identified the factors responsible for debilitating sport-confidence

8   within the subculture of world class sport. The resulting confidence debilitating factors were

9   categorized into six categories representing poor performances, injury/illness, poor

10  preparation, coaching, pressure and expectations, and psychological factors. The authors

11  noted that these confidence debilitating factors appeared to be directly related to the sport-

12  confidence sources identified in Hays et al.'s (2007) study. This coherency highlighted a need

13  for researchers and practitioners to consider confidence debilitating factors alongside sources

14  and types when attempting to gain a holistic understanding of an athlete's sport-confidence.

15         Collectively, Hays and colleagues' work (2007; 2009) contributed towards achieving

16  a more in-depth theoretical understanding of sport-confidence within a high-performance

17  elite sport culture. Specifically, it was established that demographic and personality

18  characteristics (e.g., gender and competitive orientation), as well as organizational culture

19  (e.g., competitive level) influenced the types of sport-confidence athletes possessed and the

20  sources upon which such beliefs were based (Vealey & Chase, 2008). However, the majority

21  of this understanding emerged from athletes who have already achieved elite or world class

22  status (e.g., Hays et al., 2007; 2009) and cannot be easily generalized beyond these

23  organizational sub-cultures. For this reason, research is required to examine sport-confidence

24  in athletes who are yet to reach elite or world class status. For example, Hays, Thomas, Butt,

25  and Maynard (2010) suggested that future research should be more proactive and explore the

1    confidence needs of elite junior athletes to ensure they are using the sources and types of

2    confidence necessary to develop a broad and holistic foundational belief system.

3         Although existing sport-confidence research has acknowledged that demographic,

4    personality and organizational factors influence the sources of sport-confidence used by

5    collegiate, world class, and masters athletes (e.g., Hays et al., 2007; Vealey et al., 1998;

6    Wilson et al., 2004), the sport-confidence needs of competitive junior athletes are yet to be

7    explored. This is despite self-efficacy research in academic settings indicating children and

8    adolescents often primarily base their efficacy expectations on a relatively narrow source

9    base. For example, in their systematic review of 30 years of self-efficacy research in schools,

10   Usher and Pajares (2008) noted that not only do mastery experiences consistently emerge as

11   the most powerful influencing source of self-efficacy for children and adolescents, they are

12   the most salient source of efficacy identified by these groups. Similar findings can be found

13   in some self-efficacy research in sport and/or physical education settings. For example, Chase

14   (1998) reported adolescent non elite athletes relied upon performance accomplishments

15   (mastery) and feedback from significant others to source their belief; with no support being

16   evident for two of Bandura's (1977) sources of self-efficacy in such participant groups (i.e.,

17   imaginal experiences and physical states). Other self and collective efficacy research in

18   adolescent non elite sport contexts (e.g., Chase, Feltz and Lirgg; 2003) and with respect to

19   relation-inferred self-efficacy (e.g., Saville et al., 2014) provided some support for the idea

20   that younger performers may rely on fewer sources of efficacy than their adult counterparts to

21   shape their efficacy expectations. Although such findings are important, they have limited

22   practical application to junior elite sport and do not contribute directly to furthering

23   understanding within a sport-confidence conceptualization to belief. Consequently, there

24   remains a need to examine sport-confidence in junior athletes participating in the subculture

25   of elite sport. At a conceptual level, such research will help clarify how some organizational

26   factors influence the manifestation of sport-confidence, broaden our understanding of the

1    multidimensional nature of sport-confidence and provide certainty around the sport-

2    confidence sources adolescent performers use to gain belief. Furthermore, this would help

3    provide evidence-based guidelines for practitioners regarding how to develop and maintain

4    sport-confidence with young athletes (see Vealey, Chase, & Cooley, 2017). Therefore, the

5    purpose of this study was to identify the types, sources, and debilitating factors of sport-

6    confidence in early adolescent elite academy soccer players. The rationale for exploring

7    sport-confidence within soccer was twofold. First, within professional soccer academies in

8    the UK, a player's development pathway is underpinned by the 'Elite Player Performance

9    Plan' (EPPP; The Premier League, 2011). This allows aspects of junior athletes' sport-

10   confidence to be explored within a clearly defined organizational subculture and pathway

11   emended within elite adolescent sport. Second, following the adoption of EPPP, integration

12   of sport psychology services has been more prevalent in soccer academies leading calls for

13   further systematic enquiry on the psychological development of, and environment

14   surrounding, elite junior soccer players (Mills, Butt, Maynard, & Harwood, 2012).

15                                          **Method**

16          The study was conducted from a post-positivistic philosophical position which

17   recognises that some aspects of the social world cannot be directly measured, but seeks to

18   retain an objective approach that is free from bias (Weed, 2009). In essence, post-positivists

19   loosen the strict positivistic belief in value-free inquiry, yet still embrace traditional

20   evaluation criteria and often quantify their data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Krane & Baird,

21   2005). The following sections outline how decisions made throughout the study are

22   consistent with the assumptions that underpin post-positivism.

23   **Participants**

24          A purposeful sample of 28 early adolescent elite academy soccer players (12-15

25   years; $M = 14.28$, $SD = 1.22$) participated in the study. This developmental stage was chosen

26   as it represented the adolescent phase of development, aligned with the final years of the

1    soccer players academy developmental period (Lidor & Ziv, 2012). All four main player

2    positions were represented: Goalkeepers ($n = 2$), defenders ($n = 10$), midfielders ($n = 12$), and

3    forwards ($n = 4$). Participants had playing experience of between 6 and 10 years ($M = 8.1$, $SD$

4    $= 1.4$) and had been part of an academy for between 0.3 and 6 years ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 1.6$). All

5    28 players were signed to a professional club operating at least a category two status academy

6    within the EPPP (The Premier League, 2011). The ethics board of the lead author's

7    University provided ethical approval for the study. Initial voluntary informed written consent

8    was provided by all gatekeepers (e.g., clubs and parents) before speaking with potential

9    participants. Potential participants were told about the research project and were given the

10   opportunity to speak with their parents or guardian and the researchers in order to gain a full

11   understanding of the study. Voluntary informed written consent was then provided by

12   participants before the research was conducted.

13   **Data Collection**

14       **Pre-interview booklet.** Drawing upon the notion of 'elicitation tools' (see Smith &

15   Sparkes, 2016), the pre-interview booklet was designed for three reasons: First, it encouraged

16   participants to reflect upon their experiences in relation to their sport-confidence. Second, it

17   allowed the participants to familiarize themselves with the type of questions which were to be

18   asked during the interview. Third, it instructed participants to think about and write down

19   answers in relation to their general sport-confidence, career periods of high and low sport-

20   confidence, sources and types of sport-confidence, and confidence debilitating factors. The

21   pre interview booklet was designed in line with Hays et al.'s (2010) confidence profiling

22   technique, an appropriate approach when seeking ideographic detail on athletes sport-

23   confidence needs (see supplementary file 1 for a copy of the pre interview booklet). The

24   written notes from each participant's pre-interview booklet were used to tailor each

25   individual interview guide and were integrated into the data analysis process.

1    **Interview guide.** Given the exploratory nature of this research, a semi-structured

2    interview guide was designed to allow probing of further views and opinions, generate in-

3    depth answers, and create a consistent level of depth across the interviews (Patton, 2002).

4    The questions were developed based on those used by Hays and colleagues (2007; 2009) and

5    the structure of the guide was based upon Hays et al.'s (2010) confidence profiling technique

6    (see supplementary file 1 for a copy of the interview guide). This ensured participants' types,

7    sources, and confidence debilitating factors were explored in detail at an ideographic level.

