

**FROM CLUB TO COUNTRY:
EXPLORING YOUTH FOOTBALLERS
EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL
FOOTBALL**

D EDWARDS

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DOMINIC EDWARDS

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ABSTRACT

The study of athletic career transitions has grown in recent years, with scholars seeking to understand how to better support athletes through various aspects of their career, including, but not limited to, areas such as, the youth-to-senior transition and retirement from sport. A transition that has been underrepresented in academia is that of the club-to-country transition in football. This thesis aimed to better understand the experiences of current youth footballers when moving between club and international football in order to provide both policy and practical implications to better support young footballers at this time.

Through an interpretivist methodological position, a case study approach was chosen to provide the researcher with as “full an understanding of the case as possible” (Punch 1998: 15). The thesis used methods triangulation to collect data through interviews, observations and document analysis, in order to avoid the potential biases that can occur through using a single method of study (Williamson, 2005). The semi-structured interviews involved access to current youth international footballers and leadership staff from leading youth academies in The Premier League – becoming the first to provide insight into the club-to-country transition in England. The data was then analysed using a thematic analysis, generating initial codes and themes before being organised into the empirical chapters.

Findings were organised into three empirical chapters. The first, Chapter 4, explained the process of entering the international environment, finding that clubs are likely to prioritise their own games programme over international opportunities for developing footballers and that, at times, from the clubs perspective there was ambiguity as to why certain players were selected. This shows the competing priorities of both club and NGB. Chapter 5 discussed the implications this transition can have on player development, showing the sporting performance and psychological implications, including identity and self-esteem that can occur through international representation. Chapter 6 discussed the relationship between professional football clubs and the national governing body during this process, highlighting how the clubs perceived the presence of the youth international footballer as a key performance indicator as well as an opportunity to recruit other potential academy prospects. The potential ethical issues were then discussed around the commoditisation of childhood. Chapter 6 also discussed the support that

youth international footballers receive from both club and national coaching staff throughout the transition.

In conclusion, the findings presented here add to the current career transition research through focusing on an element of the developing footballers' career that has yet to be discussed in the extant literature. The findings were also used to develop a model for the club-to-country transition, outlining meta-transitions, described as transitions within a transition process (Schinke et al., 2015), that require different types and levels of support at each stage of the process.

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

In 2017, the England men's professional youth football teams recorded an unprecedented year of success, with the under 17s and under 20s squads winning their respective Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cups, while the under 19s won their first Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) championships in thirty-seven years. In responding to such success, in recent years, academics have turned their attention towards better understanding the youth professional football environment in England, and how stakeholders can more effectively harness the country's future potential (see: Bullough & Jordan, 2017; Champ et al., 2020). The need to ensure the effective progression of youth footballers is also something that has been shared by relevant policymakers and football governing bodies across England – most notable of which in this context is the Football Association (FA), the national governing body for amateur and professional football in England.

Such a concern is not only due to the men's senior national team failing to win a major international trophy since defeating West Germany in the 1966 World Cup final, but also because, at present, England has the lowest number of indigenous footballers playing in the English top tier of football, compared to indigenous nationalities playing in their respective highest national leagues (Bullough & Jordan, 2017). Indeed, in the 2020-21 season only 12.8% of minutes played in The Premier League - England's highest professional league - were given to home-grown players - individuals having been trained for at least three seasons between the ages of 15 and 21 at a domestic club (UEFA, 2021). This is below the European average of 13.2% with the significant consequence of this being that this lack of output has led to a reduction in the current number of professional footballers eligible to represent the senior England men's national team, which, in turn, has meant that finding and maintaining effective developmental solutions for those relative few remains paramount to the country's future success.

1.1. Talent Development and Athlete Support

In seeking to add to understandings of the professional football environment in England, this thesis focused on the transition of footballers from club to youth national team representation. As is discussed in more detail in later sections, there

is a large body of research focusing on transitions in youth football; however, crucially, a gap in the literature exists in understanding the club-to-country transition and the support players receive from the key stakeholders involved in talent development. Coaches have been shown to play an integral role in athlete development, particularly as the athletes move through the development system (Morris et al., 2016). Throughout youth development the role of the coach is often not only to develop sport-specific attributes but to act as a key stakeholder in the network of social support that the athlete is provided (Chay, 2011; Morris et al., 2016). Although, social support is an important predictor of sporting success (see: Harwood & Knight, 2015; Sheridan et al., 2014), this is not an aspect of coaching practice that is currently represented in the mainstream coach education certification.

For coaches to be able to best support the athletes in their care there must be a coach education programme in place to prepare them for this role. In recent years coach education in football has experienced changes in structure and a shift in the organisations that deliver it (see: The Elite Coach Apprenticeship Scheme, by The Premier League). However, since the introduction of The Premier League's Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) (see: 2.5.2) clubs have begun to dilute the coach's responsibility of player support by hiring additional stakeholders, such as, player care managers and sport psychologists. Although these stakeholders will offer support to a developing player coaches are also integral in offering support during a transition from a sport performance perspective and therefore, must be effectively prepared how to do so.

For a coach to offer effective levels of support to a player during a transition it is first important to understand the different transitions that can occur in an athletic career. A career transition can be defined as the "occurrence of one or more specific events that brings about a change in assumptions about oneself, but also a social disequilibrium that goes beyond the ongoing changes of everyday life" (Wylleman et al., 2004: 8). Such 'events' might refer to a child moving into secondary education, or one's retirement from a career and are often divided into either normative, predictive transitions, or non-normative, transitions which were unanticipated (e.g. an injury leading to de-selection in sport) (Schlossberg, 1984). Transitions should be viewed as a process rather than a singular event, with 'positive transitions' referring to those times where one makes a quick and easy adjustment to the

demands of the transition; and 'negative transitions' denoting those times when an individual may find it challenging to adjust from one environment to another.

The career of a sportsperson occupies up to one third of an athlete's life and can influence all aspects of development (Stambulova, 1994), highlighting the importance of the sports career for elite athletes. Stambulova (1994) described career transitions as critical points highlighting the importance of the career transition to the athlete's development. Athletic career transitions are complex with the outcome of the process highly dependent on the athletes' level of preparation for the transition and their cognitive, social, behavioural and emotional resources (Coakley, 2006). The repercussions for athletes who do not effectively plan their career transitions, particularly retirement from sport, can range from identity crisis (Brewer, Van Raalte & Petitpas, 2000) to decreased life satisfaction (Surujlal & Van Zyl, 2014). However, it is important to make clear that not all transitions are negative (Stambulova et al., 2009) with positive transitions being described as being a time where the athlete makes a quick and easy adjustment to the demands of the transition (Coakley, 2006).

Research suggests that it may take up to five years for an athlete to transition into a new environment, specifically in the youth-to-senior transition (see: Stambulova et al., 2017), however, youth international sport is novel in this regard as due to the competitive nature players are often not afforded this time. A common area of study within literature is the transition from youth-to-senior sport, described as occurring between the ages of 18 and 24 (Bennie & O'Connor, 2006). This may occur at a similar time to the transition into youth international sport, and, when multiple transitions occur concurrently the demands on the individual can increase exponentially (Morris, 2013), therefore this thesis adds new findings to the area of transition, viewing the period as an opportunity for performance enhancement.

1.2. International Football

International representation within football occurs in designated periods throughout the season, with the international window, the period in which players are released from their clubs to represent their countries, lasting for up to 9 days; however, clubs and national associations are able to agree different arrangements, if required (FIFA, 2018). International football has long been an area of interest for supporters (Irianto & Kartikasari, 2020), a period of great personal pride for players

(Whittingham et al., 2021), and also plays a critical role in countries international strategies (see: Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2015). However, is an area underrepresented within academia potentially due to a lack of access afforded to researchers.

The England youth international squads begin at the U15 age group in the male game and continue to the U21 age group, before leading to senior team representation. Currently, youth international footballers are subject to the same rules outlined by FIFA (2018) for senior football. Namely that a) it is mandatory for a club to release their players to the national association once selected for all fixtures in the international match calendar, b) the international window is a period of 9 days that can incorporate a maximum of 2 competitive fixtures, with each taking place a minimum of two full days apart and c) after the call-up to the association the player must resume duty with their club no later than 24 hours later.

Current research has neglected to consider youth international football within the coaching support literature with prior research into youth international sport tending to focus heavily on the Olympic games (Hanstad, Parent & Kristiansen, 2013; Peters & Schnitzer, 2015; Kristiansen, 2015). Youth international football has similarities to the Olympics as is often perceived by the media and spectators as the highest accolade an athlete can achieve. Therefore, it can be seen as an important career changing event for young people that “results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behaviour and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981: 5). In this way athletes will be required to cope with varied transition demands, such as coping with possible changes in the level of support offered (see: Richardson et al., 2012) by differing stakeholders.

Football is a multifaceted industry that involves players, coaches, support staff and key stakeholders, such as, parents and peers (Morris, Tod & Oliver, 2016). Due to this growing stakeholder involvement with young footballers, and as can be seen above, Cushion and Jones (2006) have suggested that a footballers’ body is exposed to a disciplinary environment that aims to transform their body to produce consistent athletic performance (cited in Jones & Denison, 2017). Performance is constantly scrutinised (Cushion & Jones, 2006), this may be most true for athletes in environments where they are subject to a dual focus from both the professional football club and the national association, with performances in training and fixtures observed and judged (Reeves et al., 2018). To date, research has not sought to

explain the effect that multiple stakeholders can have on a developing footballer, particularly those who are representing their country.

Research within youth international football has been underrepresented within the extant literature. A recent study by McKay et al. (2021) has introduced the topic to academia, where the research does well to propose several performance, organisational and personal stressors that a young footballer may experience when entering the international environment, including: the intensity of international training camps and entering a new organisational culture. This thesis differs as focused on understanding the relationship between the club-to-country transition and the youth-to-senior transition as well as making recommendations for policy change within the English talent development system.

1.3. Thesis Aims, Objectives and Structure

As a researcher I have a special interest in the topic as I have worked within professional football for the last eight years, having coached youth footballers with aspirations of reaching both the first team and national squads. I have also delivered the education programme at a Category One Premier League club to the U18 age group, some of whom have undergone the transition from youth football to international representation. This is an important consideration as the football environment has its own vocabulary and is often misrepresented in research due to a lack of critical understanding of the context (Penn, 2016). The environment is also imbued with uncertainty due to the intensified professionalisation (Roderick, 2006) and globalisation of the sport (Maguire & Stead, 1998). Professional football clubs are often seen as “traditional, conservative and closed...resistant to change and suspicious of outsiders” (Eubank, et al., 2014: 31-32). Therefore, through my experience in the wider sporting context I am well placed to gain access to relevant participants but also to comment on the youth development structures.

There are three vital gaps that can be identified in the literature, these are highlighted further in Chapter 2. The first significant gap relates to the lack of research into the club-to-country transition, with research tending to focus on the youth-to-senior transition due to the perceived difficulties involved in this part of the athletic career (Stambulova, 2009). This, however, leads to the second significant gap in literature in that research has failed to suggest whether there is a relationship between the youth-to-senior transition and other within-career transitions, such as,

the club-to-country. As we do not know the influence of other career transitions, such as the club-to-country, it is difficult to suggest what effect these transitions might have on the youth-to-senior transition. Finally, research is yet to explain either club, or players, perceptions of the support networks that are offered during this within-career transition, leading to ambiguity between the best way to support athletes at this time.

Research focusing on career transitions has traditionally been underrepresented within sport and by key stakeholders, including coaches and family members, whom are “keenly aware of the complex personal adjustments and socio-psychological phenomena involved” (Gordon & Lavalley, 2012: 567). Research suggests that as young athletes develop, the number of sporting and interpersonal transitions increases (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015). Specifically, career transitions within football can be particularly problematic due to the footballer being part of an “intentionally choreographed football space” (Jones & Denison, 2017: 931) that is imbued with various relationships of power and impacted by numerous organisations with competing priorities (Bullough & Mills, 2014).

This can lead to career transitions that are problematic due to numerous difficulties that can occur during the entry into another domain or senior sport (Larsen et al., 2013). The problematic nature of athletic career transitions was highlighted by Vanden Auweele et al. (2004) who studied the youth-to-senior transitions of 167 Belgian track and field athletes finding that five years after they transitioned into senior sport, 17% were still in the senior team, 31% stagnated, 28% were still performing at a sub-elite level and 24% dropped out of the sport altogether.

In this thesis the sport of football was chosen based on similar characteristics as proposed by Morris, Tod and Oliver (2015). Namely that (a) there has been a recent introduction of sport-specific policy and operational processes by The Premier League to manage youth development (e.g. The Elite Player Performance Plan) and (b) that there is a “legitimate claim of public interest given that the sport’s governing body (The Football Association, England) receives public funding” (p.218). Despite the monetary investment and the interest in the sport in the UK there is a lack of research that focuses on the process of transition for youth athletes into international football. Although this transition differs from the youth-to-senior transition, where players often move from a supportive environment into a domain that is not concerned with player development (Richardson, Relvas & Littlewood, 2012), these

players will be put in a situation where they are challenged to perform to high standards by a different group of stakeholders. It is hoped that through this research the transition into international sport can be better understood and the way in which organisations interact with youth footballers can be analysed.

The studies origin occurred through various social interactions during my experience of supporting elite youth athletes who were selected to represent their country. The young footballers often shared their experiences of international representation, which were often evocative and highlighted an area of youth development which was under-researched and potentially undervalued. Therefore, due to the lack of research into entering elite international environments and the complex nature of the process it was deemed that research into this topic can have both academic importance as well as having important real-world implications.

Based on the above the thesis aims were as follows:

1. To identify whether there is a relationship between the youth-to-senior transition and the club-to-country transition.
2. To develop a transition support programme for developing footballers entering, and leaving, the youth international football environment, supporting the development of talented footballers.
3. To influence policy change, regarding transition support, within the Elite Player Performance Plan policy document, developed by The Premier League.

In line with these aims the research addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of international footballers during the transition from youth-team to youth international representation?
2. What is the relationship between the transition into international football and the transition from youth-to-senior football in England?
3. What are players and clubs' perceptions of the support networks and procedures that The Football Association have in place?

This research is significant as focuses upon a within-career transition that is underrepresented within literature as well as highlighting an area of youth development that academia is yet to place within the wider landscape of talent development. Moreover, this research provides a greater understanding of how to offer better support young footballers at this time, an area of concern for both clubs

and national governing bodies. The research area was original in that it was the first to offer insight into current footballers' experiences of the international football environment in England and offered an insight into perceptions of the type and level of coaching support required by players from dual stakeholders. Current policy in the area does not detail how best to support transitioning athletes, least so, those athletes moving into international sport, therefore, it is hoped that this research can be the first of its kind to influence policy change in transition support.

1.4. Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2: Literature Review; offers a critical review of the current literature in the field, outlining the gaps in literature and reviews the following areas of investigation; career transition, athletic career transition and the youth football environment in England.

Chapter 3 transparently uncovers the chosen methodological approach of the thesis, explaining the ontological and epistemological position and the methods employed to collect and analyse data. Specifically, this chapter considers details on the choice of scientific paradigm, research design, the timeline of events regarding data collection, the approach to thematic analysis that was applied to the data, and how the findings were written up.

Chapters 4-6 constitute the empirical chapters of the thesis where data is presented and discussed in relation to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. Each chapter aimed to progress academic knowledge in the field of the club-to-country transition and added to the creation of a model to explain the transition process from club to international football. Chapter 7 then concludes the thesis by outlining the key findings and implications for transition research. This is important as the given area of transition is a novel one, and little has been written on how youth athletes' transition to become youth international athletes. The chapter then discusses policy implications regarding the EPPP and implications for practice. This is an integral element of the thesis as the idea for the research was born out of my own experiences of working in elite youth football and, as such, the aim is for the thesis to have a positive actionable effect on both talent development structures and the players experiences of these structures. The chapter then ends by discussing limitations to the research and future research that may be required to further academic inquiry in the field.

CHAPTER II: Literature Review

Given the significance of the research area outlined in Chapter One this chapter aims to “function as an initial vehicle for a topic organisation” (Mellalieu & Hanton, 2009: 1) by explaining the theoretical concepts surrounding research on career transition. The first section summarises existing research in the area outside of sport before introducing literature focusing on athletic career transitions and the broader state of talent development within youth football in England. The chapter then concludes with a summary of research written on athletic career transition with a sociological focus and a justification for the following research in order to reinforce the need for further research in this area.

2.1. Career Transition

Traditionally research that focuses on career transition used social gerontological¹ and thanatological² models to understand the process of occupational and psychological adjustment, with areas such as disengagement, social breakdown and exchange theories used (McPherson, 1980; Mihovilovic, 1968; Haerle, 1975; Rosenberg, 1981, cited in Gordon & Lavalley, 2012). However, although these models tended to dominate the early literature, they have been heavily criticised for their inability to explain individual variations in responses to transitional experiences such as retirement (Crook & Robertson, 1991; Stambulova, 2003; Stambulova et al., 2009).

Meagher and Balk (2013) define thanatology as the study of death and dying and through this theoretical position research tends to take a more problem-oriented approach (McPherson, 1980) rather than a process-oriented approach (Coakley, 2006). In this way phenomena such as retirement are seen as a singular event rather than a process. Viewing transition as a process can help key stakeholders to focus on the individual and prepare for specific developmental experiences (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

¹ Social gerontology refers to the study of the ageing process, from this perspective retirement from sport is perceived as the same as retirement from any career (Gordon and Lavalley, 2012)

² Thanatology is the study of death and dying and views retirement as a form of social death (Kubler-Ross, 1969)

Career transition research has tended to focus on an individual's movement from one stage of their life to the next in the hope that they will be more successful (Van Gennep, 1960; Louis, 1980; Allen & Van de Vliert, 1984; Ebaugh, 1988). Bridges (1980) outlined three key stages of transition; endings, neutral zones and beginnings. He assumed that "endings are the first phase of transition, the second phase is a time of lostness and emptiness before life resumes an intelligible pattern and direction, while the third phase is that of beginning anew" (Bridges, 1980: 170). This idea of endings focused on disengagement from the individual's current role and although this may be perceived as a negative approach to transition as not all individuals will experience an 'emptiness' it may be argued that each individual will eventually disengage with their previous job role (Coakley, 2006).

Building on this idea of viewing transitions as various endings Ebaugh (1988) developed role exit theory and suggested that exiting a role is a unique process that can have positive or negative consequences. This theory differs from Bridges (1980) in that it does not focus on retirement due to age or end of career but on the mid-career transitions of exit and entry into additional job roles. The early themes of career transition research is that of exiting a role or career, and the influence this will have on the individual, however this underrepresents the individual's personal development outside of their career or the macro-social factors that can influence the success of a transition.

2.2. Athletic Career Transition

According to Stambulova et al. (2009) athletic career transitions appear to follow the same research foci as career transition research outside of sport, with the following theoretical frameworks being used to study the phenomenon; thanatology and social gerontology, a "whole career approach", a "whole person approach" and through macro-social factors (see: Figure 2.1). Career transitions are defined as periods of normative (i.e. predictable) and non-normative (i.e. unpredictable) events (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Jones, Mahoney & Gucciardi, 2014) that are characterised by "a set of specific demands related to practice, competitions, communication, and lifestyle that athletes have to cope with in order to continue successfully in sport or to adjust to the post-career" (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007: 713).

Theoretical Frameworks of Career Transition	Focus
Thanatology (Stages of Dying) and Social Gerontology (Study of the Ageing Process)	Transition often seen as negative and a traumatic life event.
“whole career approach”	Talent Development Models
“whole person approach”	Viewing transitions outside of sport and their effect on development
Macro-social Factors	The sport system and culture

Figure 2.1. Research Traditions in athlete career transition over time (adapted from Stambulova et al., 2009)

Research in the area of career transition has been published in journals from a diverse range of theoretical perspectives, from sociology to sports coaching and sport psychology. This shows the diversity of perspectives in career transition research; the strength of this is that each discipline is grounded in different theoretical foundations and paradigms and therefore offers a varied perspective on a given topic (Aagaard-Hansen, 2007). The following will explain the development of the field before clearly outlining where this thesis is positioned in the athletic career transition literature.