8    The guide consisted of six sections. Sections one and two introduced the broad purpose of the

9    study, how data would be used, outlined confidentiality, and asked general introductory

10   questions. Section three explored participants views on general sport-confidence (e.g., In

11   your pre interview booklet you used [soccer player's name] as an example of a confident

12   player, can you describe what you think he/she is confident about?). Section four sought

13   detail on the participants specific types and sources of sport-confidence that they identified in

14   their pre-interview booklet (e.g., Why is [type of sport-confidence] an important thing for you

15   to be confident about? Where does your confidence in [type of sport-confidence] come

16   from?). Following this, participants were asked about their types and sources of confidence

17   during a career period of high sport-confidence (e.g., You wrote in your pre-interview

18   booklet/we explored in the interview that your most confident career period was [career

19   period], can you think of a specific match during that period and describe anything that

20   happened during the match that made your confidence increase?). The penultimate section

21   explored confidence debilitating factors by asking about a career period of low confidence to

22   help facilitate this process. The final section reviewed the interview and enabled any

23   important information that might have been overlooked during the process.

24   **Procedure**

25       Following parental/guardian consent and participant consent, 28 academy players

26   from two different academies completed both the pre-interview booklet and an individual

1    interview (i.e., data triangulation across multiple sources of information). All interviews were

2    conducted face-to-face at the participant's club academy training center, were recorded in

3    their entirety, and lasted between 45-67 minutes. One week after their interview participants

4    were provided with their transcript and results and confirmed that they represented an

5    accurate reflection of their views on their sport-confidence (i.e., member checks). Following

6    this, participants were provided with a workbook titled: 'Developing Sport-Confidence

7    through Preparation, Achievement, Self-Awareness and Mental Skills' based on the findings

8    from the current study.

9    **Data Analysis**

10       Consistent with post-positivistic assumptions, qualitative data was analyzed using an

11   abductive (i.e., inductive and deductive) approach to hierarchical content analysis. It is the

12   procedures used in hierarchical content analysis which align with the post-positivistic

13   commitment to reliability, objectivity, trustworthiness and a psychological reality which can

14   be found and known independently of the researcher (Smith & Sparkes, 2012). Following the

15   step-by-step procedures for conducting a hierarchical content analysis outlined by Sparkes

16   and Smith (2013), interviews were firstly transcribed verbatim yielding 353 pages of single-

17   spaced text. Pre-interview booklets and transcripts were then independently studied in detail

18   by the second and fourth authors for content familiarity. Following this, transcripts were

19   independently analyzed by the same authors and themes representing confidence type(s),

20   source(s), or debilitating factor(s) were identified and labelled. Specifically, raw data

21   responses were organized into more meaningful sub-themes (e.g., confidence derived from

22   the use of mental skills), themes (e.g., confidence derived from psychological preparation),

23   and categories (e.g., confidence derived from preparation; Hays et al., 2007). It is important

24   to note that although the raw data themes were generated inductively, deductive analysis was

25   used to promote consistency regarding terminology within the conceptual area and previously

26   published literature (e.g., Vealey et al., 1998; Hays et al., 2007; Hays et al., 2009). Data was

then re-examined to verify that all themes and categories were represented, before the first

and third author reviewed, agreed and confirmed the analysis during a face-to-face discussion

between the authors. Finally, tables and figures were generated to display the hierarchical

nature of the themes. Themes with higher frequency represent sources, types, or confidence

debilitating factors that elite early adolescent academy soccer players have in common.

**Quality Criteria**

In line with our post-positivistic approach, a 'criteriological' approach to evaluating

qualitative work can use used to judge the current study (Sparkes & Smith, 2009; Smith &

Sparkes, 2012). Although some have criticized this approach (see Smith & McGannon,

2018), Smith and Sparkes (2012) noted, hierarchical content analysis is positioned within a

criteriological standpoint. This criteriological standpoint, and the specific techniques

employed in relation to each criterion (see below), were used as a way to remain objective

rather than to claim that objectivity has been definitively achieved (see Krane & Baird, 2005,

p.90). Specifically, the current study can be judged using Tracy's (2010) universal criteria

which was synthesized from others' work on the markers of quality in qualitative research,

and includes: (a) worthy topic (i.e., relevant, timely, significant, interesting); (b) rich rigor

(i.e., appropriate sample, appropriate procedures, sufficient data derived from multiple

sources of data [pre-interview booklets and interviews] to support claims), (c) sincerity (e.g.,

researcher transparency), (d) credibility (e.g., data triangulation, multivocality, member

checks), (e) resonance (e.g., transferability), (f) significant contribution (e.g., heuristic and/or

practically significant research), (g) ethics (e.g., procedural ethics, existing ethics / sharing of

results), and (h) meaningful coherence (e.g., meaningfully interconnects literature, research

questions, findings, and interpretations with each other).

## Results

The results are presented in three separate sections. First, the types (i.e., what players

were confident about) of sport-confidence are presented. Second, the sources of sport-

1    confidence from which these beliefs were derived are detailed. The final section outlines the

2    factors responsible for debilitating players' sport-confidence. Each section includes

3    supportive evidence via direct quotations from the transcripts and a figure representing the

4    raw data themes, sub-themes, themes, and categories.

5    **Types of Sport-Confidence**

6         The types of sport-confidence identified were categorized into three categories: Skill

7    execution, physical factors, and psychological factors (see Figure 1).

8         **Skill execution.** Skill execution was identified by all 28 participants as a type of

9    sport-confidence (see Table 1). Skill execution referred to the soccer players' beliefs in their

10   ability to successfully execute the physical/technical and tactical skills required to fulfill the

11   demands of their sport. All 28 players spoke about the confidence they possessed in their

12   ability to execute physical/technical skills. For example, participant two stated: "I'm

13   confident about passing over different ranges, distances, 10 yards, 20 yards, then ranges up to

14   40, 50 yards". Similarly, another participant explained: "I'm confident that I'll score when I

15   go 1v1 with a defender and that I can beat him and then go through on goal" (Player 13). In

16   addition, 21 players were also confident about their tactical skill execution such as awareness

17   of others, space, and positioning, reading the game, and versatility for a range of positions or

18   formations. The following quote captures these points:

19        Since I have been at [Football Club] I have played every position across defense

20        and midfield and I think I have had to adapt to different positions and I have had

21        to adapt a lot…like different positioning, if I am asked to play a different

22        position I know what I am doing, I am confident about that (Player 28).

23   **Physical factors.** Seventeen out of the 28 players identified physical factors such as

24   physical work rate, speed and agility, and height and build to be effective as types of

25   confidence. As one player explained: "Most academy players have something unique about

26   them that they are confident about…some people have speed, some people have

1   dribbling…but what I have is strength" (Player 20). Six participants highlighted physical

2   work rate as a type of confidence: "…because I'm not naturally as good as other players in

3   my team, my work rate, so how hard I work makes up for it I think… that physical ability I

4   have is something I'm confident about" (Player 10).

5        **Psychological factors.** Psychological factors were identified as a type of confidence by

6   13 of the 28 participants. This type of confidence referred to the players' confidence about

7   their ability to handle pressure and communicate. For example, one player stated: "I'm

8   confident about my communication because that's one thing that I have always been strong

9   at…I never stop talking throughout the game" (Player 18). Leadership skills were also a type

10  of confidence for seven of the players. This point is captured in the following quote from

11  player 14: "I'm a confident leader on and off the pitch, I motivate others, get them to

12  persevere…I think I'm very good in certain situations on the pitch, for example if we're not

13  playing well, I know to weather the storm so to speak and get through".

14  **Sources of Sport-Confidence**

15       Five sources of sport-confidence were identified in the current study. These included:

16  Accomplishments, social support, preparation, vicarious experience, and innate ability (See

17  Figure 2). However, as Table 2 shows, the players mostly gained their confidence from

18  sources associated with accomplishments and social support.

19       **Accomplishments.** Accomplishments were identified as a source of sport-confidence

20  by all participants. This source related to competition accomplishments, training

21  accomplishments, demonstration of ability, recognition, and selection. All but two players

22  gained confidence from competition accomplishments, with players noting competition

23  performance related accomplishments ($n = 26$) rather than competition outcomes ($n = 7$) as

24  the key source domain. The importance of competition performance related accomplishments

25  is captured within the following quote: "Once I'm passing well I normally play well…when

26  I've put 3,4,5 in a row together that's when I start to grow in confidence…that's like the

1    heartbeat of my confidence passing" (Player 26). Alongside competition accomplishments,

2    training accomplishments were a source of confidence for 27 of the 28 the players. For

3    example, one player described the importance of improving from training:

4          We were working on it [transition from defense to attack] in training and that gave me

5          confidence to play as a left back, and I took that into the game, and it worked well, so

6          we played out from the back, got forward a lot... lots of underlaps and overlaps which

7          came from what we practiced in training (Player 7).

8    Twenty-one participants also gained confidence from demonstrating ability over opponents or

9    their own team-mates. The following quote illustrates how demonstrating superiority over

10   team mates ($n = 10$) was considered vital in the process of being retained by the academy:

11         I knew those next two years were vitally important for my football career and also

12         because quite a few people didn't get the contract and got released, so it made me feel

13         confident and privileged to be one of those players who did get a contract (Player 14).

14   Finally, recognition (e.g., being recognized as a leader; $n = 18$) and selection (i.e., selected for

15   international squads; $n = 14$) were also noted by several players as being important

16   accomplishment related sources of confidence (see Figure 2).

17         **Social support.** All 28 participants gained confidence from social support.

18   Specifically, esteem, informational, emotional, and tangible support were all identified as

19   sources of sport-confidence (see Figure 2 and Table 2). Coaches, team-mates, and family

20   and friends, were consistently noted as key providers of esteem support ($n = 28$). The

21   following quote illustrates how a player gained confidence from the esteem-based support

22   he received from his coach: "Mainly a pat on the back from my coach or my manager,

23   because that shows you've done well and that's what every player wants, their coach to

24   acknowledge what you've done, so that is the main thing for my confidence" (Player 15).

25   Twenty-one players also noted the importance of receiving informational support;

26   coaches, family and friends, and team-mates were again identified as key providers of

1  this support. For example, player seven explained how informational support from the

2  coaches during a review session was a source of confidence:

3        You have a 6-week sort of plan with [club's name], and after that you get a review

4           from the coaches and they tell you what you need to work on, and how you can

5           improve and what players to look at to improve which helps my confidence.

6  Another academy player explained how receiving informational support during a match from

7  a coach improved both his confidence and performance:

8        At [Premier League Team] I wasn't playing that well and most managers, with me being

9           captain, would have left me on but he took me off, sat me down, and told me why he took

10          me off and what he felt I could and should have done, that gave me confidence, and when

11          he put me back on I felt I played better because he told me exactly what he wanted me to

12          do and that gave me confidence to do well when he put me back on (Player 24).

13 Emotional support ($n = 11$) (e.g., support from teammates after a mistake) and tangible support

14 ($n = 5$) were less frequently cited sources of confidence (see Figure 2).

15       **Preparation.** Preparation was identified as a source of confidence by 23 of the 28

16 participants. Twenty-one participants gained confidence from physical and technical

17 preparation including good physical/technical training, team preparation, identifying and

18 rectifying weaknesses, nutrition, and skill repetition. One player explained the importance of

19 team preparation:

20       On the Friday we'll train for an hour and then we'll come in for the last hour or half

21          hour and they'll [coaches] speak to us about triggers and when we need to press, when

22          we need to drop off so that gives us confidence (Player 13).

23 Players also highlighted the importance of a good warm up prior to matches: "We do a

24 running warm up first, and then we go into a passing drill and then into a possession drill, so

25 if that warm up is a good tempo I feel confident, I take that into the game" (Player 11). In

26 contrast to physical and technical preparation, only 14 players gained confidence from

1    psychological preparation and just four players engaged in holistic preparation (e.g., a

2    combination of preparation related to sleep, video analysis, tactical analysis). Despite this, the

3    following quote from a player describes how important holistic preparation was as a source of

4    confidence:

5        It's important to get a good breakfast, knowing that I've done everything in the right

6        order knowing that I haven't missed anything out that normally makes me feel

7        confident…I get up and do exercises just to liven myself up, then I have my

8        breakfast, then I do a few more exercises then I picture myself in the game, make

9        sure everything is ready to go, and then I will do it all again in the changing room

10       (Player 26).

11       **Vicarious experience.** Vicarious experience was identified as a source of confidence

12   for 18 out of the 28 participants. Specifically, participants gained confidence from watching

13   teammates executing a skill successfully. The following quote from player 28 captures this

14   point: "If I see someone else make a good touch I think I can do that…like I'm confident that

15   if I can get into position like that I can make a touch like that". In addition to this, 15 players

16   gained confidence from modelling aspects of their game on professional soccer players or

17   specific role models. One of these participants explained how this impacted his confidence:

18   "Observing better players and learning from what they do gives you confidence when you go

19   away and do what they do, maybe not to the same level but you can take parts of their game

20   and put it into yours" (Player 8).

21       **Innate factors.** Eight of the 28 participants identified innate factors as a source of

22   confidence. These players believed that they were born with either a natural ability to play

23   soccer or innate factors which gave them an advantage or edge within soccer (i.e., speed,

24   natural understanding of the game, or competitiveness). One participant explained the

25   foundations of this belief:

1   I guess that it has always been one of my strong points since I was three, playing

2   football (soccer) has just been one of the things that came naturally to me so that gives

3   me confidence…obviously I have to try hard at it now but it's one of those things that I

4   was naturally good at (Player 17).

5 Similarly, another player added: "I've always been a good passer even when I wasn't here (at

6 the academy), I've become a better passer now but I've always had it, its natural" (Player 9).

7 **Confidence Debilitating Factors**

8   As Figure 3 shows the confidence debilitating factors identified by the participants

9 were classified into five categories: Lack of social support, poor performances, poor

10 preparation, pressure and expectations, and injury/illness. Poor performances and a lack of

11 social support were the most frequently cited confidence debilitating factors (see Table 3).

12   **Lack of social support.** All players highlighted how a lack of social support reduced

13 their confidence. This lack of social support centered predominantly on insufficient provision

14 of esteem and informational support. Twenty-six players indicated a lack of esteem support

15 from coaches, team-mates, family and friends, and significant others as factors responsible

16 for debilitating their sport-confidence. The following quote highlights how a lack of esteem

17 support from team-mates debilitated confidence: "Once I lose the ball, and if I lose it again I

18 would hear a team-mate moaning and getting angry, so that makes me lose my confidence

19 and just not want to play because I don't want to get worse" (Player 23). Another player

20 highlighted how this impacted on his confidence when he moved up an age group:

21   There is more pressure when you are playing up (an age group) because you have to

22   impress the others …When I last played up a few boys kept putting me down and if I

23   didn't make a good pass they would shout at me which put my confidence down

24   (Player 27).