2.2.1. Social Gerontology and Thanatology

Due to early transition research focusing on retirement from sport the early theoretical frameworks tended to focus on thanatology (stages of dying) and social gerontology (study of ageing) (Lavalley & Wylleman, 2000; Stambulova et al., 2009). This focus on retirement from elite sport led researchers to suggest that individuals who experience difficulties during this period in their careers have not effectively planned for their post-sport life which can lead to psychological, socio-economic and psychosocial issues (Wylleman, Lavalley & Alfermann, 1999; Cecić Erpič, Wylleman & Zupančič, 2004; Surujlal & Van Zyl, 2014). Retirement from professional sport can occur due to voluntary or involuntary causes with a common reason being deselection through not reaching the next highest level of performance, which is an involuntary reason heavily linked to chronological age (Mihovilovic, 1968; Lavalley, Grove & Gordon, 1997).

The transition out of sport can take anywhere from six months to one year (Brandao et al., 2001; Stambulova, 1994) and lead the athlete to feel socially isolated as they are no longer part of the social support that professional sport offers, including coaches and teammates (McKnight et al., 2009). Therefore, Surujlal and Van Zyl (2014) suggest that when transitioning out of sport, athletes would benefit from the development of additional support networks, led by their sports federation or governing body. In addition, there is a call for any career assistance programme or transition programme to be supported by theory (Stambulova, 1994), therefore Figures 2.2 and 2.3 outline the key social gerontological and thanatological theories in research.

Theory	Description
Disengagement Theory (Cummings et al., 1960)	An 8-stage psycho-social model. Assumes that during a transition individuals voluntarily remove themselves from social situations. Disengagement is seen as inevitable.
Activity Theory (Havighurst & Albrecht, 1953)	Assumes that the athlete should maintain the same activity level after the transition as they had beforehand to effectively manage the transition. However, this has been criticised as it is difficult to replicate the same levels of activity when out of a sporting context (Baillie and Danish, 1992).
Exchange Theory (Homans, 1961)	Builds an understanding of how athletes manage their activities to generate the greatest return (Lavalley and Wylleman, 2000).
Subculture Theory (Rose, 1962)	The suggestion that continued social interactions between members of a group can lead to a group consciousness. A strength is that it has been used to identify potential factors that could cause problematic during the transition process (Lavalley and Wylleman, 2000).
Continuity Theory (Atchley, 1989)	Suggests that energy should be equally distributed across each of the individual's roles. However, criticised in elite sport due to the inability to redistribute energy from the major role of being a full-time athlete (Coakley, 2006).
Social Breakdown Theory (Kuypers & Bengtson, 1973)	Due to potential undesirable social labels prior to exiting the professional role the individual can experience social withdrawal.

Figure 2.2. Social Gerontological models in career transition research (adapted from Coakley, 2006)

Theory	Description
Social Death (Drahota & Eitzen, 1998)	Focus is on how a group begin to treat an individual who has recently departed the group, assuming that the separation from the group can lead to negative psychological consequences.

Social Awareness (<i>Lerch, 1984; Rosenberg, 1981</i>)	Different awareness contexts used to explain the process of retirement. Examples include the mutual pre-tense context where both the athlete and others are aware of the retirement but choose to ignore it.
Stages of Death (<i>Kubler-Ross, 1969</i>)	The stages of retirement are; denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, depression and acceptance.

Figure 2.3. Thanatological models in career transition research (adapted from Coakley, 2006)

Although the above models have been described as being useful as acting as a guide to understand athlete retirement (Baillie, 1993) a limitation to using both theoretical approaches within athletic career transition is their applicability to sport, having been developed outside of a sporting context. In addition, these models and theories tend to take the reductionist assumption that transition, in particular retirement, is a negative process that often leads to mental health issues or social exclusion, when this is not always the case (Stambulova et al., 2009). A further limitation of using social gerontological and thanatological models in athletic career transition is that they have been criticised for perceiving athletic career transition as a distinct event and therefore do not consider other factors outside of the event such as the career of the individual (Coakley, 2006).

A heavily cited theory in North American and European research is Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model of adaptation to career transition (Figure 2.4). The model differs from traditional thanatological or social gerontological models as it focuses on the entire process of athlete retirement and is multidimensional in that cognitive, behavioural and social interventions are proposed to support the athlete. Through a focus on the process of the transition the model developed five key stages: 1) the cause of the retirement, 2) developmental experiences, 3) coping resources, 4) quality of adaptation to the transition and 5) interventions when the athlete experiences difficulties.

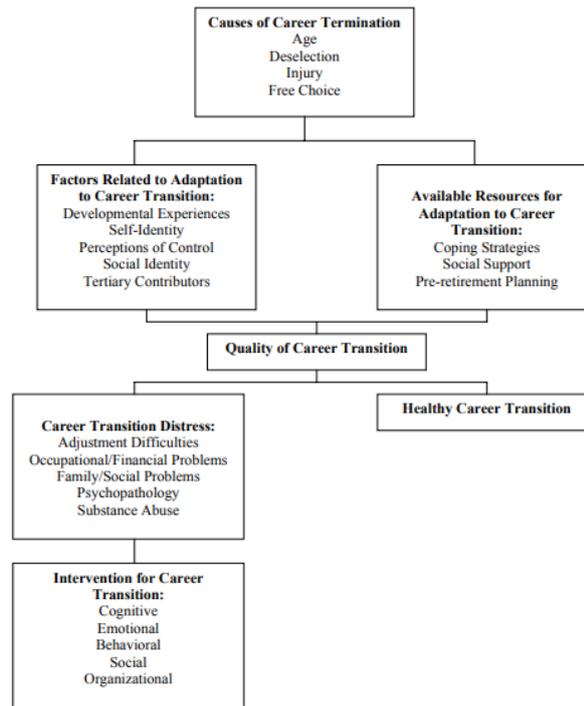


Figure 2.4. Conceptual model of adaptation to career transition (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994)

The model highlighted a movement towards focusing on psychosocial factors, such as possible occupational and financial issues that can occur during the adaptation, therefore, beginning to take a more holistic approach to the transition of retiring athletes.

2.2.2. “Whole career approach”

The next wave of research within athletic career transition is the focus on transitions throughout the athletes’ career, this differs from social gerontological and thanatological approaches as it does not view the transition as a singular event. Taking a more phenomenological approach to transition Schlossberg’s (1981) ideas on the perception of the transition process identify role change, affect, source, onset, duration and degree of stress as important factors. This differs from social gerontological models, which tend to solely focus on ageing such as retirement, due to the focus on the individual and the specific reactions to the transition. Regarding pre- and post- transition environments internal support systems, institutional support and physical settings are seen as increasingly important, with the aspects influenced by several factors, including, moving away from home and changes in their socio-economic situation (Danish et al., 1997).

Schlossberg (1981, 2004) developed the model of human adaptation to transition, proposing the definition of transition as “an event or non-event that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behaviour and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981: 5). Schlossberg (1981, 2004) continues by suggesting that there are three key factors which effect an individual’s experience of any transition, particularly, the characteristics of the individual experiencing transition, such as, sex, age and previous experiences, the perception of the transition and the pre- and post-transition environments (see: Figure 2.5). Cecić Erpič (2003) builds on this definition by suggesting that although transitions are often linked to one identifiable event the effect of the transition is influenced by four characteristics; the situation, the self, support systems and strategies. Therefore, early career transition research tended to support the idea that transitions are a complex phenomenon with multiple factors impacting an individual’s ability to manage them.

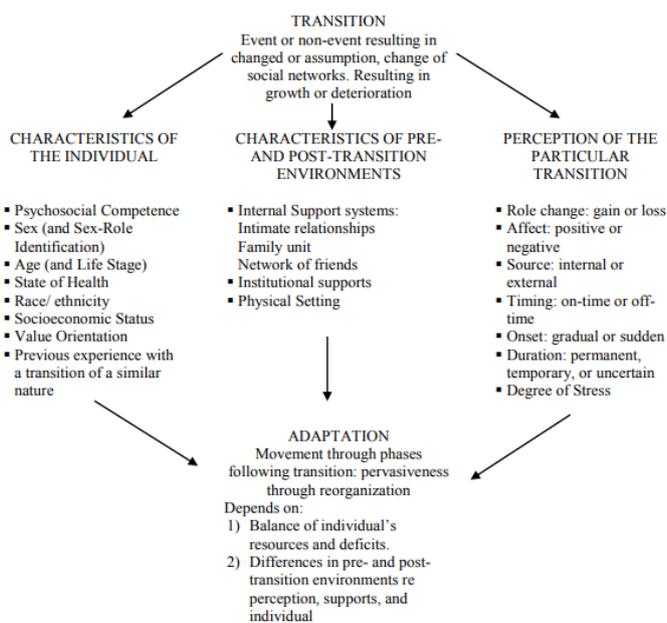


Figure 2.5. Model for analysing human adaptation to transition (Schlossberg, 1981)

The “whole career approach” to athlete career transitions focuses on talent development models from a variety of perspectives, including grounded theory (Holt & Mitchell, 2006; Gledhill & Harwood, 2015) and the developmental models of Bloom (1985), Côté (1999) and Côté et al. (2007). Talent development is complex, with Bloom (1985) suggesting that there a number of stages that athletes go through to become successful. Bloom (1985) used a variety of different individuals from

sport, art, science and music to build an understanding of the specific stages that individuals move through to become experts.

The model begins with the initiation, where play is the key focus and the child learns in a fun atmosphere and is motivated by praise and approval, although it is dependent on the individual, a performer can stay in this stage until high school. Second were the developmental years where the focus now shifts to mastering key techniques and skills in the field, with a greater focus on internal motivation rather than the external motivation required in the initiation years (Boom, 1985). Finally, the model suggests individuals enter 'the later years' where mastery is the focus and they begin to develop their own strategies and style, this typically occurs when moving into University (Bloom, 1985). A criticism of the theory is that it was based on the sports of swimming and tennis and therefore the development model may not be beneficial at explaining the development in a team sport setting such as football due to a reductionist approach to social interactions.

Bloom (1985) was one of the first researchers to suggest that the entry into elite sport is a critical transition due to the level of training, specialisation and dedication needed to succeed. As Stambulova et al. (2009) explain "it is also important to note that the talent development process occurs within a career development context" (p.397) and therefore it may be logical to assume that a sport-specific model may be more effective at explaining the talent development process. Similar to Schlossberg's (1981) definition of transition Stambulova (2003; Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007) describes transition as a process rather than a single event, this links to sport as the transition of an athlete may fluctuate due to factors such as selection, age or ability (Schlossberg, 1981). Moreover, the social support that an individual receives during the transition, including from coaches, parents and peers, is integral to facilitating an effective within-career transition (Pummell, Harwood and Lavalley, 2008). In addition, Jones, Mahoney and Gucciardi (2014) found that sports organisations should introduce resource building interventions such as goal regulation, foster determination and individualise the transition programme to increase the readiness of individuals undergoing transitions.

An approach often used by sports organisations and governing bodies to support the individualisation of a transition programme is to focus on taking a dual career approach. Gledhill and Harwood (2015) studied the dual careers of UK female footballers from a grounded theory perspective to produce a grounded theory of

talent development and career transitions. The research helps to build on the understanding of dual careers within elite sport and suggests that the interactions between footballers and key stakeholders (e.g. parents, teachers, coaches and friends) become transition barriers (Stambulova, 2003). In addition, “when combined with the perception from players, coaches and teachers about the lack of opportunities for playing careers; these interactions with significant social agents resulted in soccer players becoming role under-loaded in their ‘soccer player’ role” (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015: 28). A strength of this research is that it took a negative case analysis approach which led the researchers to be able to question pre-existing assumptions (Patton, 2002) through interviewing female footballers who had not reached the highest level. Although observing the dual career of athletes seeks to understand aspects outside of sport that could affect the sporting transition it does little to explain the holistic nature of talent development and the wider factors associated with sporting success.

2.2.3. *“Whole person approach”*

This approach to athlete transition views transitions outside of sport and the impact this can have on the individual and their athletic career. The approach views talent development as a holistic process where transitions within an athlete’s developmental pathway can offer challenges that require specific resources to be successful (MacNamara, 2011). A key assumption is that the “responsibility of equipping players [athletes] with adequate resources lies in the talent development environment, and not in one specific person or institution” (Larsen et al., 2013). Therefore, the “whole person approach” to athletic transition differs from the thanatological, social gerontological and “whole career” approaches through attempting to understand talent development across the athlete’s life, outside of sport as well as within it, rather than focusing on the end of the athletic career.

A popular theory within this approach is that of Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) who’s model has been widely implemented into career assistance programmes (CAP) across Europe, showing the shift to focusing on the whole person rather than viewing the individual as solely an employee or athlete. Wylleman and Lavallee’s (2004) developmental model explains the normative transitions that an athlete may experience over the course of their lifespan and uses three of the athletic levels as outlined by Bloom (1985); initiation, development and mastery. This model of

transition in sport takes a holistic approach as it was developed from a career-long perspective and suggests that certain transitions may overlap. It has been suggested that what makes any transition for an athlete so complex is the potential number of shifts that may occur at once; at an athletic level, psychological level, psycho-social level and academic vocational level (Finn & McKenna, 2010).

Age	10	15	20	25	30	35
<i>Athletic Level</i>	Initiation	Development	Mastery		Discontinuation	
<i>Psychological Level</i>	Childhood	Adolescence	Adulthood			
<i>Psycho-social Level</i>	Parents Siblings Peers	Peers Coaches Parents		Partner Coach	Family (Coach)	
<i>Academic Vocational Level</i>	Primary Education	Secondary Education	Higher Education		Vocational training Professional Occupation	

Note: A dotted line represents the age at which an approximate transition will occur.

Figure 2.6. Developmental perspective on transitions (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004)

A strength of this model is that it breaks down the athletes' career into distinct categories rather than taking the reductionist, simplistic approach of Stambulova (1994) of categorising individuals as children, juniors and adults. As well as moving through these key stages of development research has also explained that athletes undergo key transitions that can influence their success (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Normative transitions within-sport include youth-to-senior and retirement (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman, De Knop and Reints, 2011) whereas non-normative transitions tend to refer to an unexpected deselection or a long-term injury (Gordon & Lavallee, 2012). However, the transition into international representation is neither normative nor non-normative as is based on individual ability and is therefore not on each players developmental pathway.

A drawback to this model is that it only focuses on the normative transitions, characterised as, "generally predictable and anticipated transitions during which the athlete leaves one stage and enters another stage" (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler & Spink, 2008: 237). However, in reality there may be non-normative transitions which are more unpredictable and involuntary (Schlossberg, 1981) and can increase the complexity of the transition (Finn & McKenna, 2010). Furthermore, an area of

complexity in elite football is that the transition into the first-team environment can last anywhere between one to four years (Stambulova, 2009) and therefore can lead to role ambiguity which leads to role conflict where the footballer is no longer clear about the role they are playing (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015). This can then lead to a situation where the footballer tries to fulfil the role of footballer but also of adolescent (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), resulting in sub-standard performances in training and matches.

A football-specific model was implemented by Larsen et al. (2013) who applied the holistic ecological approach to examine talent development among U17-year-old footballers within a Danish football club. Larsen et al. (2013) argue that through using the holistic ecological approach it enables practitioners to analyse individuals and the organisational environment in which talent development takes place. The approach focuses on the environment in which the footballers find themselves, an athletic talent development environment (ATDE), and focuses on the organisational culture of the individual organisations, the micro-political environment, the relationships between athletic and personal development and the larger context that the club is a part of (Henriksen, 2010).

The authors also suggest that organisations who have the most individuals transition from youth-to-senior sport have an overt and identifiable organisational culture where “visible tokens of the culture such as value and mission statements and what people “said they did” and what they “actually did” corresponded” (Larsen et al., 2013: 12). Larsen et al. (2013) conclude by suggesting a pivotal problem in athletic career transition in football is the lack of preparedness a player has for the transition, closely associated with organisations failing to prepare a transition strategy:

The young soccer players may not be aware of what is needed, which subsequently means relying on important coping skills being “caught” instead of “taught” (Gould & Carson, 2008). The lack of explication could furthermore affect the process and outcomes of a transition, specifically the interaction of: situation, self, support, and strategies (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007)... strategies are associated with information seeking and action (Alfermann and Stambulova, 2007), but the lack of communication and proximity...provides no obvious support from the environment to cope with the transition and therefore makes the transition more difficult than needed’ (Larsen et al., 2013: 14)

Although this research was performed in Danish sport there are similarities with the work of Martindale, Collins and Daubney (2005) who suggested the following characteristics of highly effective talent development environments;

(1) a clarity and consistency of philosophy, objectives and methods must be long-term and coherent; (2) wide ranging and coherent messages and support, which includes that links to the senior level must be clear and that communications with outside influences such as parents are promoted; (3) systems facilitating the promotion of flexible programmes to suit the individual athlete and a focus on developing ownership, autonomy, motivation and goal-setting skills in the athletes; and (4) an emphasis on age-appropriate development rather than age group success (Martindale et al., 2005, cited in Larsen et al. 2013: 3).

This research took a “whole person approach” to athletic career transition, specifically when looking at the youth-to-senior transition, however, these models have not been used to understand other critical moments such as the club-to-country transition. These approaches used a holistic ecological approach with the aim of analysing not only the individual but the overall strategy and organisation, which has led further research to focus on the macro-social factors involved in a transition.

2.2.4. Macro-social factors

It is important to understand that “researchers, no less athletes, are influenced by historical and socio-cultural contexts in their respective countries” (Stambulova et al. 2009: 399). Due to this there are differences in the research of athletic career transition based on researchers using theoretical frameworks and analysing data in a manner that is a product of their countries socio-cultural context. This is important to note as the geographical location can have an impact on the sporting culture and systems of the country and therefore should be reflected in the research (Stambulova et al., 2009).

Within European studies there tends to be three distinct traditions within research, namely, athletic retirement and identity, talent development (e.g. youth-to-senior) and the transition of student athletes (Stambulova et al. 2009). Having said this, the topic of athlete transition has been prominent in research since the 1960s (Park et

al., 2012) with research in sport making the shift over time from understanding transition as a phenomenon to observing transitions through macro-social factors such as sports systems and organisational culture (Stambulova, Stephan & Järphag, 2007).

Athlete Career Research Traditions	Example Career Assistance Programmes
<p>Major research foci:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Athletic retirement -Transition from junior to senior sport -Transition from amateur to professional sports -Dual career development and transitions -Athletes crisis-transitions -Talent development trajectories -Athletic talent development environments -Cultural transitions -Athletes skills relevant to different career stages -Early professionalisation in sports <p>Theoretical Frameworks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The development model of transitions (Wylleman and Lavallee, 2004) -The human adaptation to transition model (Schlossberg, 1981) -The athletic career termination model (Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994) -The developmental model of sport participation (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007) -The life development intervention model (Danish et al., 1993) -The ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) -The analytical athletic career model (Stambulova, 1994) -The athletic career transition model (Stambulova, 2003) -The athletic talent development environment model (Henriksen, 2010) -The environment success factors model (Henriksen, 2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Career support programme for Flemish athletes (Belgium) -Performance Lifestyle Programme (former ACE UK Programme) -Study4Player and Job4Player (Denmark) -Paths of excellence in sport (France) -Partner universities of top-level sport – dual career programmes (Germany) -Athletes advice and information bureau (Spain) -Career support at Olympic training centres

Figure 2.7. Dominant and emerging discourses in European career research (cited in Stambulova & Ryba, 2014)

British discourse has been described as being in between the European and North American traditions, with researchers tending to use emerging discursive models and then shifting to developing their own approaches to the topic of career transition (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). In her seminal research paper Stambulova (1994) identified seven distinct normative athletic career transitions, these include: (1) Sport specialisation, (2) Training intensification (3) mass sport to high achieving sport (4) junior-to-senior sport (5) amateur to professional sport (6) peak to final stage and (7) transition to post-sporting career. Stambulova (2003) then used these transitions

to develop a specific model to athletic career transitions which focuses on the coping processes and strategies of any transition with an emphasis on the demands of the transition and the athlete's resources to deal with these demands.