25 Similarly, 18 of the players highlighted how a lack of esteem support from coaches (e.g.,

26 negative feedback, lack of trust) debilitated their confidence. For example, one player stated:

1    "There's been times where I haven't done things very well and they've said look you need to

2    do this better, so that would knock my confidence a little" (Player 11). A lack of esteem

3    support from family and friends (e.g., family arguments, being left out of friendship groups)

4    was also detrimental to players confidence. One player explained how negative feedback

5    from his father had an adverse impact on his confidence: "So if I've had like a bad game, or a

6    bad training session then they'll [parents] say like that wasn't good enough and are we

7    wasting our time" (Player 12). Furthermore, six players indicated a lack of informational

8    support from coaches ($n = 5$) and/or the support team ($n = 1$) debilitated their confidence. The

9    following quote captures the way in which this impacted on players' confidence: "It was

10   when I got moved position, to a position I wasn't familiar with, and I didn't get much

11   information to know what I had to do, so I sort of got on with it, but my confidence went

12   down and down" (Player 1).

13          **Poor performances.** All players identified poor performances such as: Poor skill

14   execution, poor form and selection worries, inferiority to the opposition, and poor outcomes

15   as confidence debilitating factors. One participant explained how poor skill execution

16   debilitated his confidence:

17          At center half if I get the ball and lose it, like numerous times, I will lose

18          confidence and I just won't want the ball at all because I will think to myself if I

19          get it I will just lose the ball again…like playing out (from defense) I won't

20          want the ball I will just tell the goalkeeper or whoever has got it to miss me out

21          or I won't call for the ball and I will gradually fade out of the game (Player 24).

22   In addition to poor skill execution, 17 players cited poor form and selection worries such as

23   being out of form, playing out of position, and not staring games as debilitating their

24   confidence. The following quote from player 9 captures these points: "I was playing in a

25   position I didn't want to play in, so they moved me to center back then I wasn't starting

26   anymore, so it knocked my confidence". Finally, 14 players identified a sense of inferiority to

1    the opposition could debilitate their confidence: "If the striker got the better of you, like if he

2    managed to pick the ball up, turn and get past you and go and score a goal, if he was

3    dominating me that would make me low on confidence" (Player 11).

4         **Poor preparation.** Poor preparation was identified as a confidence debilitating factor

5    by 19 of the 28 participants. Poor preparation included poor physical/technical,

6    organizational, and psychological preparation. Player 8 described how poor

7    physical/technical preparation could debilitate his confidence:

8      I didn't prepare the same way I usually do, like practicing properly in the warm-up. I

9      missed out my passing drills, 5-10 minutes of passing, so I kept giving the ball away in the

10      game, my [passing] accuracy was off, so I felt less confident".

11   Player 27 also explained how a combination of poor nutritional, organizational, and physical

12   preparation was detrimental to his confidence:

13      If I don't eat the right stuff I can worry…every Friday I have a pizza, it worries

14      me if I'm going to play good or bad and then if I don't do my homework or I

15      forget sometimes, or don't have time I do worry, and then just in the warm up if

16      I do badly that makes me worry and reduces my confidence for the match.

17         **Pressure and expectations.** Nineteen of the 28 participants identified pressure and

18   expectation as a confidence debilitating factor. Specifically, participants cited placing internal

19   pressure and expectation on themselves, having self-doubts about their ability, and fear of

20   being released as confidence debilitating factors. In addition, external pressure and

21   expectation from coaches, parents, or academy managers were also cited by some players (*n*

22   = 5) as confidence debilitating factors. For instance, one of the players recalled a match in

23   which parental pressure debilitated his confidence:

24      My dad kept putting me under a lot of pressure like on the journey there he kept

25      talking to me about not messing up because it's a big club…At first I was

26      feeling confident because I played them (Premier League team) the year before

1    and scored but then as it got closer and closer to getting there my dad was

2    putting me under a lot more pressure then I was nervous and I played awful

3    (Player 23).

4    **Injury/Illness.** Sixteen out of the 28 participants identified injury/illness as a

5    confidence debilitating factor. Eleven players referred to specific types of age related (e.g.,

6    Sever's disease, osteomyelitis) or general injuries (e.g., groin injury) as confidence

7    debilitating factors. For example, one player described the impact that being injured had on

8    his confidence: "I lose my confidence when I'm injured for a long time and I don't believe in

9    my strengths as a player because I haven't been playing for some time" (Player 12). In

10   addition to this, 11 players described how the consequences of injuries (e.g., falling behind,

11   deselection, lack of fitness) acted as a confidence debilitating factor when returning to play:

12   I got back into it as the games went on, my performance slowly got back, but I

13   was a bit worried about doing it [injury] again so my performance and fitness

14   wasn't as good as normal so that didn't help my confidence at all (Player 11).

15   <div align="center">**Discussion**</div>

16   Using multiple sources of data (i.e., pre-interview booklets and interviews) this study

17   identified the types, sources, and confidence debilitating factors of early adolescent elite

18   academy soccer players. Three types of sport-confidence, five sources of sport-confidence,

19   and five confidence debilitating factors were identified. With respect to types of sport-

20   confidence, and consistent with those reported by world class athletes (e.g., Hays et al., 2007;

21   2009), our findings indicated academy players were confident about: their ability to execute

22   skills (i.e., physical, technical, and tactical skills); some physical factors; and some

23   psychological factors. However, in comparison to the world class athletes used in Hays and

24   colleagues' work, elite adolescent soccer players did not identify 'achievement' and

25   'superiority to the opposition' as sport-confidence types. This is perhaps unsurprising given

26   the age and developmental stage of the players in our study, and the fact they are yet to reach

1    a professional level. Despite this, the findings provided support for the multi-dimensional

2    nature of sport-confidence (Hays et al., 2007; Hwang, Machida, & Choi, 2017; Machida,

3    Otten, Magyar, Vealey, & Marie Ward, 2016) and endorse the notion that athletes' evidence-

4    based belief systems (i.e., types) are grounded within their sources (Vealey & Chase, 2008).

5            Turning towards sources of sport-confidence, and consistent with previous studies

6    (Hays et al., 2007; Vealey et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 2004), the most frequently cited sources

7    of sport-confidence identified were: Accomplishments; social support; and preparation.

8    However, closer inspection of the lower order themes provides new knowledge on how

9    organizational culture (i.e., age, level, and motivational climate) influenced how elite *junior*

10   players constructed their sources of sport-confidence. Specifically, although performance

11   accomplishments were a source of confidence for all players in our study, competition

12   performances rather than competition outcomes were used most to gain belief. This contrasts

13   the accomplishment sources used by the world class male athletes in previous research (e.g.,

14   Hays et al., 2007, 2009). Players also gained confidence from selection accomplishments,

15   receiving recognition, and superiority to the opposition or their own teammates, supporting

16   the notion that the general motivational climate of a sport team includes perceptions of the

17   values, attitudes, and behaviors of a variety of social agents, and effort, improvement, and

18   social comparison might be equally emphasized (Harwood, Spray, & Keegan, 2008). This

19   appears reflective of the organizational culture in elite soccer academies, which may focus on

20   individual progress and improvement, but at the same time players are competing with each

21   other for professional contracts (Mills et al., 2012).

22           Beyond accomplishments, social support was identified as a critical source of sport-

23   confidence used by elite academy soccer players to gain belief. This sample appeared more

24   reliant on social support from coaches, peers, and family members as a source of confidence

25   than world class athletes (Hays et al., 2007; 2009). Findings that are congruent with studies

26   that have identified social support as a highly influential source of confidence for adolescents

1    participating in sport (Vealey et al., 1998) and physical education (Chase, 1998). The reliance

2    on gaining confidence from coach and peer support is perhaps not surprising given the

3    developmental stage of the players used in this study (see Wylleman & Lavellee, 2004), the

4    uncertainty surrounding their futures within elite academies, and the continual prospect of

5    being released from their contracts.

6            Preparation was the third most frequently cited source of sport-confidence; however,

7    players mostly relied on physical preparation to source this belief with few players using

8    psychological or holistic preparation-based sources (Hays et al., 2007). Such findings suggest

9    that elite academy soccer players may not have acquired the necessary knowledge,

10   experience, or skills to employ preparation strategies that are multi-faceted in nature. This

11   may surprise those engaged in the delivery of the EPPP programme within UK soccer

12   academies given the visibility of psychological provision within those organizational cultures

13   (The Premier League, 2011). However, consistent with Reeves, Nicholls, and McKenna's

14   (2009) suggestion, although support systems may exist it does not mean they are valued or

15   used by those who have access to them. Such findings highlight the need for greater attention

16   to be paid to the way in which young athletes prepare for competition from a psychological

17   perspective, particularly given the controllable nature of this source (Vealey & Chase, 2008).

18           The remaining sport-confidence sources of innate factors and vicarious experience

19   identified in this study have been less prominent within other sport-confidence studies. For

20   example, some participants believed they possessed innate factors that facilitated their

21   sporting success. Considering innate factors have only been previously identified by world

22   class athletes (Hays et al., 2007), it is possible that this may be a source of sport-confidence

23   specific to elite performers. Similarly, the importance placed on vicarious experience by elite

24   adolescents is perhaps reflective of their specific developmental stage. Hays et al. (2007)

25   found that world class senior athletes did not source sport-confidence from observing other

26   athletes performing successfully. Our findings suggest that observing and comparing oneself

1    with others is a particularly relevant source of sport-confidence for athletes who are learning

2    new skills or undertaking new challenges. Considering the aims and objectives of elite

3    academies, providing players with models to facilitate both their skill development and sport-

4    confidence should be a focus of attention for practitioners.

5         In this study, no support was found for several of the sport-confidence sources

6    outlined in previous research. For example, elite adolescent soccer players did not source

7    confidence from environmental comfort, situational favourableness, or physical self-

8    presentation as described in Vealey et al.'s (1998) research. Further, no evidence emerged for

9    the sport-confidence sources of competitive advantage, coaching, self-awareness, experience,

10   and trust as identified by Hays et al. (2007). These findings suggest elite academy soccer

11   players may base their confidence on a relatively narrow set of source beliefs in comparison

12   with more senior athletes (Hays et al., 2007; Vealey et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 2004). This

13   suggestion is supported by self-efficacy research that has indicated younger individuals base

14   their efficacy expectations on a narrower set of efficacy sources (e.g., Chase, 1998; Chase et

15   al., 2003; Saville et al., 2014; Usher & Pajares, 2008). Thomas, Lane and Kingston (2011)

16   suggested that basing sport-confidence on a narrow set of beliefs may make athletes more

17   susceptible to fluctuations in their levels of confidence and that in order to develop robust

18   sport-confidence, athletes must derive their beliefs from multiple source domains. Our

19   findings extend these suggestions to adolescent performers and indicate practitioners working

20   with such groups must ensure confidence is based on a wide range of controllable sources.

21   The results also suggest practitioners should pay particular attention to the way in which

22   young athletes construct their sources of sport-confidence (i.e., gaining confidence from

23   performance rather than outcome related accomplishments).

24        In order to gain a more complete understanding of sport-confidence, our study also

25   examined the factors responsible for debilitating sport-confidence. The confidence

26   debilitating factors identified by elite academy soccer players included a lack of social

1    support, poor performance factors, poor preparation, pressure and expectations, and

2    injury/illness. Consistent with Hays et al.'s (2009) findings, these confidence debilitating

3    factors appeared to be directly associated with the sources of sport-confidence identified by

4    this sample. For example, responses pertaining to verbal feedback from the coaches were

5    highlighted as a means of both gaining sport-confidence but also a factor responsible for

6    debilitating a player's sport-confidence. As such, the players' perception of the feedback

7    provided appears to be critical to the interpretation of whether the mechanism was a source

8    of, or debilitating factor for, confidence at that moment in time. In addition to this, the

9    confidence debilitating factors reported also appeared to be closely related to early adolescent

10   academy soccer players' sources of stress (see Reeves et al., 2009). Although it went beyond

11   the scope of the current study to examine the relationship between sport-confidence and the

12   transactional stress process, it may be that in order to develop or maintain robust levels of

13   sport-confidence, young athletes may need to learn how to effectively cope with the

14   competitive and organizational demands they experience (see Tamminen & Holt, 2012).

15   However, young athletes' capacity to use coping strategies may not fully emerge until late

16   adolescence (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007).

17        In summary, our study provided a number of important conceptual and practical

18   implications that extend current thinking and contribute new knowledge to the extant

19   literature. Conceptually, the identification of a range of types and sources of sport-confidence

20   evidence the multidimensional nature of sport-confidence (e.g., Hay et al., 2007, 2009;

21   Machida et al., 2016). The emphasis elite adolescent performers placed on certain types and

22   sources of sport-confidence when compared to those noted in previous research with elite

23   senior athletes (e.g., Hays et al., 2007) supports the inclusion of demographic and personality

24   characteristics within Vealey's model of sport-confidence. The critical role social-support

25   played as an adaptive factor from which elite adolescents sourced belief, versus the

26   maladaptive impact a lack of social-support had on debilitating elite adolescents sport-

1    confidence was an important contribution. Furthermore, this study provides new knowledge

2    on how social support is conceptualized within sport-confidence research. Previous sport-

3    confidence research has classified social support as a source category (i.e., global dimension)

4    and subtheme within the coaching source of sport-confidence (e.g., Hays et al., 2007; Vealey

5    et al., 1998).  The rigorous data analysis process used in our study identified specific

6    dimensions of social support (e.g., esteem, informational, emotional and tangible support)

7    that players used to source their belief and also identified how a lack of esteem support and

8    informational support debilitated sport-confidence. Our findings aligned with the dimension

9    based conceptualizations of social support (e.g., Freeman & Rees, 2009; Rees & Hardy,

10    2000), and has provided conceptual clarity regarding the positioning of social support within

11    sport-confidence research. Collectively, these results also provide evidence for Feltz et al.'s

12    (2008) suggestion that the unique nature of sport emphasises social support as an important

13    source of belief for athletes beyond what Bandura (1997) represented within the verbal

14    persuasion source of self-efficacy. Our results corroborated findings from self-efficacy

15    research and extended them to the sport-confidence literature by evidencing elite adolescent

16    performers utilize a narrower set of sources of sport-confidence to underpin their belief

17    system (cf. Usher & Pajares, 2008). The results also identified the confidence debilitating

18    factors experienced by elite adolescent performers. At an applied level, our findings indicated

19    coaches, parents, practitioners, and players should work on fostering a strong and broad set

20    sport-confidence sources to underpin an elite adolescent's belief system. The role these

21    individuals play in providing appropriate social support has emerged as a critical factor for

22    such groups. The bias towards the elite adolescent academy players in our study using

23    performance related accomplishments rather than outcome related accomplishments to source

24    belief sits closely with design of the EPPP pathway and is an important consideration for

25    those designing and administering such programmes.

1    The findings and implications should be considered in light of several limitations.

2    First, although member checks were used as a strategy to remain objective and enhance the

3    credibility of the data (Tracy, 2010), at a practical level there is no way to guarantee that

4    power relations did not influence participant confirmation or that each participant truly

5    engaged with this process (see Smith & McGannon, 2018). Second, the types, sources, and

6    confidence debilitating factors identified are unique to the context of elite academy soccer

7    within the UK. Although many elite junior team sport athletes may have very similar sport-

8    confidence needs to those identified in this study, we advise caution when generalizing these

9    findings beyond this context. Research is needed to establish which sources, types, or

10   debilitating factors are most salient within sport specific contexts (i.e., individual vs. team

11   sports) across levels (i.e., elite vs. non-elite), and developmental stages (i.e., sampling,

12   specializing, investment years; Côté, 1999). Thirdly, another limitation was that we did not

13   assess levels of confidence. Future research is needed to examine the interaction between

14   academy players' confidence levels and their sources, types, and confidence debilitating

15   factors over time (e.g., throughout a season). Such insights are crucial to help practitioners

16   design interventions which help young athletes to develop robust sport-confidence. Building

17   on these points, future research is also needed to examine the conceptual links between

18   athletes' source of sport-confidence and their confidence debilitating factors.