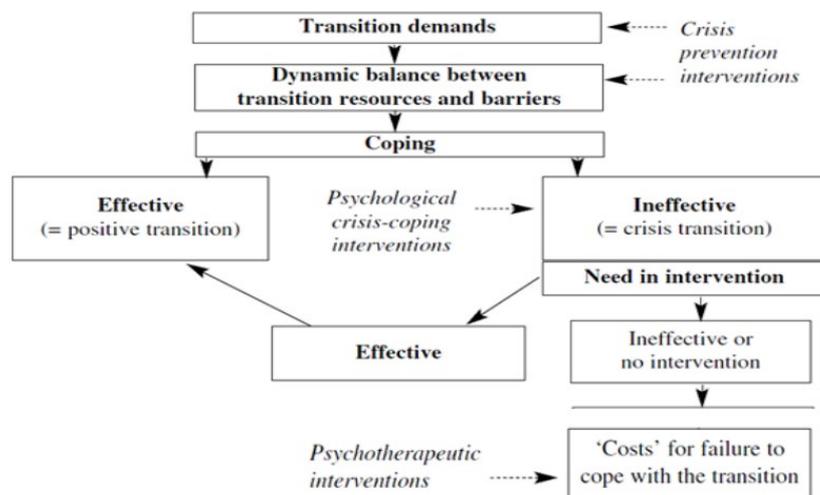


Figure 2.8. Sport Career Transition Model (Stambulova, 2003)

This model suggests that transitions such as the youth-to-senior transition is imbued with specific demands such as the higher levels of fitness needed to achieve in elite sport and the different sociological requirements of training with older teammates (Stambulova, 2003). Therefore, these demands require internal and external resources to be used, with internal factors including areas such as skills and personality traits and external factors described as areas such as social and financial support.

The model assumed that successful transition is accompanied by an athlete who is able to effectively develop the necessary resources to overcome transition barriers and cope with demands such as training with more experienced professionals (cited in Morris, Tod and Oliver, 2015). As the model was developed for Russian sport it was criticised for not being appropriate in a British sporting context. However, there are strong similarities between sport in each of these countries, particularly in the timing in which transitions occur in an athlete's career, as suggested by Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) and Stambulova (1994). In addition, Morris, Tod and Oliver (2015) describe that there is a similarity between the institutes that each Country has in place in that they are “designed to support athletes’ development and elite career, providing financial, technical, research and tangible support” (p.218) (e.g. Russian Institute of Scientific Researchers for Sport Reserve Training Technologies in Russia and UK Sport in the United Kingdom).

A critique of the Sport Career Transition Model outlined in Figure 2.8. (Stambulova, 2003) is that it takes the Eastern European tradition of vertical collectivism which puts the views of the group/state ahead of the interests of the individual. This is reflected in the Russian sports systems centralised power with professional coaches receiving state funding, this greatly differs from British sport where power is decentralised. Due to this approach to athlete development “the athletes’ transitions within the athletic career have been seen as a more important topic than athletic retirement” (Stambulova et al., 2009: 404) and this is reflected in the research topics that are published. A further critique of this model is that it lacks the complexity to deal with other within-career transitions such as the entry into International representation whilst still being part of another elite sporting culture (i.e. an elite Premier League football academy).

Morris, Tod and Oliver (2015) offered a critique of the model proposed by Stambulova by performing detailed case studies on two professional football clubs. They found that the professional club that had the more proactive programme regarding transition (involving activities such as assessing the transition demands, explaining the resources available to the players and using a staggered entry system into entering the first-team environment) aligned to Stambulova’s (2003) model and had better transition outcomes and spent less money on activities such as player assistance compared to the club who did not have a transition programme. The study found that organisations who had a transition development programme made £1.1 million more money from the sale of players developed in the youth system (over five years) and that 36% of players at the transition programme club were offered contracts which led to first-team appearances, opposed to 12% of players for the club who did not have a transition programme. This suggests that there may be beneficial financial and developmental returns on offering a transition programme at a professional football club.

Differing from a number of studies in the area of athlete transition Finn and McKenna (2010) performed research across multiple team sports, including football, rugby league, rugby union and cricket, in an attempt to explain the problematic nature of youth academy to first team transitions. Using Stambulova’s analytical model this research takes a psychological approach focusing on coping strategies and dealing with stress to frame the normative and non-normative issues related to the transitional process. The study found that the perception of coaches was that the largest factor of stress for transitioning athletes is how the players manage their free

time and the impact of friends and family, however, fails to explain these factors from a social perspective.

The authors suggest that key stakeholders are integral in the development of young athletes and the perception from the coaches in the study was that they “viewed social episodes to be the most demanding of athletes; managing free time, boredom” (Finn & McKenna, 2010: 276). Using one of their coach participants to suggest that “the choice in partner...can play a massive part in their success or failure...a young man that I coached last year didn’t get anywhere near playing first grade, even though he was on the fringe of it, largely down to the fact of his choice in partner at an early age. She was very overbearing and very into the social scene” (p.268). Therefore, this research highlights the importance of understanding the transition process from a social standpoint and outlines the factors that can affect young athletes’ success.

A strength of this research is that unlike earlier career transition research that was described as being too descriptive and lacking theory (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007) the study used the Cognitive Theory of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) to explain the phenomenon. However, it can be argued that as the research takes a psychological standpoint to transition it does not consider the impact of social interactions on the transition process and fails to explain inhibiting factors such as the results-based pressures of entering the first-team environment (Vaeyens et al., 2005).

In addition to the impact of family members, including partners, there appears to be a social paradox where coaches do not understand their role as significant other (Finn & McKenna, 2010). This is particularly pertinent in the aspect of providing appropriate advice to the transitioning players, this is in line with prior research into the psychological impact of the transition process (Seiffge-Krenke, 1996; Pummell, Harwood & Lavalley, 2008).

In more recent studies of career transition research has aimed to understand the role of a variety of contextual factors that can impact the athlete, while also considering the influence of family and key stakeholders such as coaches (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015; Morris, Tod & Oliver, 2016). From a macro-social perspective, the transition process involves “integrating the views and opinions of within-sport and outside-sport stakeholders through reciprocal interaction and power-sharing” (Røynesdal et al., 2018: 27). This suggests that the culture of a sports organisation

is affected by factors outside of their control, including the media and fans. This focus on macro-social factors has led to the development of theories surrounding sport participation and early specialisation (Côté, Baker and Abernethy, 2007). Studies in this area have observed the differences in specialisation across cultures and suggested that specialisation occurs due to external factors such as the number of voluntary or professional coaches working at each developmental level.

The aforementioned definition by Schlossberg (1981) that transition is “an event or non-event that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behaviour and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981: 5) has been applied to sport by several researchers (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Danish, Owens, Green & Brunelle, 1997; Wylleman, Lavalée & Alfermann, 1999). However, Stambulova et al. (2009) note that due to the definition focusing on event/non-event it does not consider the time it takes to transition, for example, adaptation to retirement can take up to one year (Sinclair & Orlick, 1993).

In a study researching the entry into elite English sport Richardson et al. (2012) use migration as a term to explain the movement into English professional football interchangeably with transition. Through a macro-social approach this paper is unique in that it focuses on the cultural differences for young footballers in entering these environments. They suggest that the existing literature failed to consider the cultural and environmental factors that underpin the transition process. Richardson et al. (2012) suggest that “migration involves the movement of players both within and between nations and continents” (p.1605), which is important as professional football clubs are now recruiting more foreign nationals to meet their desire of obtaining instant success and results (Richardson, Littlewood & Gilbourne, 2005). This supports previous findings that the youth-to-senior transition can be problematic, not only from a psychological perspective for the player in question, but from a talent identification perspective.

Richardson et al. (2012) continue by discussing acculturation and its application to migratory transition. They described it as “the changes in people as a consequence of intercultural contact or connection with people from other cultures” (p.1607). Although the movement from being a club footballer to an international footballer does often not require a move into another countries culture, particularly when discussing English football, the young footballers are entering an organisational environment that is different to the one in which they experience on a daily basis

and this may have implications for their development as a footballer as well as their sport performance, however, research has so far failed to seek to understand this.

Røynesdal, Toering and Gustafsson (2018) studied youth-to-senior transition in an elite Norwegian football environment from a coach's perspective. The authors suggest that it is important for young footballers to break, conform or adapt to the specific features of the first-team environment. The research uses the work of Alfermann and Stambulova (2007) to define within-career transitions as “a set of specific demands related to practice, competition, communication and lifestyle that athletes have to cope with in order to continue successfully in sport” (p.713). This research aimed to investigate how elite youth coaches perceived the transition of youth players into the first team and how these players dealt with entering this environment. The research took a pragmatic approach where the research “elucidates practical-level truths by developing understanding in how “real world” processes function in applied contexts” (Cruickshank et al., 2014: 109). Figure 2.9 outlines the key themes from the research.

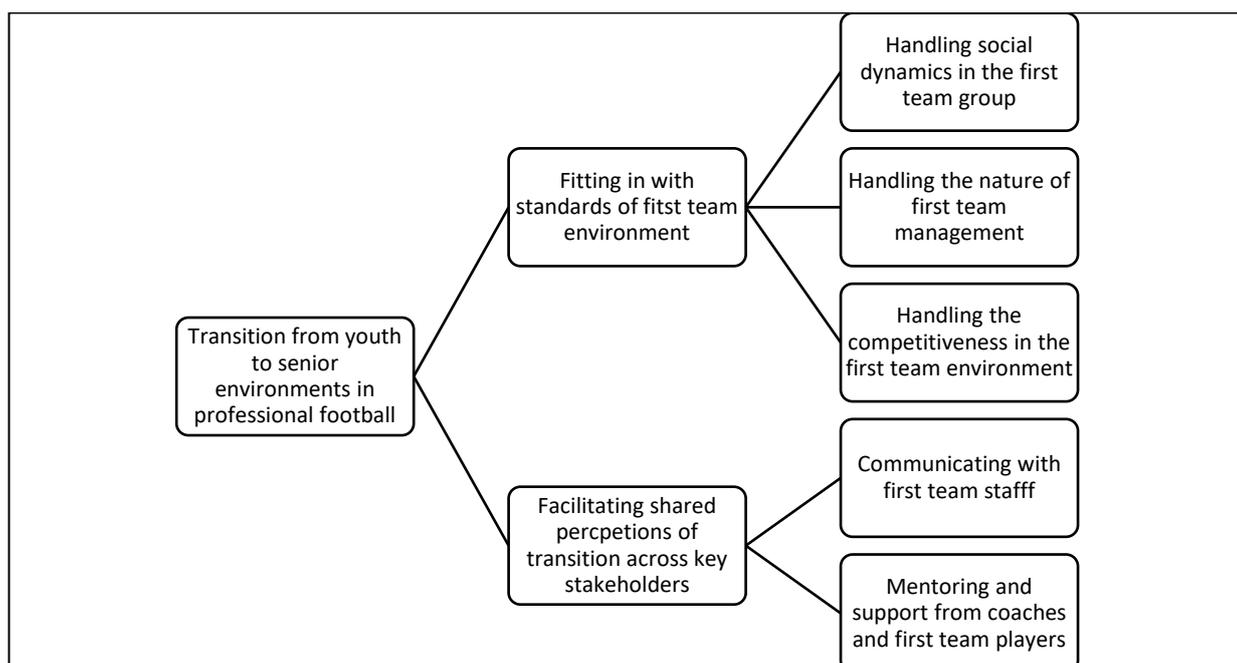


Figure 2.9. Two higher order categories and five lower order categories explaining transition into the first-team football environment (Røynesdal et al., 2018).

The study suggests that it is important for young footballers to remain visible to the first-team management (Nesti et al., 2012) and have been advised to attract interest from first-team coaching staff by ‘attacking’ senior players (Røynesdal et al., 2018). In an international environment this may be even more pertinent due to the lack of time spent with coaching staff.

One of the key findings of Røynesdal et al. (2018) is that to effectively transition into the first-team environment the young footballer must 'fit in with the standards of the first team environment'. Therefore, it may be argued that indoctrination appears to be a pertinent factor in the transition of youth athletes into elite performance environments. This is supported by numerous researchers who suggest that indoctrination can lead individuals to believing that there must be a right way of thinking and behaving to be successful (Finn & McKenna, 2010; Rogers, 2002; Nelson et al., 2006; Cushion et al., 2010). In this way existing members of the group will assess newcomers through the existing values and beliefs of the organisation, perhaps leading to an environment where the newcomer feels that they have to manage the impression of the group (Goffman, 1959). This impression management is defined as "the process of which people try to control others impression of them" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990: 34) and has been suggested as a manner in which newcomers can meet the demands placed upon them by the group that they are entering.

If it is plausible that there is "a cultural gap between the first team level and youth level...in professional football" (Røynesdal et al., 2018: 27) then there may also be an argument that there is a gap between club and international football. In this way, the culture of football is a consequence of historical conditions (Hughson, 2009; Roderick, 2006), these historical relations of power then result in individuals becoming compliant to dominant assumptions (Blackett et al., 2018). Entering a different culture can be deemed difficult, in the case of transitioning from player to coach Blackett et al. (2018) found that youth academy directors were more likely to consider former athletes due to these bodies being docile to the organisation's normative values (Foucault, 1972). This may also be important to understand in the case of transitioning into youth international representation due to the entry into the potentially different sub-culture. This appears to be a repeating issue within football cultures with Gibson and Groom (2018) suggesting that if a coach did not fit the model of the club then they were released from their role.

2.2.4. Towards a cultural praxis

Stambulova and Ryba (2014) have suggested that more recently culture has been applied to athlete career transition research, with literature taking a cultural praxis,

written in waves over time (Ryba & Stambulova, 2013). The authors suggest that early cultural studies took a cross-cultural approach where research often used a positivist epistemology, where the data collection would use questionnaires and other quantitative methods (Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009 cited in Ryba & Stambulova, 2013). Next, career research took an epistemological move towards cultural psychology where research “was characterised by an attempt to permeate athlete career studies with a cultural mindset...[where] the focus of research, therefore, is on understanding a constitutive dynamic between psychological processes and socio-cultural contexts” (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014: 2, for example, Schinke et al., 2006; Carless & Douglas, 2009). Through this focus on both psychological and sociological perspectives this has led to what has been termed as a shift towards a cultural praxis of athlete’s careers.

Through this shift it has been shown that countries that have a limited number of published research of their own, “research findings from geographically neighbouring countries or countries with a similar language are used to develop sport policies and career assistance programmes” (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014: 7). This shows that there are research discourses within transition research, suggesting that there may be other theoretical frameworks that are more appropriate for the cultural context. Stambulova and Ryba (2007) suggest that the study should ideally be situated in an inter-disciplinary context, this is because “athletes lived experiences are always multifaceted and cannot be fully grasped by one subject” (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014: 12). Therefore, this research project was situated in an inter-disciplinary context, taking a sociological, sport coaching and sport policy approach to understand the transition into international representation.

The methodology of the following study adhered to a cultural praxis of career transition through ensuring that the methodological approach uses a theoretical framework, collects data and interprets that data in a methodologically congruent manner (Cresswell, 2007). This is achieved through using an interpretivist paradigmatic approach which is incorporated into each section of the methodology. The research contributes to research driven practice in the field (Ryba & Wright, 2005; Bevir & Rhodes, 2006) through developing practical recommendations for a career-assistance programme into and out of international representation.

Cultural praxis of athletes careers encourages researchers to: “a) reflexive positioning of career projects in particular sociocultural context, b) taking the holistic

perspectives on athlete career and environment, c) exploring diversity of career pathways and their construction within and across international borders, d) engaging culturally sensitive methodologies, and e) developing transnational networks and collaborative projects by career researchers and practitioners” (Stambulova et al., 2020: 7). In particular this thesis recognises the importance of positioning research in a unique and specific sociocultural context as well as taking a holistic perspective of the athletic career.

2.3. The Professional Youth Football Environment in England

This section focuses on explaining the landscape of which professional youth football clubs operate, including, the relationship between sports organisations that govern football, before introducing a model to understand stakeholder relationships in youth football.

Youth football in England is imbued with complex relationships of power between organisations (Morris, Tod & Oliver, 2015) and individuals involved in talent development, such as coaches. Recent research attempted to situate coaching in the social world rather than observing it as a vacuum devoid of the socio-cultural barriers that can impact the wider society (Gibson & Groom, 2018b). The research focused on the experiences and interactions of the Academy Manager (the person charged with leading the youth academy at a football club), which was unique in its field, finding that the organisational change within a youth academy at a British football club can be problematic due to the different priorities of staff members and the governance of rules by The English Football Association and The Premier League. A strength of this specific piece of research is that it took the interpretive paradigm, which is limited in the field, to reflect the social complexity of organisational change in an elite sport setting.

Outside of work into football club environments the singular piece of research into the England youth football teams comes from Pain and Harwood (2007) who sought to better understand the performance environment that youth footballers enter upon international representation. They interviewed staff and players across a range of squads, providing them with a holistic overview of the team environments. This research did not focus specifically on the transition into the environment but gave an insight into players (n=4) experiences of youth representation, namely, that in an

international environment team cohesion, clear coach feedback and avoiding boredom 'on camp' were key factors leading to positive performances at international tournaments. Although the research provides an overview of performance related factors in the environment it fails to identify the coaching support provided to players during this transition, not accounting for the multifaceted nature of performances within youth football when the player is not 'on camp' with the England team. This is important as national team coaches will only have face-to-face contact with their squads for up to 50 days per year, therefore, it is important to understand how the requirements of positive performance, for example, clear coaching feedback, are supported by national team staff whilst the players are at their clubs. In addition, this research did not take into consideration the club environment and the effect this can have on the athlete's development, therefore, it is important to understand the organisations who are responsible for talent development in English football.

2.3.1. The relationship between sports organisations that govern football

Bullough and Mills (2014) suggested that there is an organisational dichotomy between the concern of The Premier League (commercially driven) and The FA's more player development focus (The FA, 2016). Due to the lack of alignment between organisational priorities this may cause a conflict between the league's commercial success and The FA's desire for indigenous youth development. Their research paper discusses the need for a 'power shift' where the 'power balance' shifts back to the clubs to develop an agreement to focus more on indigenous youth, however, does not effectively define or explain their view on this relationship of power.

Foucault (1980) suggested that "if an analysis of power at a micro level can reveal practices of dissonance and discord, then it is appropriate to investigate how these are connected to a larger structure" (Zehntner & McMahon, 2014: 601). As a sport British football is distinctive in that it is able to create interest politically which has led to governments using it as a tool to target social issues (O'Gorman & Partington, 2015). In particular, football-specific organisations such as The Football Association receive government funding (gov.uk) and therefore are bound by certain rules and legislation. However, foreign investment and investment models have altered how

English football clubs are owned and operated in recent years (Bullough & Jordan, 2017).

Richardson et al. (2012) provides a background on the legislation that governs player transitions, particularly regarding The European Court of Justice's Bosman ruling in 1985 which banned Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) football leagues from introducing foreign player quotas (Maguire & Stead, 1985). However, legislative directives introduced by governing bodies have changed the way in which professional football clubs focus on youth development, partly due to the commercialised nature of professional football (Relvas, et al. 2010). As Elliot and Weedon (2010) outlined, senior figures in world football (FIFA and UEFA) highlighted an issue where imports from overseas permeating the senior game is extending to the academy structure (Bullough & Jordan, 2017). UEFA continued to suggest specific trends that they deemed negative to the progress of youth footballers, particularly the stockpiling of players, a reduction in identity in local clubs and a lower competitive balance in club competitions (Dalziel et al., 2013, cited in Bullough & Jordan, 2017). A potential solution to combat these trends was the introduction of the home-grown player rule.

The home-grown player rule is a legislative directive implemented by UEFA (2019) to increase the number of indigenous players across European football leagues and has influenced British football clubs through the governance of each Nations league. The rule states that as of 2008/09 clubs in seven of the top UEFA football leagues (including The Premier League) must have a minimum of eight home grown footballers in their 25-man squad, defined as "those who, regardless of nationality, have been trained by their club or by another club in the same national association for at least three years between the age of 15 and 21" (UEFA, 2019: 1). This has led to an environment where clubs have taken steps to increase the number of home-grown players transitioning and competing in the first-team environment (Winter, 2009). Bullough and Jordan (2017) studied the ten-year period between 2006-2016 and found that there were 141 footballers developed through the eight Category One clubs but that they experienced limited playing time and were often transferred to lower league clubs. The authors conclude by suggesting that the competing organisations of The Premier League, The Football Association and professional football clubs create a complex environment where there are competing priorities that impact footballers and player development.