19   In conclusion, this study was the first to examine the types, sources, and confidence

20   debilitating factors of athletes within a single empirical study. Using multiple sources of data,

21   this study provided an in-depth insight into what elite junior soccer players are confident

22   about, where they gain confidence from, and what serves to debilitate their confidence. It also

23   provided new knowledge on the role of social support within an elite adolescent's belief

24   system. Such insights are vital in terms of affirming the role organizational culture plays on

25   the manifestation of sport-confidence, and for assisting the development of interventions

26   aimed at fostering robust sport-confidence within elite junior performers.

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Table 1.

*Types of Sport-Confidence Identified by Elite Academy Soccer Players (n =28)*

| Type of Confidence | Number of athletes citing type | Total percentage of participants |
|---|---|---|
| Skill Execution | 28 | 100% |
| Physical Factors | 17 | 61% |
| Psychological Factors | 13 | 46% |

Table 2.

*Sources of Sport-Confidence Identified by Elite Academy Soccer Players (n = 28)*

| Sources of Confidence | Number of athletes citing source | Total percentage of participants |
|---|---|---|
| Accomplishment | 28 | 100% |
| Training accomplishment | 27 | 96% |
| Competition accomplishment | 26 | 93% |
| Demonstration of ability | 21 | 75% |
| Recognition | 18 | 64% |
| Selection | 14 | 50% |
| Social Support | 28 | 100% |
| Esteem support | 28 | 100% |
| Informational support | 21 | 75% |
| Emotional support | 11 | 39% |
| Tangible support | 5 | 18% |
| Preparation | 23 | 82% |
| Physical and technical preparation | 21 | 75% |
| Psychological preparation | 14 | 50% |
| Holistic preparation | 4 | 14% |
| Vicarious Experience | 18 | 64% |
| Innate Factors | 8 | 29% |

Table 3.

*Confidence Debilitating Factors Identified by Elite Academy Soccer Players (n = 28)*

| Confidence Debilitating Factors | Number of athletes citing confidence debilitating factor | Total percentage of participants |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of Social Support | 28 | 100% |
| Poor Performances | 28 | 100% |
| Poor Preparation | 19 | 68% |
| Pressure and Expectations | 19 | 68% |
| Injury/Illness | 16 | 57% |

Raw Data Theme                                              Theme                    Category

Range/quality of passing (16)
Heading (12)
Tacking/winning the ball (11)
Scoring/finishing (7)
Good first touch (7)
Attacking 1 v 1 (5)
Defending 1 v 1 (5)
Maintaining possession (4)                 Physical/Technical Skills (28)
Holding the ball up (4)
Delivery at set-pieces (3)
Crossing (3)
Using both feet (2)
Dribbling (2)                                                                        Skill Execution
Making good saves (2)                                                                (28)
Shot-stopping (2)
Getting assists (1)

Ability to read the game/opponent (14)
Awareness of others, space and
positioning (9)
Attacking shape and skills (9)
Movement on the pitch (5)
Quick and effective decision making (5)    Tactical Skills (21)
Organizing team-mates (4)
Knowledge and capability to fulfil
responsibilities/role on the pitch (4)
Versatility for a range of positions (3)
Understand and apply different
formations (2)

Speed and agility (8)
Physical work-rate (6)
Overall fitness levels (4)                                                           Physical Factors
Strength and physicality (4)                                                         (17)
Height and build to be effective (4)

Handling pressure (3)
Communication (8)
Leadership skills (7)                                                                Psychological
Bravery (4)                                                                          Factors (13)
Positive mindset/attitude (3)

*Figure 1*: Types of Sport-Confidence identified by elite academy soccer players

| Raw Data Theme | Sub Theme | Theme | Category |
|---|---|---|---|

Accurate/successful in game passes (11)
Scoring in a match (10)
Good tackles (9)
Consistency in performance (4)
Consistency as top goal scorer (1)
Being in form (3)
Success in 1v1 (4)
Getting an assist (7)
Team-mate scoring (2)
Good headers (1)
Making a good save (1)
Catching difficult crosses (1)
Influencing the game (4)
Helping others on the pitch (1)
Clean sheets (3)
Tricks coming off (4)
Good team performance (2)
Good first touch (1)
Successful interceptions (1)
Successful counter attack (1)
Good movements to find space (1)
Last ditch tackling (1)
Workrate in matches (2)
Good decision making (2)

Competition performance (26)

Winning matches (7)

Competition outcome (7)

Competition accomplishments (27)

Improvements from training/practice (19)
Learning and practicing new skills in training (8)
Scoring in training (4)
Passing well in training (3)
Training with senior players (3)
Strength improvements from the program (2)
Training with the National team (1)
Good fitness test results (1)
Successfully applying training focus to matches (1)
Speed and agility improvements (1)

Training accomplishments (27)

Outperforming opponent (individual) (8)
Beating opponent with speed (4)
Winning aerial/physical battles (3)
Using height/strength as an advantage (3)
Dominating opposition (team) (2)
Exploiting opponents weaknesses (2)
Reading game quicker than opponent (2)
Dominating possession (1)
Being a threat to opposition (1)

Superiority over opposition (15)

Demonstration of ability (21)

Accomplishments (28)

Being the best in our team (4)
Not getting released when team-mates were (3)
Top goal scorer at the club (2)
Beating senior players fitness scores (1)
Holding your own with senior players (1)
Having the best pass completion rate at the club (1)

Superiority over team-mates (10)

Offered an apprenticeship/extended contract (8)
Recognized as a leader (captain) (7)
Winning awards (MoM, player of season) (3)
Academy trial (1)

Recognition by/at the club (13)

Recognition (18)

Recognition from coaches/parents (5)
Getting scouted (2)
Recognition from opponents coach (2)

Recognition by significant others (10)

Playing for a top professional club (7)
Selection/standby for international squads (7)
Playing up a year group (4)

Selection (14)



1
2    *Figure 2*: Sources of Sport-Confidence identified by elite academy soccer players

Figure 2: Sources of Sport-Confidence identified by elite academy soccer players

| Raw Data Theme | Sub Theme | Theme | Category |
|---|---|---|---|

Match/position specific drills (9)
Strength and conditioning preparation (4)
Working hard in training (5)
Training well in the lead up to a match (2)
Training well in pre season (1)

Good physical/ technical training (14)

Good team warm up (5)
Team training in preparation for matches (3)
Formations, roles and responsibilities (2)
Set-play book (2)
Set piece preparation (1)
Observing opposition to gain advantage (1)

Team preparation (11)

Extra training outside the academy to develop specific areas (8)
Additional gym sessions (1)
Staying longer at training to improve weaknesses (1)

Identifying and rectifying weaknesses (10)

Physical and technical preparation (21)

Eating and hydrating properly (4)
Eating well before a match (1)

Nutrition (5)

Effectiveness of skill due to repetition (2)
Repetition of working on first touch (1)
Skills becoming second nature (1)

Skill repetition (4)

Preparation (23)

Imagery pre and in game (4)
Pre performance routines (2)
Setting goals (2)
Listening to music to relax (1)
Reflection to learn from mistakes (1)
Recalling oppositions strengths and weaknesses (1)

Psychological skills (9)

Enjoying training and having fun (6)
Possessing a winning mentality (1)

Positive state of mind (7)

Psychological preparation (14)

Video analysis of own performance (4)
Tactical analysis (1)
Sleeping well (1)

Holistic preparation (4)

Modelling other professional players (15)
Watching/learning from team-mates (4)
Watching players recover from injury (1)

Vicarious Experiences (18)

Natural ability (5)
Natural understanding of the game (1)
Innate competitiveness (1)
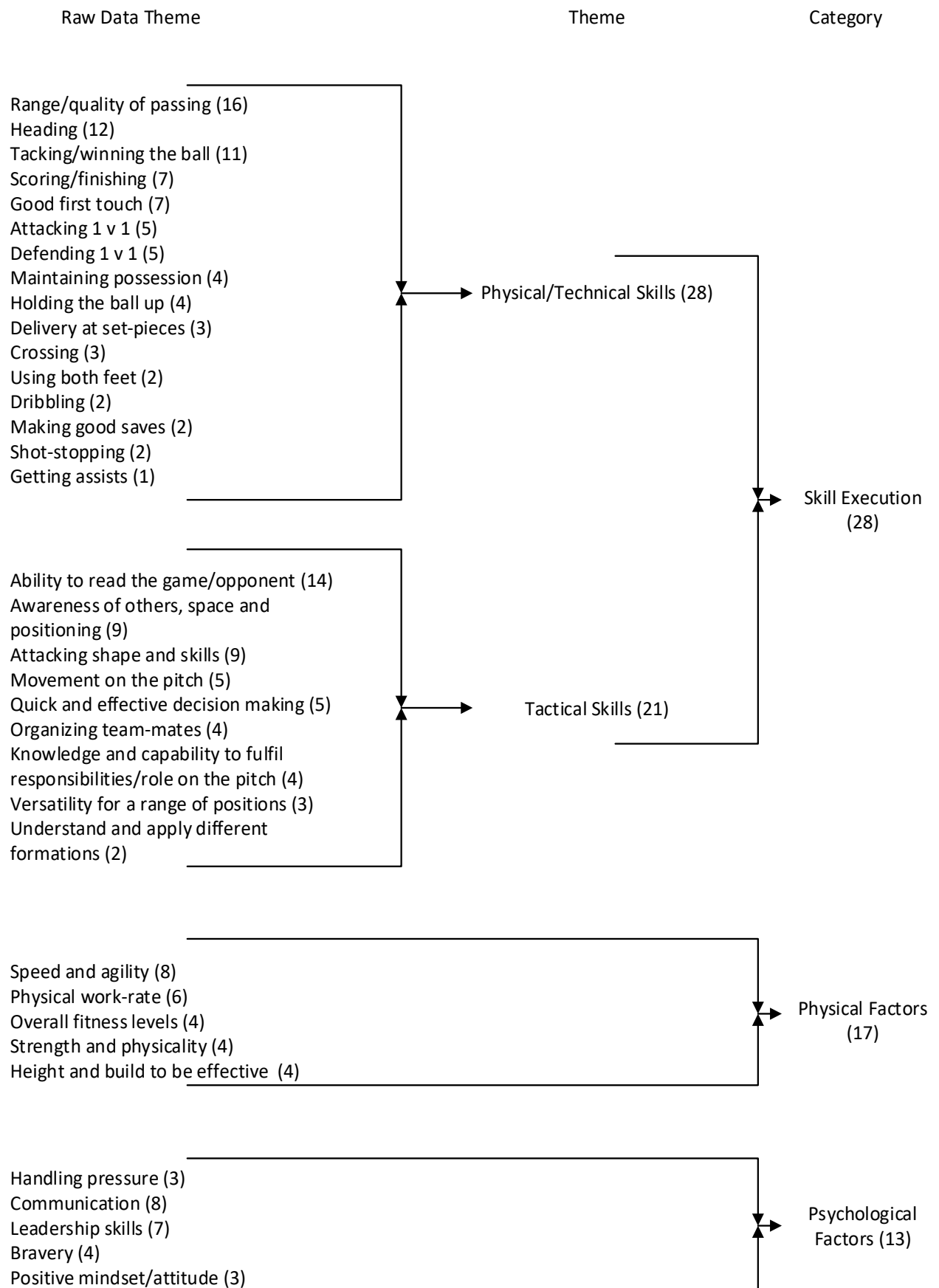Innate speed (1)

Innate Factors (8)

1

*Figure 2*: Sources of Sport-Confidence identified by elite academy soccer players

| Raw Data Theme | Sub Theme | Theme | Category |
|---|---|---|---|

Negative feedback from coaches (14)
Coach shouting at you (4)
Coach having no trust in me (3)
Being mocked/teased by the coach (2)

→ Lack of esteem support from coaches (18)

Negative feedback from team-mates (16)
Team-mates shouting at you (4)
Not feeling part of the team (3)
Low team morale (2)
Being teased by team-mates (1)
Team-mates not believing in my ability (1)
Lack of encouragement from team-mates (1)

→ Lack of esteem support from team-mates (21)

→ Lack of esteem support (26)

Family problems at home (3)
Negative feedback from parents (2)
Arguments with parents (2)
Criticism from school friends (2)
Parents shouting at you (1)
Excluded from school friendships groups (1)
Negative comments from other players parents (1)

→ Lack of esteem support from family and friends (6)

Negative comments by significant others (2)

→ Lack of esteem support from others (2)

Poor quality of coaching (4)
Disagreeing with coaches decisions (2)
Coach not knowing what to do (1)
Coach favouring other players (2)

→ Lack of informational support from coaches (5)

→ Lack of informational support (6)

→ Lack of Social Support (28)

Poor advice from physio (1)

→ Lack of informational support from support team (1)

*Figure 3*: Confidence debilitating factors identified by elite academy soccer players

| Raw Data Theme | Theme | Category |
|---|---|---|

Loosing possession for the team (13)
Not playing or training well (10)
Making a poor pass (7)
Missing a goal scoring opportunity (7)
Making a mistake (7)
Having a bad touch (5)
Conceding a goal (4)
Scoring an own goal (3)
Conceding a penalty (2)
Making a bad challenge (2)
Poor team performance (2)
Incorrect decision making (2

Poor skill execution (28)

Being out of form (6)
Playing out of position (5)
Not starting matches (4)
Not getting any match time (4)
Not being selected for
international squads (2)
Getting substituted in matches (2)
Not getting selected for matches
(2)

Poor form and selection worries (17)

Poor Performances (28)

Opponent outperforming you (9)
Opposite number scoring (5)
Opposition dominating us (4)

Inferiority to opposition (14)

Losing match(es) (7)
Poor 6 week review (2)

Poor outcomes (8)

Performing poorly in training (11)
Performing poorly in the warm-up (6)

Poor physical/technical preparation (13)

Late night before a game (3)
Being late for a game (2)
Inadequate food/hydration pre game (2)
Not doing homework (1)
Forgetting some kit (1)

Poor organizational preparation (7)

Poor Preparation (19)

Self doubts before a game (2)
Not being relaxed before a game (2)
Poor mood before a game (2)

Poor psychological preparation (5)

1

*Figure 3*: Confidence debilitating factors identified by elite academy soccer players

| Raw Data Theme | Theme | Category |
|---|---|---|
| Pressure and expectations of self (13)<br>Pressure and expectations of coaches, academy manager and/or parents (5)<br>Having self doubts about ability (4)<br>Being moved up or down an age group by the coach (4)<br>Fear of being released (3)<br>Over-thinking during a match (3) | Pressure and expectations (19) | |
| Missing matches through injury (5)<br>Isolation during recovery from injury (3)<br>Inability to show ability due to injury (3)<br>Fear of re-injury (3)<br>Fear of not reaching pre-injury form (3)<br>Getting injured during an important part of the season (1)<br>Other players taking your place when you're injured (1) | Consequences of injury (11) | Injury and Illness (16) |
| Groin injury (2)<br>Severs disease (2)<br>Stress fracture (1)<br>Haematomas (1)<br>Broken foot (1)<br>Osteomyelitis (1)<br>Hyper-extension of the knee (1)<br>Damaged hip flexors (1)<br>Niggling injures (1) | Types of injury (11) | |
| Illness resulting in poor performances (1) | Illness (1) | |

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**Pre-Interview Booklet**

The Types, Sources and Debilitating Factors of Sport Confidence in Academy Soccer Players

Name:

Age:

Position:

Participant Code (To be filled in by the researcher):

Date & Time of interview (To be filled in by the researcher):

**Instructions:**
The purpose of this pre-interview booklet is to get you to reflect and think about your sport confidence. Please write down your thoughts on each of the questions below as it will help you answer the questions during the interview. Any notes you write in this booklet will be anonymised if published.