In addition to the legislation implemented by UEFA, the introduction of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) by The Premier League (see: sub-section 2.5.2) has led to certain recruitment rules being altered, including the abolishment of a ruling which stopped Category One clubs from recruiting from outside of their own geographical area, which has led to clubs being permitted to recruit Nationally (The Premier League, 2011). This has now meant that football in England has become more nationalised and even internationalised within the youth academy structure as well as in the first-team environment. Bullough and Jordan (2017) support this through their research, finding that the home-grown rule has failed to correct the proposed market failure in English football to create more opportunities for indigenous footballers in the top league in England.

The research discussed thus far regarding organisations of competing priorities take a macro-approach to talent development structures. This thesis focuses on a more micro-level understanding of the effect of competing organisations on the experiences of youth international footballers when moving between stakeholder environments.

2.4. Stakeholders in youth international football

As with other sports international football has its own unique guidelines and principles, with a complex web of stakeholders involved in the governance of international representation. The following section explains the stakeholders involved in youth development in England, their relationships with the player, as well as each other, and develops a model highlighting the key stakeholders involved in supporting the youth international footballer in England.

Although previous research has attempted to explain the complex nature of the key stakeholders in football (Senaux, 2008; Garcia & Welford, 2015; Morris & Tod, 2016) there is a gap in the literature focusing on mapping the international football environment from the players perspective. Therefore, in line with player-centered research into stakeholders in football (Reeves et al., 2018) this thesis situates the player as the 'focal organisation' and focuses on which organisations have a 'stake' in the developing footballers career pathway, taking into consideration individuals such as academy managers and coaching staff.

It is the coaches who are charged with enacting the policies developed by stakeholders (O'Gorman et al., 2020) and this policy enactment leads coaches to

take part in report writing, appraisals and external auditing procedures (Ball, 2003, cited in O’Gorman et al., 2020). As professional football coaches are now required to take part in administrative activities alongside their coaching this has led to a ‘fabrication of working practices’ where coaches construct fabrications to ‘withstand the inspectors gaze’ (Courtney, 2016; O’Gorman et al., 2020). Players do not actively take part in these activities but they are the central point at which many youth development policies revolve (e.g. FA Charter for Quality, The Premier League’s EPPP) and due to this ‘fabrication of working practices’ as well as clubs needing to meet policy objectives, the club environment is imbued with disciplinary power where the player is expected to act and behave in a certain manner in order to be successful (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Manley, Palmer & Roderick, 2012; Jones & Denison, 2017). However, the international player is at the heart of the “struggle between different groups who lie outside the formal machinery of official policymaking” (Ozga, 2000: 113) as they are exposed to dual elite sports climates (the club and the National team) and are therefore a person of interest when studying youth development in English football.

Competitive professional sport is unique when compared to other conventional economic marketplaces in that clubs and leagues require strong competitors to be successful rather than aiming to eliminate their competition (Neale, 1964). Therefore, this environment necessitates “the presence of effective governance mechanisms to ensure an adequate level of competitive balance is maintained” (Hassan & Hamil, 2012: 3). In addition to ensuring competitive balance the bodies that govern football also have a duty of care to protect those that play the sport – including youth international footballers³

The professional football landscape is complex and imbued with numerous micro-political relationships (Thompson, Potrac & Jones, 2015) that impact the developing footballer. As a sport, football has the capacity to engage millions globally (Tucker, 2020) and create interest politically (O’Gorman, 2015), because of this it has a complex web of organisations, regulatory and governing bodies, whom are involved in the governance of the game on a national and international scale. Each of these key stakeholders will have different priorities, whether their focus is on developing the next generation of footballer or taking a more commercially driven approach.

³ In England, men’s international football begins at the U15 age group and this paper assumes all age groups from U15-U21 England men’s squads to be classed as youth international football.

The following section explains the role of these stakeholders in order to frame the youth international footballer in the wider landscape of professional football.

2.4.1. The stakeholder model

In recent years football has moved from a traditional hierarchical model to a model of systemic governance (Leftwich, 1994; Henry & Lee, 2004). This refers to the complex web of stakeholders and the interrelationship between them which has led to one governing body no longer being the sole primary stakeholder in the success or development of the sport. This systemic governance has led to three implications for policy change. 1) Policy change must occur through negotiations between stakeholders which can lead to potential trade-offs in policy development, 2) Governing bodies have less power in the governance of their sport, and 3) Individuals involved in policy development must be able to manage multiple stakeholder interests. In the case of youth international football this will have implications for those working with youth international footballers as those individuals will be at the heart of several stakeholders objectives and although it is the clubs' coaches who are at the heart of delivering policy objectives (Liston, Gregg & Lowther, 2013), it is the players who are the central point at which these policies are aimed.

At the micro-level the stakeholders within high performance sport have moved from solely being parents, peers and coaches to sports psychologists, sports scientist and lifestyle advisors now being added to organisations support teams (McCalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016). However, at the organisational level elite football will also have stakeholders who work together, or oppose each other, to govern, enact policy and guide youth footballers whilst meeting their own objectives and priorities. The impact that these stakeholders may have on our 'focal organisation', the youth international footballer, may be dependent on whether they are a primary or secondary stakeholder.

A primary stakeholder is defined as "those whose continued participation is necessary to the survival of the firm" (Senaux, 2008: 5). However, on the other hand secondary stakeholders are not as essential for the survival of the 'firm'. Secondary stakeholders are defined as having an "influence or affect, or are influenced or are affected by, the corporation, but they are not engaged in transactions with the

corporation and are not essential for its survival” (p. 107). The stakeholder relationships within football are part of a system that “has given way to a complex web of interrelationships between stakeholders in which different groups exert power in different ways and in different context, conditioned by history, resources and drawing on alliances with other stakeholders” (Henry & Lee, 2004: 6). This interrelationship between stakeholders assumes that organisations are inextricably linked. In the case of football clubs and leagues are reliant upon each other for the others success. In this way The Premier League (PL) needs clubs to perform well domestically as well as in European competition and the clubs require the PL to increase its global reach to increase their revenue streams.

As with any stakeholder modelling it is important to begin by identifying who the stakeholders are, however, as Senaux (2008) suggested, this can be problematic as there must be criteria for each stakeholder to justify inclusion. The focus for here is on organisational stakeholders but we cannot ignore the micro-level of individuals who are important in the players development, particularly as a support network (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014). Personal stakeholders in the young footballers’ career have been well researched with family (Battaglia & Kerr, 2020), peers (Rosso & McGrath, 2012) and coaches (Morris, Tod & Oliver, 2016) often cited as having a direct impact on player development.

Mitchell, Agle and Wood’s’ (1997) Stakeholder Identification Model has been selected as it has been widely used to explain relationships between stakeholders with different priorities and objectives (Parent & Deephouse, 2007; Hautbois, Parent & Seguin, 2012; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015). Each of these stakeholders will “have to compete, adjust and cooperate with other organisations and groups and hence the structures and changes of a domain...are subjected to contestation and negotiation” (Gammelsæter & Senaux, 2013: 3).

The Stakeholder Identification Model (Mitchell et al., 1997) built upon traditional two-dimensional models of stakeholder identification by proposing three parameters; power, legitimacy and urgency. Here, power is defined as “a relationship among social actors in which one social actor, A, can get another social actor, B, to do something that B would not have otherwise done” (Mitchell et al., 1997: 869). This can be characterized within youth International football as the relationship between The Football Association (FA) and The Premier League in writing policies for professional club’s youth academies to follow. Legitimacy is “a generalized

perception or assumption that, the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, definitions” (p. 869). Urgency is “the degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate attention” (Suchman, 1995: 574, cited in Mitchell et al., 1997: 869).

Mitchell et al (1997) suggested the three key typologies for stakeholder classification;

1. Latent Stakeholder: Organisations at this level will hold one of the three defining factors at any one time.
2. Expectant Stakeholder: these stakeholders exhibit two of the key factors and have moderate levels of salience⁴, often with an expectation of something enhanced through an increase in responsiveness to the stakeholder’s interests. These can be dominant, dangerous or dependent.
3. Definitive Stakeholder: Here, organisations will be identified as have all three factors and the highest levels of salience. Due to displaying power, legitimacy and urgency stakeholders’ needs will be met with immediacy.

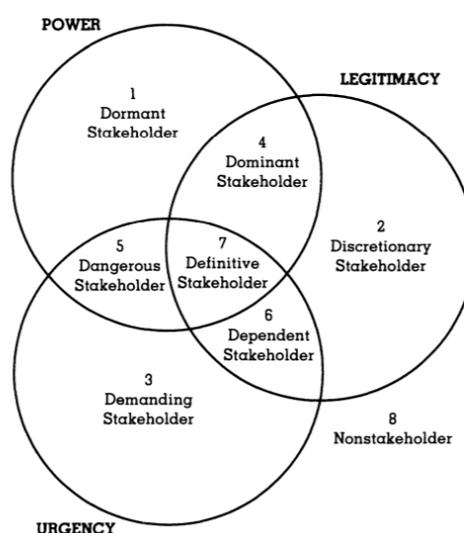


Figure 2.10. Stakeholder Typology (Mitchell et al., 1997)

2.4.2. Primary and secondary stakeholders in youth international football

The stakeholder approach to football governance proposed by Senaux (2008) assumes that players are an important stakeholder for professional football clubs,

⁴ Salience is the ‘degree to which managers give priority to Original-builds on the competing stakeholder (Mitchell et al., 1997: 869)

however, this thesis frames the player as the centre of the stakeholder relationship. Players are dictated by urgency as they are only part of the academy system for a finite amount of time and only have a certain number of fixtures each season to prove they are good enough to stay in the squad. The same can be said for the international youth football environment where players have a limited time 'on camp' during the season. De Bosscher et al. (2006) assume that international sporting success is dictated by "macro (country), meso (sport programme) and micro (athletes) levels" (Valenti et al., 2019: 2). If we assume that the youth international footballer is at the heart of the stakeholder map, then it is important to understand how the core priorities of these key stakeholders can affect the young players sporting and emotional development. The practice of identifying stakeholders in the youth international footballers' career is not to explain the governance processes of elite sport but to highlight "the interaction and influence patterns between the sports own governing bodies and external constituents" (Gammelsæter & Senaux, 2013: 4). This is significant as the extant literature is yet to frame the youth international footballer in their stakeholder map and therefore it is difficult to suggest whom may be important in the career journey of the developing footballer and the role they play.

Primary Stakeholders

Professional Football Clubs

Professional football clubs operate as service enterprises "engaged in the business of performance, entertainment and financial profit" (Vaeyens, Coutts & Philippaerts, 2005, cited in Relvas et al., 2010: 166). Young footballers will spend up to 14 hours per week training and an additional four hours in further education, this is not including any additional psychological or player care support that the player may receive, at their youth academy at the ages of 16-18 years old over a 46 week season (The Premier League, 2021). Therefore, the argument to suggest that clubs are a primary stakeholder in the developing footballers' career is a simple one.

There is an importance for clubs to develop their own players through the academy system in men's football as the sale of players can be lucrative. Alongside this, the "mediatisation of sport makes explicit the value of every player, both through an instant appreciation of his production (game) and through rumours of transfer" (p. 11). The increased media attention on developing footballers through social media has now meant that the secondary stakeholder, supporters, are beginning to have

a greater stake in the players development as they are now able to get closer to the first-team environment (Garcia & Welford, 2015).

The aims of professional football club's youth academies will be club-dependent but will include developing players for their, or others, first teams, life skills development (Cope et al., 2016) and to make financial profit (Relvas et al., 2010). As part of the club's business model they may now start to factor in the development of international footballers to bring in more revenue. Professional football clubs will receive up to 49% of their total revenue through commercial markets (Deloitte, 2020). Although Deloitte do not include player transfers as commercial revenue, they do recognise the importance of player transfer income on football clubs' financial strategies. Youth international football is often seen as a by-product of development; however, it may be in the clubs' interests to develop international footballers whom can provide the club with a potentially lucrative revenue stream, if sold.

Clubs may not openly suggest that income generation from selling youth players is a core priority, however, through receiving compensation for the transfer of youth players (EPPP, 2014) this adds to the suggestion of legitimacy in the stakeholder relationship. This idea of 'commoditised childhood' (Gammelsæter, 2020) has the potential to ask difficult moral and ethical questions to clubs and is a factor in how the PL and The FA work with clubs to ensure their legitimate stake in the developing footballer are "desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (Suchman, 1995: 574, cited in Mitchell et al., 1997: 869).

Clubs hold each of the attributes proposed by Mitchell et al. (1997) in that they have legitimacy, power and urgency and are therefore perhaps the most important stakeholder in the development of young footballers. The youth international footballer provides the club exposure during international representation, a key aspect of urgency in the Stakeholder Identification Model (Mitchell et al., 1997) and through this exposure there is also an expectation that the player will continue to develop, however player development in youth International football is still an area that is non-existent in the extant literature. In addition, although professional football clubs are integral to the production of professional footballer's, research has done little to suggest how clubs can support their youth players who represent their country, whether from a coaching or player care perspective.

The Premier League

The Premier League functions as a corporation that is owned by the league member clubs and was initially developed by The FA to consist of the most successful teams in England, which increased the power that The FA held over English football through maintaining The FA's ability to govern the professional game. This has led the power within elite football in England to shift with the "examination of the combined issues of Premier League wealth, increased player salaries, increased labour rights through the Bosman case, [and] the use of agents" (Magee, 2002: 223). The role of the league is not to actively engage in club management, however, in 2011 the PL introduced the most important policy development in professional youth football, the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) (The Premier League, 2011). The EPPP was introduced due to the consistent poor performances of youth England national teams at international tournaments as well as the perceived failure of youth football academies to prepare home-grown players with the skill set to succeed in competitive football (O'Gorman et al., 2020; Mills, Butt, Maynard, & Harwood, 2012).

The EPPP aimed "to foster a working environment that promotes excellence, nurtures talented young players and systematically converts talent into more and better professional home-grown players" (The Premier League, 2011: 12). Since 2011 the document has been updated in the form of the Youth Player Development Rules which are provided to clubs at the beginning of each season. Due to the high stake that the PL have in its members clubs and the introduction of the EPPP to guide youth development the PL is well placed to enact policy change regarding youth international football. To date the EPPP document focuses on the processes of clubs but fails to suggest recommendations for any International transition. However, according to the EPPP a minimum of four weekends throughout the season are devoted to International football (The Premier League, 2021), organised in consultation with The FA and youth academies are required to upload data to the Performance Management Application (PMA) once the player has returned from England representation.

The relationship between professional football clubs and The Premier League is complex, as "actors with a high stake in the firm will demand more comprehensive incentive mechanisms and governance structures in order to safeguard their asset-specific investments in the firm" (Hill & Jones, 1992: 134). This helps to understand

their relationship as the better the clubs perform, the more powerful the league can become and therefore there is an interdependence between clubs and leagues in elite English football.

The Football Association

Since the introduction of the EPPP the emphasis on youth development has shifted further towards professional clubs rather than The FA taking responsibility for developing footballers, as was the case with The FA's Charter for Quality in 1997 (The Football Association, 1997; Howie & Allison, 2015). The Lewis Report (2007) suggested that the current guidelines were not fit for purpose and therefore constituted a move to a more legitimate use of power "as those that do not use power in a manner in which society considers responsible will tend to lose it" (Davis, 1973: 314).

Although clubs will have greater levels of stakeholder salience with the developing footballer, in the context of international football, The FA are a primary stakeholder as they are responsible for the management of all England representative teams (FA Learning, 2020) as well as being the governing body of the sport in England. In The FA's strategic plan 2016-2020 their key priority is to develop winning England teams by 2022 and 2023 (FA, 2016). Although they have a key stake in the developing National team player there is not any formal guidance or policies regarding how clubs should support international footballers, a problem that this thesis looked to resolve.

Secondary Stakeholders

FIFA and UEFA

The roles of both FIFA (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*) and UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) have changed throughout their histories, with FIFA moving from a global sporting organisation (Foster & Pope, 2004) to an international non-governmental organisation (Eisenberg, 2006), acting as a "regulatory organisation driven by a principle of decentralisation and independence of the [50] member association" (Lanfranchi et al., 2004: 74). The introduction of UEFA gave European club football and National Governing Bodies a collective voice within world football (Sugden, Tomlinson & Darby, 1998) and acts as a "supporting authority which doesn't have the powers of a government; it

represents Europe's national football associations and can only act in accordance with the wishes of these associations" (UEFA, 2007).

UEFA's strategy document, *Together for the Future of Football 2019-2024*, has a clear focus on youth development, however, as they state they "place a heavy emphasis on the role of clubs, big and small, in youth development, rewarding and incentivising those which prioritise investment in future players, their education and the necessary infrastructure" (UEFA, 2019: 18). This acknowledgment of clubs' roles in player development is echoed by FIFA whom have created a football stakeholder committee to enhance cooperation and communication between member associations and confederations. The idea was to develop a Football Stakeholder Committee that advises the FIFA Council on relevant matters which may impact them throughout the football ecosystem, this may involve the use of technology in sport or player development, for example (FIFA, 2020).

FIFA and UEFA deliver the competition structure that young footballers participate in during international representation and this provides the organisations with legitimacy. Through their international games programme both organisations also have urgency as they have a critical relationship with the young players who compete in their competitions. This critical relationship is defined through the stakeholders (FIFA and UEFA) having an expectation that the young players will continue to provide them with value, which in this context refers to high-level senior footballers who participate in their flagship competitions (e.g. FIFA World Cup and UEFA Champions League). Therefore, FIFA and UEFA's stake in developing youth international footballers is based on future commercial revenue (the FIFA World Cup 2018 brought in 83% of FIFA's total revenue, the most profitable World Cup to date – FIFA, 2018) rather than a focus solely on player development.

Player Guidance

Due to the introduction of a more systemic governance model of elite football there are additional bodies whom provide direct guidance and support to their members (Gammelsæter & Senaux, 2013). In England these organisations include the national players union - The Professional Footballers Association (PFA) or the independent reporting body KickitOut who work closely with partner organisations with the aim of challenging discrimination and inequalities across English football (KickitOut, 2020). In 2013 the PFA became a registered charity and is a key member of the International Players Association (FIFPro). The association aims "to protect,

improve and negotiate the conditions, rights and status of all professional players by collective bargaining agreements” (The PFA, 2020).

Organisations which function as players unions or reporting bodies are dependent stakeholders in that they have legitimacy and urgency but do not hold any power over the footballer and rely on other stakeholders to function. An example of stakeholder urgency here is through the critical nature of contractual disputes between clubs and players which the PFA would become involved in. These organisations are identified as secondary stakeholders as their “engagement is perhaps more social or social-psychological than purely economic” (Senaux, 2008; Gammelsæter, 2010; Chadwick, 2012, cited in Gammelsæter & Senaux, 2013: 144).

Supporters

At the elite end of British football, the modern professional football club is increasingly seen as a global brand (Millward, 2012; Dickson, 2016; Porter, 2019), able to bring in large commercial revenues and have diversifying fanbases with fans beginning to have allegiances to specific footballers rather than the club (Deloitte, 2020). Garcia and Welford (2014) suggest that supporters be seen as stakeholders in regard to supporter activism and the engagement of supporters in club governance. Beyond this, supporters of clubs may also have a stake in the development of youth footballers. Social media, such as Twitter, helps players to have a voice and build their personal brands but can also create a bridge between supporters and footballers that until recent years has not been possible (Price, Farrington & Hall, 2013). Although clubs have strict rules stating what players can and cannot do on social media the interaction with fans and the visibility of these players has created a legitimate stakeholder relationship between player and fan.

Youth international players stakeholders were mapped to understand the various organisations who impact player development in English football. Based on a document analysis of stakeholders’ strategies and annual reports the stakeholders’ typologies and objectives have been summarised in Figure 2.11.

Types/Attributes	Power	Legitimacy	Urgency	Type	Objectives
Primary Stakeholders					
Professional Football Clubs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Definitive	Sporting, financial, developmental
The Football Association	Yes	Yes	Latent	Dormant/Definitive	Development of football
Leagues	Yes	Yes	Latent	Dormant/Definitive	Sporting, financial
Secondary Stakeholders					
FIFA	-	Yes	Yes	Expectant - Dependent	Development of football
UEFA	-	Yes	Yes	Expectant - Dependent	Development of football
Player Guidance (e.g. The PFA)	-	Yes	Yes	Expectant – Dependent	Player support, persuading stakeholders
Supporters	-	-	Yes	Latent - Demanding	Sporting success

Figure 2.11. Summary of Youth International Footballers stakeholders' types and objectives (adapted from Senaux, 2008)

Power does not solely constitute high salience as “power gains authority through legitimacy, and it gains exercise through urgency” (Mitchell et al., 1997: 869). Each of the primary stakeholders were found to have legitimacy due to the assumption that their “actions [are] desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms” (Suchman, 1995: 574, cited in Mitchell et al., 1997: 869). This can be evidenced through the football clubs priority on developing footballers for their first team, The FA’s desire to develop football across England and to develop winning England teams and The Premier Leagues introduction of the Elite Player Performance Plan which outlines youth development rules to all professional youth academies in England. Each stakeholder is able to move between typology and this may change at different points in the players career, and however big the stake each stakeholder is an important part of the “nexus of implicit and explicit contracts that constitute the firm [player experience]” (Henry & Lee, 1992: 134).

On the basis of (1) literature surrounding stakeholder priorities and mapping the stakeholders in youth football, (2) the structure of professional football and (3) an understanding of the developmental process of youth football, it is possible to develop a model which situates the athlete within the context of youth International representation. Figure 2.12 shows the journey that young footballers may take throughout their career and the organisational stakeholders who may have an impact on their development throughout this process.

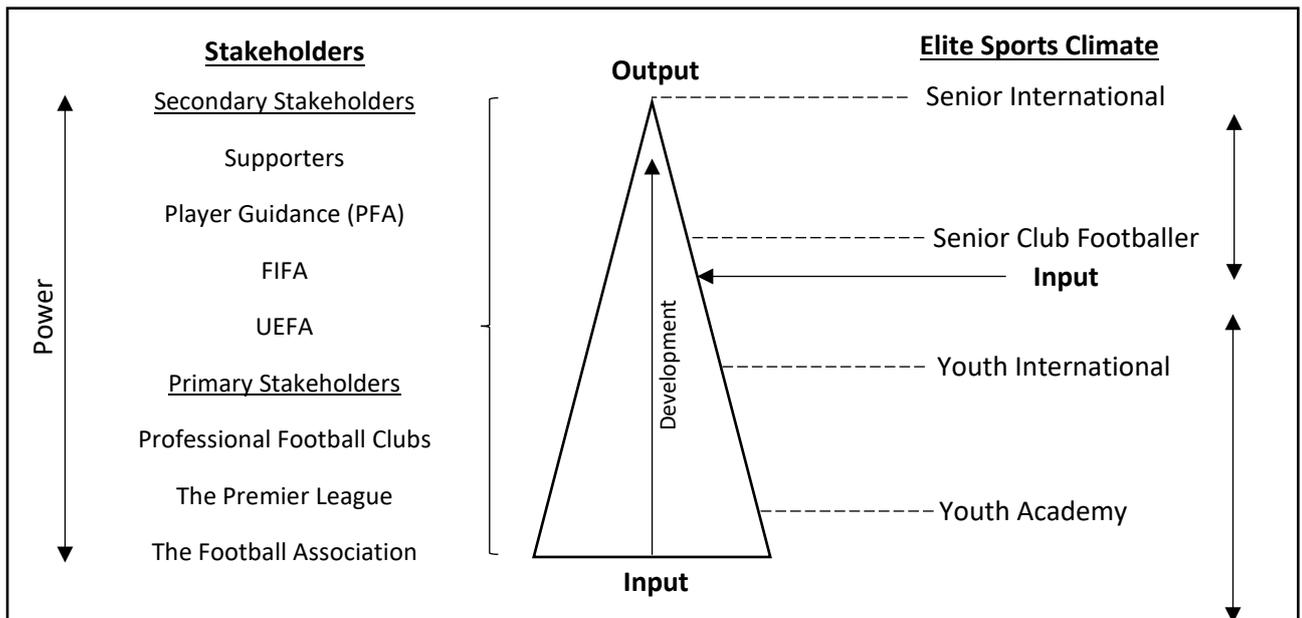


Figure 2.12. Conceptual model of Stakeholders in Youth International Football

Like the pyramid structure proposed by De Bosscher et al. (2006) this model considers the different stages in athletes' careers. As the model is concerned with player development, input refers to young players entering the youth academy for the first time as well as individuals who may enter professional football at the senior club level. In the model, output refers to players becoming full senior internationals. Therefore, the model is representative of the large number of players who enter the professional youth football system and the small number who reach the level of senior International footballer, this is in line with the idea that professional football is the pinnacle of a much larger grassroots movement (Meier, 2008).

Although this model assumes that transitions are normative, with players moving through the levels in a linear process, in reality it needs to be explained that players will be de-selected at different points and may enter the next stage of their development on an interim basis before re-entering the previous level (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Brown & Potrac, 2009), e.g. playing one fixture with senior team before playing for the club academy again. The function of the model is not to be deterministic and assume that footballers will directly move through each of these transitions, rather that throughout the process of entering a senior club football environment there will be numerous stakeholders for consideration who will have policies which will either implicitly or explicitly influence the players development and opportunities to reach senior football.

Through placing the athlete at the centre of the stakeholder relationships we can begin to focus on sport, not as industry but as a tool for development and a force for social good, of which it is so capable. As mentioned above, the national sport policies that have been introduced by multiple stakeholders will have a direct effect on the developing footballer. Having identified the organisations whom have a stake in the development of youth footballers we can better understand the youth football environment as well as the micro-political factors involved in youth development.

2.5. Justification

The research topic is of interest to both academics and those working in youth development because successful talent development environments are categorised by the number of top-level athletes that they produce (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007), and as such, the effective transition of youth athletes into senior and international sport is an important factor in maintaining successful talent development environments. From a club perspective, one of the primary aspects of success for professional football academies is based on how many players become youth internationals (Larsen et al., 2013) therefore, it may be in the best interest of the football clubs to understand and provide additional support to young athletes during the international transition – an area not currently considered in the Youth Development Rules (The Premier League, 2021).

Research in the area of transition in sport has been criticised for focusing too heavily on retirement (Nesti et al., 2012) and the movement out of elite sport (Brandao et al., 2001; Stambulova, 1994). However, research into within-career transitions, for example movement from amateur to elite (Larsen et al., 2013; Gledhill & Harwood, 2015), is an emerging area of research as it enables researchers to focus on transitions that may be caused by specific sporting cultures and organisations (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). The within-career transition of movement into international representative sport and the effects of this on player development has not been represented in the literature. This research adds to the discussed literature through building on the academic understanding of professional youth footballers' experiences in England and aims to lead to policy change regarding youth development structures during the international representation process.

The sport of football was chosen as a focus based on similar characteristics as proposed by Morris, Tod and Oliver (2015). Namely that (a) there has been a recent

introduction of sport-specific policies and operational processes by The Premier League to manage youth development (e.g. The Elite Player Performance Plan) and (b) that there is a “legitimate claim of public interest given that the sport’s governing body (The Football Association, England) receives public funding” (p.218). Despite the monetary investment and the interest in the sport in the UK there is a lack of research that focuses on the process of transition for youth athletes into international football. Although this transition differs from the youth-to-senior transition, where players often move from a supportive environment into a domain that is not concerned with player development (Richardson et al., 2012), these players will be put in a situation where they are challenged to perform to high standards by a different group of stakeholders. This can lead to situations where young footballers struggle to balance their life as a footballer, their academic studies and their social life (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015).

A difficulty within professional football is that the individuals responsible for the transition process vary greatly between clubs, as do the reporting structures in place to manage talent development (Relvas et al., 2010). Therefore, a football clubs’ organisational culture can be specific to that club as well as imbued with a culture pertinent to the sport and its governing bodies. High-performing cultures in elite sports are “a dynamic process characterised by the shared values, beliefs, expectations and practices across the members and generations of a defined group” (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012: 340). Similar to varied high-performing cultures across sport an athletic transition will heavily rely on the sport they participate in due to the different demands during each transition (Stambulova et al., 2009).

Taking this into account, this research provided much-needed support to the understanding of developmental processes in elite youth football and adds to the published research for the following reasons:

- a) The former Premier League Chief Executive Richard Scudamore recently stated that there were too few English players successfully transitioning from youth and reserve teams to senior teams (Guardian, 2016), a transition that happens at a similar time to the club-to-country. Due to the falling number of English players in The Premier League (Guardian, 2016) and that the majority of footballers’ experience retirement from professional football during their adolescent years, either due to being released or being injured (Brown and Potrac, 2009), understanding the transition process at this age

may help young athletes avoid this early retirement/exit from professional sport. Therefore, this thesis begins to address a major issue outside of academia.

- b) A unique element of this research is the focus on international representation as this does not fall into the categories of normative or non-normative transitions as outlined by Wylleman and Lavallee (2004). Entering the international sporting environment may be seen as predictable for some athletes but not all, with certain athletes struggling to cope with the lack of predictability of entering this environment, particularly for the first time, whilst balancing complex academic, sporting and social roles (Bruner, Monroe-Chandler & Spink, 2008). However, as Stambulova et al. (2009) suggest, “normative transitions create an opportunity to prepare athletes to cope with them in advance” (p. 398), therefore, to avoid the inability to cope with these transitions it may be important to understand the preparation of elite youth athletes entering this environment. This may be seen as increasingly important due to the rationale that youth players should be able to handle transitions themselves and solve how to effectively enter new environments (Larsen et al., 2013).

- c) In addition, young footballers who can manage relationships between different groups in different environments appear to undergo a more successful youth-to-senior transition (Mills et al., 2012). Therefore, through this research a more contextually rich understanding of the within-career transition process from club-to-country can be understood, which will support footballers in the youth-to-senior transition. The research also offers recommendations for a career-assistance programme for young footballers transitioning between club and international football. A transitional trend within English football is that academy graduates from Category One football clubs tend to transition into the first team at lower level English clubs as traditionally young English footballers are less likely to move abroad and therefore the available pathways are not as varied as their foreign counterparts. Bullough and Jordan (2017) found that within their sample from 2006-07 to 2016-17 only 1% of English footballers have played outside the EPL. Moreover, the research suggests that the number of indigenous

footballers developed in each country is a key measurement for National Associations. However, the study found that the level of output in England is weaker than other leading nations; England: 369, Spain: 713, France: 656, Holland: 647, Italy: 523, Germany: 517 (Bullough & Jordan, 2017), suggesting that there may be an issue with the number of English players transitioning into the first-team at EPL clubs.

Coaching support in talent development is a developing area of research, with the relationship between the aforementioned stakeholders and youth international footballers an area of interest due to observing the club-to-country transition as an opportunity for talent development. When entering the elite sport environment players tended to feel that coaches were being overly critical which led to a decrease in confidence (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler & Spink, 2008). In sport it has been suggested that it is important to reassure the athlete of the support networks that are in place during any transitional situation. In addition to this an elite talent development programme has a duty of care to provide athletes with effective support in all areas of their development (Martindale et al., 2005). Martindale et al. (2005) suggest that sporting organisations need to focus on promoting development rather than early progression into the elite environment with a focus on characteristics such as mental (e.g. motivation and handling pressure), life (e.g. self-evaluation) and physical skills (e.g. speed and strength). This is also highlighted by Surujlal and Van Zyl (2014) who suggest that sport governing bodies have an integral role to play in managing each transition, within and outside of sport.

As the most important years for transition from youth to senior sport are described as 18-24 years of age (Bennie & O'Connor, 2006), it is important to point out that youth international transition may also occur at the same or a similar time period and therefore this should be considered within the literature. Particularly as when multiple transition demands occur at the same time the demands on the individual can increase exponentially (Morris, 2013).

2.6. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter aimed to provide a clear background of athletic career transition literature and justify the importance of the literature in the wider academic and youth development landscape. Through the review of literature, a number of key concepts

have emerged which will inform the thesis. Namely, career transition research has begun to take a more cultural praxis, leading to holistic research which focuses on both psychological and sociological concepts and leads researchers to focus on areas such as organisational culture or pedagogical understanding.

Secondly, the organisations that govern football have multiple competing priorities which may impact how the game is governed and have an effect upon the policies and procedures of football clubs, in turn, influencing the developing footballer. Therefore, as the domain of international transition is situated between club, The Football Association and The Premier League it is important to understand the complex relationships that can affect a young footballer's development and overall performance, from both a micro- and macro-perspective.

Thirdly, the extant literature has suggested that negative career transitions can have adverse consequences for athletic success, including disengagement from sport and wider decreased life satisfaction. The transition into international sport is well placed to offer an insight into a normative transition that may have a large impact on player development at an important time in a player's career. The thesis provides a detailed perspective on the practical implications of positive transitions and offers ideas on how to enhance youth development structures which can be embedded in UEFA and EPPP guidelines. Having provided a background to the studies areas of interest the following chapter outlines the methodology and methods employed in the thesis to meet the objectives in Chapter One.

CHAPTER III: Methodology and Research Methods

This chapter aims to explain the research methodology for the study, including a justification of the philosophical assumptions, research design and methods. To begin, the chapter explains the researchers' ontological and epistemological position before discussing the methodology that the researcher aligns themselves to. Next, the chapter argues the importance in using a case study research design and method triangulation to answer the research questions outlined in Chapter One. The chapter concludes by detailing the data collection and analysis considerations of the study.

3.1. Scientific Paradigms

The paradigms approach⁵ refers to the basic beliefs and assumptions that the researcher holds and dictate what the researcher perceives as legitimate and reasonable to study (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The term paradigm is often perceived as “an established academic approach” that enables the researcher to agree upon paradigmatic assumptions, methods and practices (Grix, 2010: 26).

Paradigms and metaphysics do matter. They matter because they tell us something important about researcher standpoint. They tell us something about the researchers proposed relationship to the Other(s). They tell us something about what the researcher thinks counts as knowledge, and who can deliver the most valuable slice of this knowledge. They tell us how the researcher intends to take account of multiple and contradictory values she will encounter. (Lincoln, 2010: 7)

Ormston et al., (2014) explained that the researcher is “bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises [a paradigm] which...regardless of ultimate truth or falsity...become partially self-validating” (Bateson, 1972: 314). In short, the researchers' paradigmatic position will affect their views on how they answer questions regarding the nature of reality and knowledge (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Therefore, central to any paradigm is its ontology, epistemology and

⁵ A paradigm is defined as a “set of basic beliefs...and a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the world, the individuals place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its part” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 107)

methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is important to outline the theoretical assumptions of the research as it is not the methods which are the defining factor in delivering quality social research but the ontology and epistemology of the researcher (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

3.1.1. Ontological Assumptions

Ontology is defined as the “claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other” (Blaikie, 2000: 8). In short, ontology is concerned with ‘reality’ and the study of being (Effingham, 2013). The ontological position of the researcher is of utmost importance as ontological assumptions will dictate the scientific position of the research (Grix, 2010).

Ontologically social science researchers tend to adhere to two clear schools of thought; objectivism and constructivism (Grix, 2010). Objectivism “asserts that social phenomenon and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors” (Bryman, 2001: 16). This assumes that it is possible to objectively understand the social world and has traditionally been the dominant ontological assumption of empirical research (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). On the other hand, constructivism is a position which lends itself to social science research as it ‘asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors...social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in constant state of revision’ (Bryman, 2011: 17-18). This thesis takes a constructivist position due to the focus on understanding the young footballers’ social reality and their relationships within their social context as well as club staffs perception of the youth international environment – a social phenomenon.

3.1.2. Epistemological assumptions

Epistemology is commonly defined as the theory of knowledge and therefore epistemological considerations will depend upon the researcher’s beliefs about the nature of knowledge (Grix, 2010). In the same vein as ontological assumptions, epistemological positions can be described as having three dominant research

paradigms, 'positivism', 'post-positivism'⁶ and 'interpretivism' (Sparkes, 1992). Each of these dominant paradigms are informed by the researchers' ontological position.

Positivism is linked to an objectivist ontological assumption and assumes that reality exists outside of human consciousness (Blaikie, 2010). The positivist paradigm is concerned with finding objective truths and because of this has traditionally been the most dominant research paradigm in social inquiry (Grix, 2010). "Positivism is based on an assumption that it is possible to report unambiguous truth, in terms of observable phenomena and verified facts... a positivist approach assumes that the aims, concept, methods and model of explanation in the natural sciences may be applied non-problematically" (Taber, 2013: 45). Having made these claims it is important to suggest that qualitative research can still take a positivist position. Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that when observed through a positivist paradigm qualitative research takes a dualist epistemology with the researcher and participant seen as independent of each other.

In comparison, through an interpretivist paradigm the epistemological assumption is more dialectical, focusing on hermeneutic interactions⁷ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The interpretivist paradigm, which aligns itself with constructivism and, takes the epistemological assumption that knowledge is a consequence of society and therefore "argues for meaning to be found in social consensus" (Potrac et al., 2014: 33). Through this paradigm the researcher has an understanding that their observations are underpinned by subjectivities and personal biographies (Sparkes, 1992). Potrac et al. (2014) state that the interpretivist paradigm has been increasingly adopted in recent years when studying sports coaching and sociology and does not attempt to observe objective truths. The paradigm is founded in "the premise that the social world is complex" and "that people define their own meanings within respective social, political and cultural settings" (Markula & Silk, 2011: 31).

The research aligned itself with the interpretivist paradigm as was concerned with observing the experiences of young international footballers in their own social context (Sparkes, 1992). It has been argued that interpretivism effectively aligns to sporting environments as within sport "the social world is complex [and] people define their own meanings within respective social settings" (Markula & Silk, 2011:

⁶ Post-positivism is a research paradigm that situates itself between the paradigms of positivism and interpretivism and is sometimes referred to as realism (Grix, 2010).

⁷ Hermeneutics are the theory of interpretation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) and is concerned with 'the uncovering of something hidden' (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009: 58)

31). In this way, this research assumed that an individual's knowledge is shaped by their social context and the historical, cultural and political norms that define this context.

3.1.3. Methodology: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

Through wider reading it has become clear that there are key differences between quantitative and qualitative research and therefore the selection of the approach will affect the further methods of the study. Firstly, the term qualitative differs from the traditionally scientific quantitative research (Cresswell, 2014) as it suggests the importance of “an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally measured...in terms of quantity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 8). Traditionally, qualitative research has been seen as an attack on the values of truth (Carey, 1989). However, Ormston et al. (2014) have suggested that a theoretical issue with research is what constitutes scientific inquiry. The process of carefully observing humans and society is no more epistemologically problematic than observing the traditional, scientific measures but this is dependent on the researchers' ontological approach (Erickson, 2011). The ontological and epistemological assumptions of qualitative research are highly important aspects of interpreting phenomena (Weed, 2009), and this is where qualitative and quantitative research differ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Philosophical assumptions will underpin the researchers' perceptions of the research landscape which may lead to issues in defining qualitative research (Lincoln, 2010).

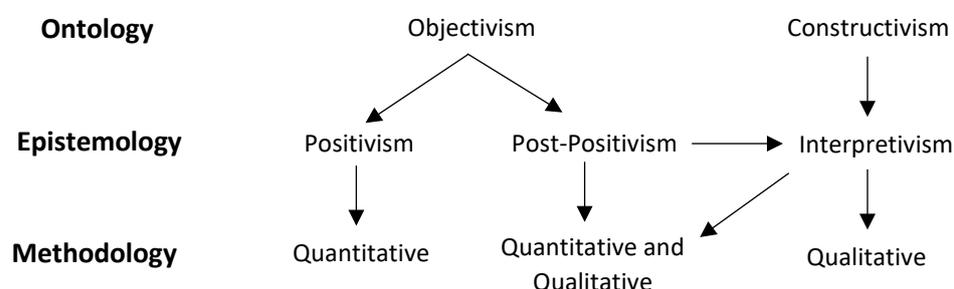


Figure 3.1. The research process as outlined by Marsh and Stoker (2010: 186)

Silverman (2010) suggests that the drawback to using qualitative research is that it is not the research question that drives the study but the researchers' assumptions and theoretical orientations and therefore the researcher must be reflexive. This may be particularly true within interpretivist research as it is often perceived that the researcher themselves is the primary research tool, unlike in positivistic quantitative research where a specific instrument or tool may be used (Ball, 1999). Having said this, Figure 3.1 suggests that the researcher is an important factor in the research process as the ontological and epistemological position will influence the methodology and methods.