**Section 1: General Sport Confidence:**

1) Can you write some notes on what you think footballers need to be confident about?

*Notes:*_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2) Using a confident football player as an example, can you write some notes on what you think they are confident about? And what they do that makes you think they are confident?

*Player's Name:*
_____
*What do you think they are confident about?*
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
*What do they do that makes you think they are confident?*
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

## Section 2: Recalling Career Periods of High and Low Sport Confidence

3) Can you recall, and write some notes on, a period of your career when you have felt really confident? Why was this? And what were your thoughts and feelings during this period?

*Career Period:*

_____
_____

*Why did you feel confident during this period?*

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

*What were your thoughts and feelings during this period?*

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4) Can you recall, and write some notes on, a period of your career when you have felt least confident? Why was this? And what were your thoughts and feelings during this period?

*Career Period:*

_____
_____

*Why did you feel low on confidence during this period?*

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What were your thoughts and feelings during this period?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Section 3: Sources and Types of Sport Confidence:**

5) Can you write down some examples of the things you are confident about as a football player.

*Notes:*_____

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6) Referring to your answer above, can you write some notes below on where you think those aspects of confidence in yourself as a footballer come from?

*Notes:*_____

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Section 4: Confidence Debilitating Factors:**

7) Can you write down some of the things that cause you to lose your confidence?

*Notes:*_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Thank you for completing the pre-interview booklet**

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**Interview Guide**

The Types, Sources and Debilitating Factors of Sport Confidence in Academy Soccer Players

Name:
Participant Code:
**Content Page:**
Section 1: Introduction (Not Recorded)
Section 2: General introductory questions (Recorded)
Section 3: General sport confidence questions (Recorded)
Section 4: Types and sources of sport confidence (Recorded)
Section 5: Confidence debilitating factors (Recorded)
Section 6: Conclusion / reflection upon the interview (Recorded)

## Introduction (Not Recorded)

- The study is looking at the types, sources and debilitating factors of sport confidence in academy soccer players

- The purpose of interview is to identify what is important to you in relation to your sport confidence needs

- The interview will enhance your awareness and understanding of your sport confidence.

- The interview will be recorded using a Dictaphone, as this is the best way to gather and collect accurate information.

## Participant Rights (confidentiality, anonymity and the use of data)

- Anything you say is entirely confidential which means that anything you say will not in any way be used in combination with your name.

- Quotes for your interview may be used when writing up the findings, however, these will remain strictly anonymous and your identity will be protected. Your name will never be released.

- You have the right at any point to stop the interview - you are also entitled to refuse to answer any question. Each of these decisions will not harm your relationship with the interviewer or [Club's Name] Football Club.

- There are no right or wrong answers to the questions you will be asked. Your answers should be based entirely on your own opinion rather than answers you think sound right or that I would like to hear.

- If at any point you don't understand a question or you need clarification please do not hesitate to ask.

- There is no time limit on the interview so please do not feel pressured by time. If at any point during the interview you would like a break just ask.

- And finally, at the end of the interview there will be an opportunity for you to add anything that you thought we missed.


Do you have any questions about what I have said so far?

## Section 2: General Introductory Questions (Recorded)

Before we go into the main interview I will ask you a few general introductory questions to get to know you a bit better and gain an understanding of your history as a footballer.

1) How old were you when you first started playing football?

2) How long have you been playing for [Club's Name] Football Club?

   - Probe: Have you played for any other football clubs?

3) How many times a week do you usually train at [Club's Name] Football Club?

4) Do you compete in any sports other than football?

5) What are your goals for your future in football?

## Section 3: General Sport Confidence Questions (Recorded)

6) To start, can you describe to me what you think footballers need to be confident about in order to perform well during a match?

7) In your pre-interview booklet you used _____ as an example of a confident football player; can you describe what you think he/she is confident about?

   - Probe: What does _____ do that makes you think he/she is a confident player?

**Section 4: Types and Sources of Sport Confidence (Recorded)**

From now on any answer you give will be entered into the appropriate column in your confidence profile. The types of confidence you identified in your pre-interview booklet have already been added to your confidence profile.

Types of Sport Confidence

8)   In addition to the types of sport confidence that you identified in your pre-interview booklet, is there anything else that you are generally confident about as a football player?

- *Probe: What parts of your game are you usually confident about?*
- *Probe: What do you think you are normally good at?*

Now that we have listed all of your types of confidence, I would like to explore each type in a little more depth.

9)   Why is _____ (Type) _____ an important thing for you to be confident about?

- *Probe: Can you tell me about your _____(Type)_____ and why it is important to you*

- *Probe: What do you mean by _____(Type)_____*

Sources of Sport Confidence
10)  Can you explain where each type of confidence comes from? (E*ach type may have more than one source*)

- *Probe: Why are you confident about your _____*

- *Probe: What makes you feel confident about _____*

- *Why is _____ a source of confidence to you?*

- *How do you know your _____ is good?*

11) You wrote in your pre-interview guide that your most confident career period was _____ can you think of a specific match during that period?

   - *Probe: Can you describe anything that happened during the <u>lead up</u> to that match that made you feel confident?*
   - *Probe: Referring to the same match, can you describe anything that happened <u>during</u> the match that made your confidence increase?*

12) Are there any additional types or sources of confidence relating to your lifestyle or training that you feel are important to you that have not been included within your confidence profile?

## Section 5: Confidence Debilitating Factors (Recorded)

13) Can you give me some examples of anything that has or does cause you to lose your confidence as a football player?

14) You wrote in your pre-interview guide that your least confident career period was _____ can you think of a specific match during that period when you were really low on confidence?

   - *Probe: Can you describe anything that happened during the <u>lead up</u> to that match that made you lose your confidence?*
   - *Probe: Referring to the same match, can you describe anything that happened <u>during</u> the match that made you lose your confidence?*

## Section 6: Conclusion / Reflection upon the interview (Recorded)

That just about brings the interview to an end, however, before we finish there are just a couple more questions I would like to ask.
15)  Are there any areas that you think I failed to cover relating to your confidence as a football player?

16) Do you think this process improved your understanding or awareness of your sport confidence?

17) Do you think I led, or influenced your answers away from the things you wanted to say?

18) Do you think the interview could be improved in any way?

19) I think that is everything that I would like to ask you, is there anything you would like to ask me or anything else you would like to add?

**Many thanks for your time and involvement in this interview.**

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## Confidence Profile

| Player Name: | | Participant Code: |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

| Types of Confidence Identified: | | Sources of Confidence Identified: |
|---|---|---|
| | → | |
| | → | |
| | → | |
| | → | |
| | → | |

| | | |
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| | $\rightarrow$ | |

| Confident Debilitating Factors | | Suggested Strategies to Improve Confidence |
|---|:---:|---|
| | → | |
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**Additional Notes:**