Quantitative research assumes that "inquiry takes place through a one-way mirror" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 110) and often approaches research through a positivist paradigm to explain the relationship between two variables (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research differs from the more dualist quantitative approach as it often assumes that the research findings are a combination of the knower and the known (Ormston et al., 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe these different philosophical approaches as the key variances between quantitative and qualitative researchers. Therefore, the key strength of qualitative research lies in its dialectical, relativist ontological approach and leads the research to understand the interaction between and among investigator and participant (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In the case of this research qualitative research was used as it helped to understand and explain social phenomena rather than explaining relationships or causes (Cresswell, 2009).

3.2. Research Design: Case Study

Having taken an interpretivist methodological position and outlined the use of qualitative research in the study it is now important to explain the use of the designated research design. Sparkes and Smith (2014) outline six qualitative research traditions that are commonplace amongst social science researchers, namely, 'ethnography', 'phenomenology', 'grounded theory', 'narrative research', 'critical research' and the 'case study'. In preparation for the study, multiple designs were deemed appropriate due to the designs enabling the researcher to observe the presentation of complex phenomenon (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Having said this

it was felt that the case study design was the most appropriate at enabling the researcher to meet the objectives of the study.

The case study research design is an approach that aims to shed light on a specific topic within its real-world context (Grix, 2010) and has been described as both the *process* of inquiry and the *product* of the inquiry (Stake, 2005). As Schwandt (1997) explains “the phenomenon of study may be a person, process, event, group, organisation, and so on” (p.12) and therefore can be useful at answering how and why questions (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Stake (2005) builds on this by suggesting that a case study must have a specific ‘bounded system’⁸ that has certain requirements that can be recognised, leading the researcher to effectively work out whether the phenomenon is relevant to their specific case.

The rationale for using the case study approach was three-fold, firstly the research operates in the specific ‘bounded system’ (Stake, 1995) of English Premier League and youth international football rather than studying international transitions within multiple countries and across numerous football leagues. Consequently, due to the subject area being underappreciated in the extant literature the case study design enables the researcher to “develop as full an understanding of [that] case as possible” (Punch, 1998: 150). Within the social sciences Giges and Van Raalte (2012) suggest that the approach enables the researcher to understand important principles that can provide insights into areas such as performance enhancement. The concept of career transition and the movement into international representation can be included here as Stambulova (2009) suggests that positive athletic performance can be affected by negative career transitions.

The type of case study used in this research was what Stake (2005) described as an instrumental case rather than an intrinsic or collective case⁹. The instrumental case study is concerned with developing an understanding of a case that can help to build wider knowledge of a phenomenon.

⁸ Stake (2005) suggests that the bounded system will ensure that certain characteristics of the case can be recognised whereas others will not meet the requirements (bounds) of the system.

⁹ Intrinsic case studies are concerned with a specific case and are therefore more bounded than instrumental or collective case (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Intrinsic cases tend to focus on a specific child, conference or curriculum (Stake, 2005) whereas collective cases involve the study of multiple case studies to lead to a better understanding of a larger set of cases (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

The case is still looked at in-depth, its contexts scrutinised, and its ordinary activities detailed, but all because this helps to pursue the external interest. The case may be seen as typical of other cases or not (Stake, 2005: 445).

The 'unit of analysis' was at a "multi-level" (Pennings & Lee, 1999: 9) as focuses on both the 'micro' and 'macro' level. The thesis was concerned with the micro-level through understanding the experiences of young English footballers during their transition into the international environment and was also concerned with the macro-level through its interest in the organisational policies and procedures that govern the transition process and the stakeholder's relationships within these organisations.

3.3. Research Methods and Data Collection

Methods and methodology are often terms that are used interchangeably; however, it is important to define how these terms have been used in the research (Grix, 2010). Methods are the "techniques or procedures used to collate and analyse data" (Blaikie, 2000: 8) whereas a methodology is the strategy employed to answer the research questions and objectives (Silverman, 2010). The methodological techniques selected to collate and analyse data (Blaikie, 2000) were the combination of document analysis, observations and interviews (see Figure 3.2). Through 'methods triangulation'¹⁰ the researcher uses more than one method to investigate a specific phenomenon (Denzin, 1989). Although one should not assume that gathering data from different sources will result in a complete picture (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) the qualitative researcher can use this approach to understand the social context in which their phenomenon is present (Silverman, 2014). The reason for its inclusion in this study was three-fold. Firstly, 'methods triangulation' (Kuper et al., 2008) enabled the researcher to avoid the potential biases that can occur from using a single method (Denzin, 1970; Williamson, 2005). Secondly, methods triangulation can be used "as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 5). Thirdly, the approach assumes that findings can be "much more convincing and accurate if...based on several different sources of information" (Yin, 1994: 92).

¹⁰ Triangulation refers to an approach to research that uses more than one intended measure to gather results (Heale and Forbes, 2013).

However, triangulation can be problematic due to the contrasting ontological and epistemological assumptions that are associated with different research methods (Silverman, 2014). Having said this, it is important to suggest that the selected methods come without paradigmatic assumptions¹¹ and it is the researcher that applies these to the specified method (Grix, 2010). In this way Fielding and Fielding (1986) suggested that effective triangulation should ensure that the methods belong to the same theoretical perspective (in this case constructivism) and that these methods enable the researcher to provide an account of the phenomena from within the interpretivist perspective. Through a methods triangulation approach this helps the researcher to understand the holistic experience of the transition and therefore make better judgements on transition demands and intervention strategies, this differs from the largely idiosyncratic research in the field that focuses solely on one aspect of the transition. This meets recent calls that suggest research in this area move away from a reliance on singular interviews (Drew et al., 2019).

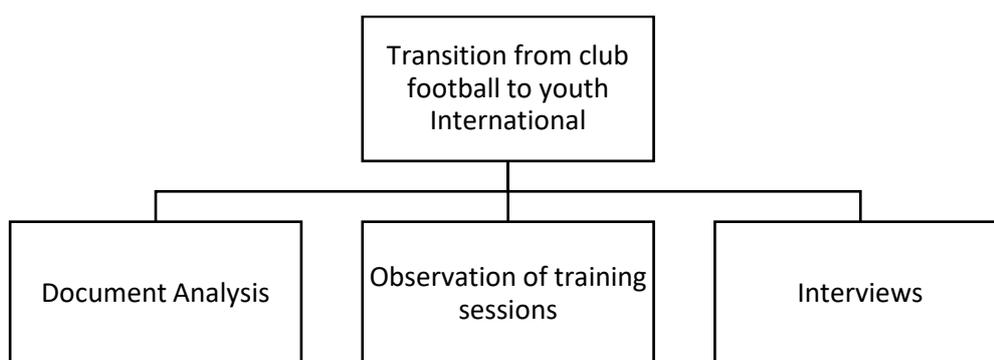


Figure 3.2. Triangulation of Methods

3.3.1. *Timeline of events*

The data collection process of the thesis was as follows:

- Ethical clearance was granted on 23rd October 2019 which enabled the researcher to begin data collection for interview and observations.
- Interviews 1 – 7 were completed with the first group of current youth footballers between November 2019 – February 2020.

¹¹ Therefore, a method is not “rooted in epistemological and ontological commitments” (Bryman, 2001: 445) but it is the researcher who aligns themselves to a specific philosophical position (Grix, 2010).

- Interviews 8 – 14 were completed with current club coaching staff between June 2020 - July 2020.
- Interviews 15 – 17 were completed with the second group of current youth footballers between May 2021 – June 2021.
- Observations of youth international camps were completed over a 2-day period in March 2022 .

	2019	2020	2021	2022
January		Interviews	Thesis Adjustment	Thesis Adjustment
February		Interviews	Thesis Adjustment	Thesis Adjustment
March		Document Collection	Thesis Adjustment	Field Work
April		Thesis Adjustment	Document Collection	Thematic Analysis
May		Thesis Adjustment	Interviews	Thematic Analysis
June		Interviews	Interviews	Thematic Analysis
July		Interviews	Thematic Analysis	Thematic Analysis
August		Interviews	Thesis Analysis	Write-up
September		Interviews	Thesis Analysis	Write-up
October	Document Collection	Interviews	Thesis Adjustment	
November	Document Collection / Interviews	Thesis Analysis	Thesis Adjustment	
December	Document Collection / Interviews	Document Collection	Thesis Adjustment	

Figure 3.3. Timeline of Data Collection and Analysis

3.3.2. Document analysis

Document analysis involves the analysis of specified documents and text (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), including official documents and legislation written by National Governing Bodies. A benefit of using a document analysis is that it enables the researcher to disseminate information that has been developed for a specific purpose (Grix, 2010). However, this is only possible if the researcher is aware of the reason that the document was written so that they can review the document from the perspective in which it was intended (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The method can be particularly effective when attempting to understand an organisations aims and objectives and through combining this with other methods such as speaking to

individuals within the organisation this can build a strong picture of the organisation and operating structures (Linders, 2008; Grix, 2010).

Through an interpretivist paradigm the researcher is concerned with what depicts reality rather than observable truths. Official governing body legislation is often deemed as a true reflection of the organisations practices. However, this may not be the case, as Atkinson and Coffey (2004) suggest:

In paying attention to such materials, however, one must be quite clear about what they can and cannot be used for. Documents are 'social facts', in that they are produced, shared and used in socially organised ways. They are not, however, transparent representations of organisational routines, decision-making processes, or professional diagnoses. They construct particular kinds of representations using their own conventions (p.58).

Atkinson and Coffey (2004) allude to potential issues that can occur in any form of document analysis which suggests the importance of using other methods to help to understand how an organisation operates, supporting the need for a methods triangulation approach.

Building on the idea of documents as social facts (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004) the purpose of mainstream media and National Governing Bodies is not always to inform or accurately represent reality but to entertain or show a controlled view of how something should be (Silverman, 2014). Therefore, it is important for interpretivist researchers to view these documents as representations and analyse effects rather than to assume objective truths from these documents. In this way, if a document states that youth academies function in a specific manner this does not mean that they will adhere to this. This adds further support to research in this area as it will be possible to understand the impact of these official documents through interviewing and observing practice.

The decision to include a document analysis as well as interviews and observations was three-fold. Firstly, the document analysis led to being able to offer more context to the interview schedule to ensure that the key arguments were considered in interview (Bowen, 2009). In addition, youth academies in England are governed by a complex system of historical and political systems, governed by The Premier League and prior to this The Football Association, and therefore the document analysis has helped to develop a greater awareness of the environment that the young footballers are a part of and how this environment is governed. Finally,

analysis of these documents enabled the researcher to understand the progression of youth development legislation over time and gain an insight into areas of support that may be underrepresented (Bowen, 2009) – this included lifestyle support, coaching contact time, recruitment procedures and academy structures.

The document analysis focused on one type of document - ‘official governing body legislation’. The decision not to select media publications as documents was that this thesis places the players experiences as the research focus and therefore the wider media perception of youth international football was not deemed as important. Official national governing body legislation was selected as it provided information on the guidance that is currently, and has previously been, given to professional football academies and helped to develop a stronger understanding of the wider context of youth football in England. Having outlined the types of document it is now important to suggest specific sources that were included or excluded from the research.

	Included	Excluded
Official Governing Body Legislation	Documents published directly by a governing body (The FA, The Premier League, FIFA, etc.)	Documents that were not published by a governing body linked to the governance of international, European or British football

Figure 3.4. Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria for Document Analysis

In addition to the inclusion-exclusion criteria outlined in Table 3.4 three other points were considered in selection of the documents. Firstly, the trustworthiness of the data, next the publication date of documents was checked and finally the documents were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives:

1) Trustworthiness of data – although it can be argued that textual data, particularly through the media, may lack relevant information or be a fabrication of the writers’ own interests they still serve to supply the researcher with specific information on how a social phenomenon is constructed (Hookway, 2008). Having said this, although tabloid newspapers may provide the researcher with an understanding of the social phenomenon (international transition) they were discounted due to their superficial depth.

2) Publication Date - The publication date of the document was considered to ensure that documents that were relevant to the current footballers in the youth system of English football were selected. The FA’s Charter for Quality (CfQ) was introduced

in October 1997 and provided an outline of youth development structures in England (Charter for Quality, 1997) up until the inception of the EPPP (The Premier League, 2012). The CfQ was included as it is an important document in British youth football, and it is likely that it still has a developmental impact on the young footballers entering the current U18/U21 youth International football environment. However, it was decided that all other documents would only be considered if they were published after the inception of The Premier Leagues Elite Player Performance Plan in August 2012. This is due to time restraints and to ensure that the document analysis would not have taken several years to reach completion (Bryman, 2008).

3) Relevance to Research Objectives – It was important that only relevant documents were included which helped to answer the research questions, to achieve this a structured approach was taken to the document search. Key words were selected based upon the wider literature review in Chapter 2 and altered depending on the prior searches. It was decided that a tertiary word may be needed to narrow down the search as the term transition was often misrepresented to explain tactical transition within match play¹² rather than a transition into a different developmental environment as is the case of entering the youth international environment.

Search No.	Key word, Secondary and Tertiary Word used
1	'Transition' and 'football'
2	'Transition' and 'The Premier League'
3	'Transition' and 'football' and 'development'
4	'career transition'
5	'football' and 'youth development'
6	'transition' and 'youth football'
7	'football' and 'power'
8	'football' and 'youth coaching'

Figure 3.5. Key Words used in the Document Search

3.3.3. *Field Work – Observations*

Field work is an appropriate method for interpretivist research as it assumes that “social reality is emergent, subjectively created, and objectified through human interaction” (Chua, 1986: 615). The purpose of the observation is to understand the

¹² Tactical transition refers to the change in a team’s possession during a match or training environment, for example, when a team lose possession of the football they will be described as undertaking negative transition and on winning possession of the football this has been described as positive transition (Winter & Pfeiffer, 2016).

phenomenon in question and therefore the researcher will spend time in the environment, observing behaviour, practice and interactions (Silverman, 2014). Guest et al. (2012) propose that when conducting any form of field work the researcher must be aware of 1) where the phenomena takes place, 2) whether it is specific to a time period, 3) whether this occurs in more than one location, and 4) whether the researcher will need to visit multiple locations. In reference to these key points the following were considered:

1. It was important to ensure a presence at both the club and International football environment to enable the researcher to understand both aspects of the players experience and the interaction between these experiences.
2. Due to the nature of youth football development having a relatively low retention rate of footballers it was felt that the observations of the club and International environments would have to be in the same season. However, this also became problematic as the selected England squad was subject to change dependent on club performance, injuries and availability of players.
3. As there were multiple sites of interest the researcher was required to visit different locations to identify the overall case study. These included multiple youth academy training grounds and St. Georges Park – the training centre for The FA.

It is important to make clear that the researcher has been through an inductive process that has been used to “inform the design and coverage of other phases” (Ritchie et al., 2014: 251). This inductive process led the researcher to be able to ‘case the joint’ (Silverman, 2011) whilst working in the environments of youth academy football and International football in England. Although they have been involved in these environments from a coach and support staff perspective the use of field work enabled them to analyse the everyday interactions which took place between the participants and their coaches/staff. As Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) explained, the topic of study and background of the researcher can increase the chances of gaining permission for field work:

the chances of getting permission to undertake the research are increased when the researcher's interests appear to coincide with those of the subjects. ... In the course of getting in, researchers must present not only themselves but also their proposed research.... Access will be shaped by the cultural and ascriptive differences between the field researcher and the researched.

Where these differences are minimal, access and even acceptance are likely to be enhanced (Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991: 26).

A reason for selecting observation on international training camps was because they were scheduled events which would enable the researcher to generate copious amounts of field notes, as the camps ranged from two-six days in duration. The research setting was what Walsh (2004) described as a private setting as access was controlled by gatekeepers¹³. Within a football environment this can be problematic due to its perceived anti-academic nature (Cushion & Jones, 2006). However, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest that gatekeepers tend to be more concerned with what kind of person the researcher is and whether they can be trusted rather than the research itself. Therefore, due to the researchers' background in football this helped to build the required rapport to enable effective access to observation. Also, a coaching background helped to offset the status of an academic, which can be problematic (Cushion & Jones, 2006).

Silverman (2014) argued the importance of "looking as well as listening" (p.254) during an observation, stating that rarely in sociological research does a researcher have an awareness of visual characteristics when observing a phenomenon. Therefore, it was deemed appropriate to record visual observations of the football environment, including the structure of the training days, the locations of training and the space in which the players operate when they are not in training. Through this observational strategy, to some extent, the researcher was a participant, however, in each observation they attempted to take the role of spectator rather than immersed full participant (Patton, 1990).

Observations were recorded using field notes which were organised through the 'frame' of understanding the players experiences. This was to ensure that the researcher did not record notes on everything that occurred, which would have refuted the theory-driven nature of research, and also prepared the notes for analysis. Through this analytical framework the researcher kept four sets of notes (see: Appendix A), as outlined by Spradley (1979, cited in Silverman, 2014: 85)

1. Short notes made at the time.
2. Expanded notes made as soon as possible after each field session.

¹³ A gatekeeper is "someone who is able to grant or deny access to the field" (Silverman, 2014: 453).

3. A fieldwork journal to record problems and ideas that arise during each stage of fieldwork.
4. A provisional running record of analysis and interpretation.

A benefit of using a field note journal as outlined by Spradley (1979) is that reflexivity journaling is “a type of connoisseurship by which individuals become connoisseurs of their own thinking and reflection patterns, and indeed their own understanding of their work as qualitative researchers” (Janesick, 1999: 506). The written field notes were descriptive and dated, noting who was present and the social interactions which took place. This was to provide as much detail as possible to provide a basis for further data collection.

In order to maintain reflexivity, it is important to explain the difficulties in observations that occurred throughout the data collection process. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic it became increasingly difficult to gain access to the appropriate venues for observation and therefore changes had to be made to the timing and number of observations. The first iteration of the thesis focused on ensuring observations could take place prior to and after each interview to gain as full a picture as possible of the given case, however, this became untenable due to training centres removing access to external stakeholders. Therefore, the observations took place far later in the research process (see: Figure: 3.3) and provided an overview of the England talent pathway environment but this was not always inclusive of the players whom had been interviewed, as had previously been planned. This resulted in a limited amount of data being gathered through observation, however, information surrounding the environment created and the development of athletes was significant at answering the research questions presented in Chapter One.

3.3.4. Interviews

On completion of institutional ethical approval (see: Appendix B) semi-structured interviews were used to generate an informal discussion with the footballer; what Holloway (1997) described as a conversation with purpose “to obtain the perspectives, feelings and perceptions of the participant” (p.94). It has been suggested that within sport coaching research conversations are the cornerstone to understanding feelings and perceptions of participants in the social world in which they operate (Nelson et al., 2014). Focus groups were another possible qualitative

research method that could have been used, however, Silverman (2010) suggests that they can sometimes reduce the candour of the participants due to feeling uncomfortable. Therefore, interviews were deemed to be more appropriate as it enabled the researcher to gather personal experiences, which focus groups often fail to achieve (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Each interview was performed face-to-face between the researcher and the participant. It was felt that this was important because it enabled “an in-depth examination of an individual’s attitudes, opinions, beliefs and values with respect to [the] particular phenomenon” (Purdy, 2014: 164). Face-to-face interviews were also used to combat the potential issues that communication technologies bring such as the lack of visual cues and the lower level of engagement in the interview which can impact interview responses (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

To ensure that there was a consistent framework across interviews a semi-structured interview schedule was used (see: Appendix C), with the audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to gain ‘thick description’ (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Howell, 2013). The interview guide comprised questions surrounding the following sections; (a) Experiences in football to date (b) The experience of representing your country, and (c) coaching and the environment. For the development of the interview schedule a pilot study was used to help to guide the research process (Kim, 2011).

The pilot was conducted through interviewing two youth International footballers, both of which had made International appearances within the last 6 months. The purpose of the pilot interview was to best understand how to interview adolescent participants as Silverman (2014) suggests that this can differ to interviewing adult participants due to the potential inability to vocalise their experiences (Rapley, 2004). Rapley (2004) suggests a further difficulty with interviewing teenagers is that they can have a tendency not to share opinions but to agree and display understanding in order to facilitate conversation. To enhance the interview process and interactional practices the interviewer ensured that he was able to build rapport through active listening and doing what Rapley (2004) described as showing an interest in what they were saying. The pilot interviews used the semi-structured interview schedule and lasted 40 minutes each. Alterations were made to the interview schedule on completion of the pilot interviews to reduce the number of

questions as it was felt that the overly structured approach was limiting conversation.

This mode of data collection was also shown by Drew et al. (2019) to be the primary method within youth-to-senior transition research. However, the majority of current research in this area used a singular retrospective semi-structured interview where participants were encouraged to reflect upon their experiences. This research differed as the interview data was collected with current footballers who were undergoing the transition into the international environment.

Snowball sampling was used to select participants (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), described by Patton (1990) as the act of using a gatekeeper to direct the researcher towards appropriate participants. This sampling method was used in the place of others as it helped the researcher to identify “groups, settings and individuals where...the processes being studied are most likely to occur” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 202). This form of purposeful sampling led to the development of three critical parameters for sample selection (Silverman, 2014). Firstly, the participants must currently be playing for a British football clubs youth academy. This was to ensure that the young footballers were in an environment which was governed by The Premier League. Secondly, the footballers must have represented England in a fixture at least once over the course of the last two seasons. The decision to base this on the previous two football seasons was because transition outcomes may be subject to recall bias (Patton, 2002) which may influence the individuals’ recall of their experience. Therefore, it was decided that for the study to have the greatest impact current footballers would be used to attempt to avoid recall bias that may have been affected by a favourable or non-favourable transition outcome. This ensures that the research is situated in the wider context of social explanations in relation to the construction of the research question (Mason, 1996). Simply put, using specific inclusion and exclusion criteria will help the researcher to best understand the phenomena and effectively answer the research questions (Silverman, 2014).

Figure 3.6 shows a breakdown of the inclusion criteria for the study in more detail. In order to meet the research objectives a potential participant must have answered yes to each question.

Inclusion Questions	Answer?
Does the footballer currently play for a Premier League football academy?	Yes?
	No?

Has the footballer represented their Country in a fixture during the current football season or previous season?	Yes?
	No?
Is the footballer representing a Category One or Two academy?	Yes?
	No?
Is the participant under the age of 23?	Yes?
	No?
Has the participant signed a letter of consent?	Yes?
	No?

Figure 3.6. Inclusion Criteria for Player Interviews

To provide a rich description of the participants backgrounds Figures 3.7 and 3.8 show a brief description of each participant, including their age and International experience, pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity (Patton, 1990). Prior to interview the participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (see: Appendix D) and completed informed consent (see: Appendix E).

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Years in Academy Football	Category of Youth Academy	International Appearances (excluding friendlies)
Sam	17	9	1	4
Ben	18	9	1	28
Greg	17	4	1	15
Tom	18	9	1	13
TJ	17	9	1	5
Sodiq	17	9	1	14
Harry	17	6	1	1
Frank	16	7	1	6
Tony	17	8	1	24
Callum	17	7	1	18

Figure 3.7. Participant Information – Current England Internationals

It was felt that it was also important to interview coaches and support staff, in part, because coaches and support staff currently account for less than 1% of the research population over the last 15 years (Gledhill et al., 2017). Also, it was hoped that through speaking to staff whom currently work with youth international footballers it would provide an insight into both the club and international domain, helping to create a picture of both environments which would support the development of a transition programme.

Name (Pseudonym)	Role	Category of Youth Academy	Previous Roles
Adam	Head of Coaching	1	England Youth Team Coach
Luke	Head of Coaching	1	England Youth Team Coach

Jack	Technical Director	1	Technical Director at Governing Body
Graham	Head of Coaching	1	U18 Coach
Neil	Loans Manager	1	Head of Coaching at Category 2 Academy
Stephen	Head of Coaching	2	U18 Coach
Nigel	Academy Manager	1	Academy Manager Category 3 Academy

Figure 3.8. Participant Information – Club Staff

The sample size was deemed adequate due to ‘information power’ (Malterud et al., 2015). This refers to the idea that the more highly relevant information that the participant has then the fewer number of participants are required. In the case of this study young footballers have been interviewed and observed who are among the elite in their field and will have access to knowledge that is rarely seen in the extant literature. In addition, there are a finite number of individuals working for the 20 Premier League clubs who are able to comment on the club-to-country transition, therefore, the seven interviewed was deemed adequate.

The audio data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and involved listening to the audio prior to the transcription to re-familiarise the researcher with the data (Grix, 2010) (see: Appendix F). The transcription was verbatim as the researcher did not want to remove any grammatical errors or perceived trivial pauses and overlaps (Silverman, 2014). To reduce the subjectivity of the results and enhance the studies reflexivity (Finlay & Gough, 2003) the results were member-checked by the participants to establish whether the multiple realities provided by the researcher align with the reality of the participant (Sparkes, 1989). Guba and Lincoln (1989) describe the act of member-checking as “the single most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p.239) and is particularly important in social research due to its double-hermeneutic¹⁴ nature (Larkin et al., 2006). Having said this, Angen (2000) suggests that member checking relies on the assumption that there is a fixed reality that can be confirmed by the participant. This is in opposition to the philosophical position of the interpretive paradigm which is co-constructed and therefore no objective reality can be found (Grix, 2010). Day (2012) proposes that

¹⁴ The approach can also be described as double-hermeneutic as it relies upon the researcher’s interpretations of the participants’ interpretations of the phenomenon (Giddens, 1982). This approach recognises that “social science is basically an interpretative enterprise dealing with social forms of life, which in turn, are webs of meaningful, pre-interpreted activities and relationships” (Dallmayr, 1982: 20).

the views of the participant should not be taken as direct support or refutation of the researchers' interpretations.

3.4. Data Analysis – Thematic Analysis

Qualitative research in sport and talent development does not belong to one singular academic discipline and therefore research in this area has been subject to a range of paradigmatic assumptions, which, in turn, will influence the method chosen to analyse the data. As the research takes an interpretivist approach it is assumed that the pre-existing beliefs of the researcher will affect the manner in which the data is analysed (Brown, 1977). Through this paradigm the experiences shared by the participants will be interpreted by the researcher and therefore resulting in a double-hermeneutic understanding of the phenomenon (Jones et al., 2004). Here, it is important to suggest that the interpretations were constructed into text by the researcher (Richardson, 1990), therefore, there is a need to be reflexive to avoid perceived issues with the hermeneutic analysis (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Markula & Silk, 2011).

Reflexivity refers to a critical self-reflection of the researchers' values and subjectivities and how this may affect the research process (Finlay & Gough, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). According to Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2009) there are two defining characteristics of reflexive research. Firstly, the researcher must make interpretations of the data whilst having an awareness that their own pre-understanding can be a major determinant of the interpretation. This is due to the hermeneutic nature of qualitative research and the assumption that a researcher's philosophy may underpin their insight into interpretations (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). The second characteristic of reflexive research is that of reflection (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). This implies a "turn inwards" (p.9) to focus on understanding the "interpretation of interpretation". This thesis takes the reflexive philosophical assumption of alethic hermeneutics, observing that there is a relationship between pre-understanding and understanding, and is "preoccupied with the uncovering of something hidden" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009: 58). It is important here to consider the paradoxical nature of hermeneutics in that "the things themselves always present themselves in a manner which is at the same time self-concealing" (Moran, 2000: 229).

As hermeneutics are grounded in human experience (Sandelowski, 2004) it is essential to understand the rigorous process of data analysis used to present meaningful results (Attride-Stirling, 2001). It is not desirable to view the analysis of data as something that simply occurs after collection but that researchers will be organising their thoughts throughout the data collection process (Markula & Silk, 2011; Nelson, Groom & Potrac, 2014). A qualitative researcher will not distance themselves from the process of interpreting the data (Wolcott, 2001) and is an important instrument in the analysis of data (Taylor, 2014).

Thematic analysis is a method that can be used across a range of epistemologies (Nowell et al., 2017) and is a method for identifying, analysing and organising themes from a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through taking an interpretivist approach a thematic analysis was chosen to organise and describe the data gathered through identifying, analysing and reporting patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach differs from other analytical methods as does not seek to quantify themes or build hierarchical structures but uses the writing up of results as a key analytical tool (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This approach helps to garner results that “are generally accessible to educated general public” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 95), which meets the aims of this thesis to influence both policy and practice within talent development structures.

Although thematic analysis is commonly used within qualitative research in sport there is still a lack of literature focused upon ensuring the thematic analysis is trustworthy and rigorous (Nowell et al., 2017). The approach to data analysis is often criticised for being too flexible which can lead to incoherence between the themes generated from the data (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Moreover, although the researcher is able to identify themes, they cannot make claims about other aspects of the interview, such as language use or the performative nature of the conversation (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Taking into consideration these potential weaknesses of the approach it was deemed that there must be a clear structure to ensure rigor in the analytical process.

This saw the research adhere to the following six stage process, suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Immersion: Read and re-read the transcribed interview data. This occurred until it was felt that that the author had become familiar with the breadth and depth of the content.

2. Generating initial codes: Working through each transcript, any key points/aspects/issues were pinpointed – these were then colour-coded using highlighter pens, and each highlighted passage was allocated a few words of text which very briefly captured the key points of the highlighted passage.
3. Searching for and identifying themes: Once all data had been coded, the author then progressed towards the identification of themes. Here, the various codes were sorted into categories, providing consideration towards how various codes could be combined to form overarching and sub-themes. In doing so, significant attention was paid towards the relationship between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes (e.g., main overarching themes and sub-themes within them). This stage was completed once there was a collection of initial candidate themes and sub-themes.
4. Reviewing themes: The author then ensured that each theme consisted of coherent data that came together meaningfully and was significant and unique in its own right (compared to other themes). Once all the codes and themes had been through this review process a thematic map was developed, which provided a useful visualization of the themes and their corresponding sub-themes.
5. Defining and naming themes: Once the author was satisfied with the thematic map, themes were then defined and refined further. This saw a detailed analysis for each theme written, identifying and making note of the story each theme told. By the end of this stage there was a concise account of the content and significance of each overarching and sub-theme.
6. Upon completion of this, the author was then in a position to start writing up the findings (see: 3.5).

As can be seen in the five-stage process outlined above, using a thematic analysis allows the researcher to “work back and forth” (Silverman, 2004: 357) between theory and data, providing a transparent account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once data has been analysed it also allows the researcher to examine perspectives between participants and summarise large qualitative data sets, often generated from interview (King, 2004). A thematic analysis is appropriate for research using an interpretivist research paradigm as it enables the researcher to highlight similarities and differences across the dataset (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and meets the objectives of this thesis as is “useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 95).

3.5. Writing up of Findings

It is important to consider that writing up research findings is a form of analysis within itself (Richardson, 1990). This is because “writing is not simply a true representation of an objective reality, out there, waiting to be seen. Instead, through literary and rhetorical structures, writing creates a particular view of reality” (Richardson, 1990: 9). Based on this, researchers must select their form of representation in an informed manner (Sparkes & Smith, 2013), taking into account the “theoretical points wished to be made, what truths can be told, the intended audience, and what, if anything, can the genre of choice say that is of value” (Smith, 2010: 103).

The findings of this thesis were written up whilst considering the dominant approach within coaching research of providing a realist tale. This approach assumes that the researcher should become a third-person voice in the participants story and that “once the researcher has finished the job of collecting the data, he or she simply vanishes” (Sparkes, 1995: 162). However, similar to the thoughts of Purdy (2009) the findings presented in this thesis can be thought of as “a modified realist tale” (p. 327). This is because the authors interpretation of the findings is ever-present and therefore cannot be removed from the analysis or writing up of findings, providing the reader with not only the ‘story’ of the participants but the authors interpretation of their story. As previously mentioned results were member-checked to attempt to diminish researcher bias and to ensure an accurate representation was shown, this also helped to “construct authority and objectivity through the use of a passive voice [in an attempt to] distance the disembodied author from the data” (Sparkes, 2002: 44).

The results have been written to take into consideration crystallisation as a methodology (Ellingson, 2009). This refers to the process of viewing the data through different analytical lenses dependent on the audience, for example, publishing in a journal article will have different audience requirements than the presentation of data in a PhD thesis (Groom et al., 2014). Crystallisation then, “carves out a space for researchers to write differently for different audiences, think critically about the limits of each genre of writing, and engage in discussions about how we can expand our forms of representation further” (Groom et al., 2014: 88). This helps the researcher to think about how to best present their data for varied audiences rather than presenting data in the same format for all (Smith, 2010). The

hope is that the findings of this thesis will be published across varying disciplines, using different analytical lenses so that a more complex and multi-layered understanding can be shared with wider audiences (Ellingson, 2009).

The interpretivist paradigm has been criticised for an inability to compare and analyse data due to idiosyncratic personal experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). In addition, it has been suggested that generalisability, in the traditional sense, can limit qualitative research by losing the more human element of the research (Donmoyer, 1990). Having said this, Williams (2000) argued that interpretivism is an important lens in which to observe social phenomena due to *moderatum* generalisations. This refers to results that can be generalised within a population due to the “social consistency of the social world, a consistency which makes social life possible” (Potrac et al., 2014: 33). Therefore, the results and discussion in Chapters Four to Six will be relevant for professional football clubs across the English football league system and those involved in international football.

3.6. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has identified the philosophical allegiances and methods of the research which have been acknowledged as the most appropriate to meet the aims and objectives of the study. To begin, the chapter outlined the researchers’ paradigmatic position which led to the description of the use of a constructivist ontology, interpretivist epistemology and a qualitative methodology. The chapter continued by explaining the use of the case study research design and explained the use of a ‘methods triangulation’ design, using document analysis, observations and interviews to answer the questions set out in Chapter One. The use of the case study approach was justified by illustrating the subject areas lack of prior research, providing the researcher to “develop as full an understanding of [that] case as possible” (Punch, 1998: 150). The chapter then ended by explaining the analysis that was used in the form of a thematic analysis. The next chapter will begin to answer the questions outlined in Chapter One through discussing the key themes and areas of interest in the data collected to contribute to literature that is committed to exploring real world accounts of young footballers undergoing the transition process.

CHAPTER IV: The transition into youth International football

As Appendix G demonstrates, three overarching themes inductively emerged from the data. Theme one focuses on the process of representing the England men's national team, theme two represents the perceived developmental benefits of international youth sport from both the player and coach perspective. Theme three then offers an insight into the relationship between professional football clubs and The FA, specifically regarding the support provided to players during transition and clubs' perceptions of the implications for developing youth internationals. Each chapter then concludes by offering practical implications for transition strategies within professional football.

This chapter seeks to explore the dominant themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. The results and discussion are presented together with the data represented using direct quotations, to ensure transparency of the research (Morrow, 2005) and provide 'thick description' that is "a complete account...of the phenomena under investigation as well as the rich details of the data collection and analysis processes and interpretation of the findings" (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015: 363). The data gathered through document analysis, interviews with players, academy management staff and through observations has been presented as part of a corpus analysis.

The first overarching theme seeks to explain 'the transition into youth international football', highlighting the players' experiences during this time. The following chapter will explain the following sub-themes, 'the process of selection to the England men's youth national teams' and the 'social hierarchy in the international dressing room'. These sub-themes seek to answer research question one of the thesis' objectives, as set out in Chapter 1, to better understand the experiences of international footballers during the transition from youth-team to international youth representation?

4.1. The Process of Selection to the England Men's Youth National Team

The first sub-theme to emerge from the analysis was 'the process of selection into the England men's youth national teams'. The players showed a detailed understanding of the selection process when being called up to a youth international squad. This sub-theme involved two key points. The first centred on what we call

the 'call up process' from club football into international football. The second explained the 'social hierarchy in the international dressing room' that can occur upon entering the international environment. Figure 4.1 explains the process that young footballers move through on being selected for the national team and the two primary stakeholders that are involved in the process.

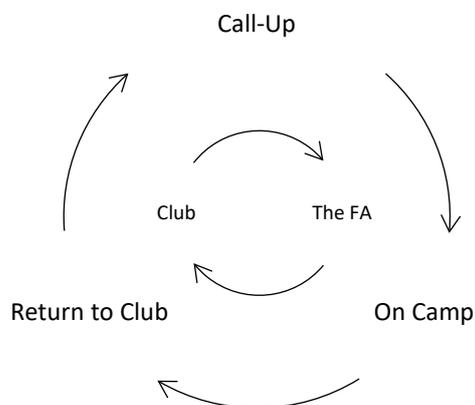


Figure 4.1. – The cyclical nature of transition into, and out of, youth international sport

4.1.1. *The call-up process*

The first point to emerge from this sub-theme was the explanation, from both players and coaching staff, of the process of selection during England representation, what is referred to here as the 'call-up process'. The decisions of selection, identification and de-selection are a frequent occurrence in professional youth football academies (Ford et al., 2020) and it was explained that this is similar in international football. The players discussed how the squad sizes at U15 will be up to approximately 80 players before being broken down to a squad list of approximately 30 players who will be selected for the final U18s squad. When discussing the process of how they received the news that they had been selected, players suggested that they will either receive direct communication from The FA, a family member will be contacted, or a club coach will be told of the 'call up' and contact the player:

I was on standby and we'd just had a game, it was a Saturday. I had just left the building and I get a call from [academy manager] and he said I've just been selected to go with England and my initial reaction was like "wow", this is my first time, "wow" and then he was like, you just need to come and get your passport, your boots and stuff, so I've got my stuff, went home and I was ready. (Interview with Tom, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

First game I played was a double header against Holland, and I got called up, I think it was around December time. I remember my mum didn't even tell me until about two days before, she knew I'd go crazy, so she kept it from me. The first camp that year I just wanted to play as many games as I could for England, so she knew how much it meant to me. (Interview with TJ, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

When you were, say, 16s-18s you get an email but when I was u19s I think I got a phone call to say I was going, from the coach. And then it works the other way, if you aren't going then the coach rings you and says why. I think they only ring players that go quite regularly, say if you've been once but not coming the next time then they probably won't ring you. (Interview with Ben, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

Although each of the players were excited about the prospect of the call up, they explained that they felt they were still reliant on the club allowing them to attend the camp and therefore the players' clubs appeared to hold the power in whether the player could attend. This is the case, even though FIFA's 'Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players' explains that "clubs are obliged to release their registered players to the representative teams of the country for which the player is eligible to play on the basis of his nationality if they are called up by the association concerned" (FIFA, 2018: 32). When asked if he had been denied the opportunity to attend a camp, one player suggested: 'Yeah one camp because of my injury, to be fair I was back, but they didn't want me to get injured again' (Jeremy, player), highlighting that the young footballer is often at the will of their club when selected for an international squad. When asked about being called up to their first camp, Harry suggested that the club can prioritise their own fixtures ahead of an international fixture: 'I wasn't sure if I was going at first cos there was a tour [with the club], but they told me last minute that I was allowed to go' (Harry, player). It was explained that a common justification for a club not allowing a player to attend a camp was that the club were worried that the player would get injured and therefore miss important club fixtures. This highlights the relative importance of youth players to their academy and the youth academies desire to have their best players available as often as possible:

The last two times I've come back [from England] with an injury. [At the club] my GPS showed similar readings of my load...and because I've been playing under 23s as well as mid-week U19 Champions League games, and I'd only been back 6 to 8 weeks since my injury and I'd done a lot, they tried to lower how much I do because when you go away it's like three games in eight days. If I went over there and played three games, as well as the last week

here I played two games, that will be five games in two weeks which is probably too much and it would irritate my back again. So, this stopped me going, but I could play for the club in the game on Friday. (Interview with Greg, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

First [Head of Goalkeeping] told me and then they emailed my dad I think, but obviously I found out from the club first, but then dad called me and told me. I wasn't sure if I was going at first cos there was a tour, but they told me last minute that I was allowed to go. (Interview with Harry, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 3rd February 2020)

The comments regarding clubs releasing players to represent their country shows that often clubs will prioritise their own games programme over opportunities for players to represent their country. These tensions do not function as singular paradoxes but have impacts across both the organisation and wider stakeholders (Junghagen, 2017). For example, if clubs do not allow players to represent their country, clubs are potentially limiting the developmental opportunities that are afforded to their players. This is not to say that the tension should be seen as a dilemma (Mason & Mitroff, 1981) but there may need to be an open dialogue between professional football clubs and The FA surrounding player availability to ensure players are provided with relevant developmental opportunities. Central here is that it is a stakeholder's responsibility to make decisions which are consistent with other stakeholders (Senaux, 2008; Minoja, 2012; Pankhurst, Collins & MacNamara, 2012), however, it is clear that in youth football this is not the case, where stakeholders tend to make decisions that are dictated by self-interest. From a holistic perspective youth development is inhibited when there is "a limited awareness or ambiguity concerning organisational direction" (Nesti et al., 2012: 24), therefore, it would be advantageous for these competing primary stakeholders to align their priorities in order to avoid stakeholder contestation which would inhibit the footballers development.

As the international transition is quasi-normative (Hendry & Kloep, 2002), and able to plan for in advance, practitioners should be aware that the moment the player is told of their selection in the squad is the point at which the transition into the new environment begins. Therefore, the initial conversation to call a player up can be explained as the first meta-transition within the movement from club football to international representation, reflecting the phase structure of the transition process (Schinke et al., 2015). At this point there will be significant others whom will also

have an influence over the players developmental experiences. Within transition research a number of individuals have been shown to have a stake in the players development and therefore coaches, family and other stakeholders such as players agents should have an awareness of the point at which the transition begins so they can best offer appropriate support. Players explained that individuals such as agents would be involved at this point: 'my agent did come he was staying in the same hotel' (Tom, player) and that parents had a positive reaction to the call-up: 'they were really excited and really happy for me, we're quite a religious family, so they were just praising God, and I thank God for the call-up and hopefully many more to come' (Harry, player).

In answering research question one it would appear that the initial experience of being selected for the youth international squads, the preparation phase (Stambulova et al., 2017), is a positive one characterised by both player and parent excitement:

I was just buzzing; I only came on for 10 minutes but then I started the next game against Portugal two days later. I was getting nervous in the tunnel; you could hear the national anthem and then you have to come out and when you come on it goes really quick. (Interview with Ben, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

The excitement at entering this transition for the first time may have positive development outcomes as those individuals who do not perceive the transition as a negative event (Čačija & Stambulova, 2007) tend to have more positive transition outcomes. Players selected into this environment will have been identified as having the technical proficiency to be successful, but this cannot necessarily be used to assure positive initial performance: 'I was trying to do too much to impress them [the family] really, I did play well but not like normal' (Sam, player). Performance factors such as readiness to compete could be a debilitating factor upon the initial point of representation and if not provided with opportunities to compete the individual can begin to view the transition as negative (Bruner et al., 2008). To avoid this, it is important that national associations provide players with sufficient playing time, regardless of initial performance quality, to offer the opportunity for the player to perform to the level that earned them the call-up.

This approach to viewing the transition as an opportunity for performance enhancement is a novel approach in the extant literature in the UK. Through understanding research into talent development, it is clear that effective talent

development environments focus on long term player development rather than short-term success (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017) and therefore national governing bodies would benefit from selecting young players to several international training camps as opposed to making a decision on their performance after one singular 'camp'.

When discussing how the players at their clubs are identified for national team squads club staff explained that there can be issues for England scouts and coaches to get access to watch players at certain clubs. This may be due to issues of club privacy:

I'll get contacted by a number of different people at The FA to say "Do you know if player X is playing in the game or are a part of the squad?, Do you know what position he is playing?" and depending on the sensitivity of the information I will go to the coach [and ask]. So previously we had a player with the under 23s last season but the coach said to me he didn't want people to know who is playing yet and he wasn't sure if he was going to play, so I will then feed that back and say "Listen we can't confirm whether he's playing" and try to be as open as possible. (Interview with Adam, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 17th June 2020)

Or due to clubs not providing England scouts with the best possible opportunity to observe the player:

There are also some clubs who literally you will turn up for a game and they will treat you like a scout, they'll put a bib on you, they don't let you go and have a coffee beforehand, they put you in a pen by the side of the pitch and they treat you like a scout. That is frustrating because actually what we are trying to say is that we wanna be a partner with you, we wanna be as responsible as you are for the development of your players. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

Opportunities for national staff to observe players will have a direct correlation with the players who will be identified and therefore selected into the squad. Hence, the opportunity for the players to transition into this environment is dictated by the process of talent identification and selection. Therefore, the call-up process will only occur through this complex process involving a number of individuals from within each organisation.

4.1.2. Perceptions of talent identification and selection

Through understanding how players are provided their call-up to the squad it is now beneficial to explain the talent identification and selection process of players. Club staff have explained their perceptions of these processes and have mentioned several ways in which they feel this can be improved. This is the first time this has been represented in academia. Stephen, a head of coaching at a category one club, explained that the England staff may select or de-select a player dependent upon the playing style of the club:

He would go to England [and] they would ask him to do things and then you come back to the club and we are contradicting that message. Tactically he struggled to be able to understand that because of the way he was as a player. You might get players who can differentiate between being in an international environment and a coach asks him to do something in the club environment, but this lad played completely differently for us. You've got to feel for the boy, he then started to fall out of favour in the starting line-up in the international squad and [our academy manager] spoke to the coach at the time and say "Well he's not asked to do that when he's here" and that's because it's two different styles of play. England dominate a lot of the ball against certain teams, whereas the way that we would play is different. We'd want him to win the ball in a certain position but England would want him to stay wide, so it's quite different...I think that's an example of how they probably need to put more time into [the selection process] and I feel that the England coaches for the youth set ups have a lot of time to be able to invest in contact outside of the camps but predominantly they were very poor at that. (Interview with Stephen, Category Two Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 16th July 2020)

The process of identifying talent is often neglected within academia which focuses on the selection of talent rather than the process of identifying talent. Selection within football has traditionally been subjective, with the thoughts and opinions of significant figures used to decide upon the fate of the developing footballer. Through this approach to selecting talent football has often been criticised as archaic or not understanding the need for applying data to the process (see: Dugdale et al., 2021; Sieghartsleitner et al., 2019). The coaches interviewed in this study explained both the process of identifying their talented footballers and the selection of those players:

I remember a young lad at [Category 1 club], [players name] who wasn't on their radar, he got his call-up at under 19s when he'd play

a fair few games in the Championship and it's like, he's always been here! So, I think sometimes it's that piece where England may turn their noses up at a player but suddenly when they get involved in the first team they think "Oh he's good enough, let's get him in", because he's in the first team. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

This approach to international team selection has been explained by club staff, including heads of coaching, u18 coaches and academy managers, that they feel that identification and selection is subject to unconscious biases which guide decision making:

Sometimes England scouts and England coaches are lazy, they assume that the best talent is located in and around bigger clubs and that is sometimes the case. But others don't get selected because of the fact that he wasn't at a sexy club and they think "If I call up a player from a Cat. three club I'm going to get ridiculed because I've turned down the holding midfield player at Chelsea, Arsenal or Man City to have a Cat. three, league two player in there". It was definitely down to ego. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

I think from what I've experienced I'm not always convinced, especially with the younger age groups for England, and a few others as well, that they've always got the best players in the country. I think sometimes it is around relationships and biases with certain coaching staff at The FA. (Interview with Nigel, Category One Premier League Academy Manager, 20th July 2020)

In environments where training intensity and competition are high selection can often be based on individuals' physical profile, with players who are deemed to be quicker and stronger more likely to be selected (Dodd & Newans, 2018). As the international environment is the peak of youth football performance there is a risk that players could be selected based upon similar characteristics. Therefore, the identification and selection of international players may require a focus on more holistic attributes. Here it is important to explain that although club staff perceived players are often selected based on simple metrics such as first team appearances, NGBs are now using more innovative means to identify the next England internationals. A former member of the senior leadership team at The FA explained how talent identification has been reconceptualised by the FA to become 'Player Insights':

There is a much more multi-disciplinary team feel, there is much more feedback. We spend more time together sitting discussing in detail about squads and squad depth or individual players to enable us to make better informed decisions and then those decisions are not purely just based on football, it's really a 4-corner approach now

and the coach obviously is a lead figure in that process. I've sat in player audit meetings with up to 14 professionals, all with strong and different opinions on players from many different disciplines and surely that information and the gathering of that data is only going to help us make better informed decisions about the players that will stay in the pathway long-term. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

Here, Jack explains the paradigmatic shift to a more data-focused approach to talent identification. This is in line with the current approaches of leading sports in other nations, such as the National Basketball Association or National Football League draft picks. Jack also made it clear that there was an attempt to clarify differences between current performance and future potential:

Another thing that is now in place which I thought was significant is that often we were viewing or making a decision based on performance and not potential. So, now we have a grading system which enables us to measure and grade players on both so just that alone means that we are starting to talk about not just winning today but preparing for the future and I think the player insights team,...has done a phenomenal job of bringing all that together and I think also educating all of us as coaches and moving us away from traditional methods of coaches, is leaning to much more of a multidisciplinary view and allowing the coach to have access to so much more information to make more informed decisions. So, it is better, still not perfect but the FA are definitely on the right lines over the last couple of years in regard to tracking and monitoring and supporting and making better informed decisions on players. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

In their seminal paper into talent identification and selection in youth football Williams and Reilly (2000) called for those in player recruitment (e.g. coaches, scouts, academy managers) to work together to better identify the players whom will enter the formalised training environment. Two decades on, this thesis is the first to suggest that it is clear that international players are identified using a more data-driven, multi-disciplinary approach. As club staff perceive there to be other metrics that national associations use to select talent then perhaps this has not been communicated with professional clubs. In addition, the choice to select the player into the squad is still subject to external factors such as squad size, proximity to a tournament or player positions. This was explained by Luke:

I think our left back at [the club] is better than our number 10 at left back, but he's not in the England setup because our 10 is playing there. Because in their opinion he is a better left back than at number 10, therein lies potential challenges. Now, if England were saying we've got a challenge at left back and they asked all the

clubs who the best left back in your opinion as Head of Coaching, Academy Manager, under 18 coaches, under 16s coach, do you think he'd be able to make that step up and we would tell you. We're not going to put forward a player we know that's going to crash and burn, it's not in our interest to do so. So that trust has to fly both ways, I think at the minute maybe they've started to think that they're right and I always find that that's quite dangerous. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

Club staff explained how they wished to be consulted regarding the players that were called up, beyond that of simply asking about the player attitude:

The England coaches potentially will only be working 50 days on the grass a year and yes they will be very experienced coaches because they're in those jobs, however, we work with the boys 46-47 weeks of the year so we know the players, we know what makes them work, we know what their strengths and weaknesses are. So, there should be more of an element around trust and the England coaches maybe should look at what the clubs are doing and trust it a tiny bit more. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

In the last 20 years there have been 10 studies focused on measuring multiple variables to predict talent in youth football, tracking players from academy to senior level (Williams et al., 2020). These studies suggested that players who became successful professionals as adults were more skilled, taller, heavier, faster, leaner, more motivated and practiced more as adolescents (see: Carling et al., 2012; Deprez et al., 2012; Leyhr et al., 2018; Roescher et al., 2010). As these potential predictors for success focus on specific developmental areas then the question could be raised why The FA would want to invest their time in a player who may not make it to senior football, particularly if they do not have these characteristics as an adolescent, as they may not receive a return on investment. The answer may be three-fold. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter Two a core priority for the organisation is to have winning England teams, including youth teams, secondly there is an argument that the environment helps to develop the player and engages them in the setting of international football. Finally, it is difficult to predict future performance and therefore variation in player selection should be encouraged – even if this differs from the club perspective.

Meta-
Transitions
during the
Transition from
Club-to-Country

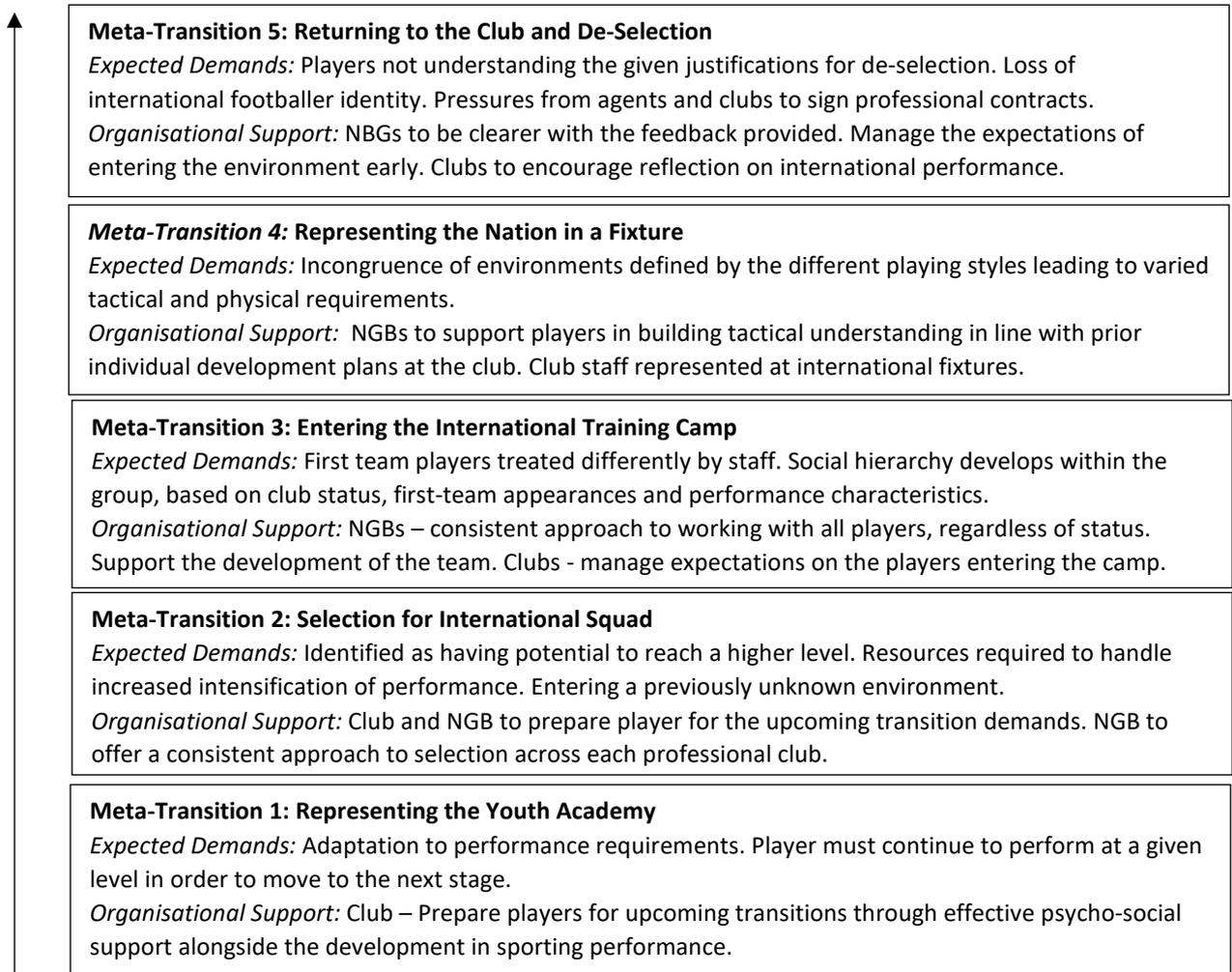


Figure 4.2. – Meta-Transitions 1 and 2, outlining the expected demands and the organisational support that both club and national governing bodies should offer developing footballers during youth international representation

Figure 4.2 has been adapted from the model developed by Schinke et al. (2014) in their study of the psychological support provided to the Canadian boxing team at different points of the Olympic cycle. In addition, the inclusion of the expected demands of each meta-transition and the support required falls in line with previous research into career transitions, in an attempt to make clear the holistic nature of the transition (Pehrson, Stambulova & Olsson, 2017). Figure 4.2 differs from previous models as rather than focusing solely on the psychological characteristics and support required during each meta-transition this proposed model looks to explain the coach and organisational support that both professional clubs and national governing bodies should offer at this time. Through understanding the athlete’s experiences and offering practical applications this provides an opportunity to “mend the gap between theory and applied work” (Stambulova, Ryba & Henriksen, 2020: 7). This approach to career transition research takes a cultural

praxis and therefore takes into account the specific socio-cultural characteristics of the environment and is also situated in an inter-disciplinary environment to best explain athletes multi-faceted lived experiences (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). Through taking this approach the model can be used in “facilitating the adaptation of evidence-based intervention strategies to the participants cultural characteristics and relevant contexts” (Ryba et al., 2013: 138). The meta-transitions can be explained as follows:

Meta-Transition 1: Representing the Youth Academy – this is the entry point for players whom may be selected for international representation. As the players and staff have suggested, there is a competitive selection process in order to join a youth academy, however, in itself this may not lead to a player reaching the next stage within their career as there are also other factors which will dictate whether they will be successful. For example, within a club squad there may be positional constraints where certain players may not feature in competitive fixtures as others (e.g. Goalkeeper) and therefore these players may be less likely to receive international recognition due to limited exposure.

Meta-Transition 2: Selection for International Squad – during this meta-transition both club and national governing body should begin to prepare the young player for the upcoming transition. This would be in line with prior research into career transitions that suggest the importance of providing the young person with the necessary resources to manage future transition demands (Stambulova, 2003; Drew et al., 2019). Demands within this meta-transition have been shown to be the ability to cope with a higher level of performance and a greater level of intensification of that performance. At this point the player is now subject to dual-policy actors where both primary stakeholders will have opinions on, and begin to liaise about, their sporting performance.

4.2. Social Hierarchy in the International Dressing Room

The second sub-theme to emerge was the social hierarchy that occurs within the international youth football environment. This theme emerged from both player and club staff interviews as well as through observations of the international environment. Three key points were presented within the sub-theme; 1) the process of ‘working people out’ quickly upon entering the international environment for the

first time, 2) the social hierarchy of being involved with ‘first-team footballers’ in an age group squad, and 3) ‘the category of academy’ that the footballers represent.

4.2.1. Working people out

Upon entering the senior environment, it is apparent that there is a hierarchy in place where first year professionals were seen by others as being at the bottom of the social hierarchy within the group (Mitchell et al., 2020). Through the interviews with both players and staff this was also seen to occur within the youth international environment where players were aware of their standing within the group. The first key point was the players admission that on entering the international environment for the first time they would quickly attempt to ‘work people out’ in terms of sporting performance:

We work on stuff in training and we feel it out so we might say “okay he’s right-footed, he likes to ping the ball” so you get a feel for it and work each other out, football is like that, if you’re good you should be able to link with people whenever. (Interview with Tom, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st June 2019)

I think it’s difficult but because I’ve been on quite a few camps I know the boys quite well now. First time I went it was hard, I didn’t know anyone, and it was only [a teammate] from here. He was the only one I knew, and he is a midfielder so he’s not a player who I work with so it’s hard to adapt. They might have different playing styles, the other centre half, and you have to learn quickly. (Interview with Ben, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st June 2019)

The quotes from the players show that when initially asked about their experience of meeting their new teammates players would begin by explaining technical or tactical performance rather than social factors. Based on research into the youth-to-senior transition in sport, it has been shown that there would be a period of adaptation when entering a new environment where there is a greater responsibility on personal performance and to build unity in the team (Pehrson, Stambulova & Olsson, 2017). Within the club-to-country transition there are similarities here as the research has found that youth international footballers, who are selected based upon their sporting performance, will identify their position in the group based upon performance characteristics. However, the talent development environment often puts the athlete at risk of embodying the performance narrative, “reinforcing a sole focus on, and an unwavering dedication towards, being an athlete” (Rongen et al.,

2020: 1388, see also: Christensen & Sørensen, 2009) leading to a failure to balance academic, sporting and social roles (Bruner, Monroe-Chandler & Spink, 2008) and a possible failure to reach the highest possible level of performance (Stambulova, 2004).

As well as identifying their new teammates playing characteristics and level of performance players also suggested that they would observe social characteristics such as how the players were dressed and how they interact with others:

That's me as a person to be fair because I like to work people out before I have my first impressions. I think first impressions are key in everything, not just football, but outside the pitch as well. Off the pitch is where you build relationships. On the pitch if your relationships are good off the pitch then they'll be better on the pitch. If you work them out early enough to justify whether they're a person you can bond with on the pitch, then it's even better. (Interview with TJ, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st June 2019)

when you first get called up you're in the hotel and you see the boys and everyone is in their little groups, you see which group is making the most noise, you'll see who is chilling, what people are wearing and what shoes they wear and who is on their phones, what wash bags they've got. Does he have a nice watch? You just see everything. (Interview with Tom, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st June 2019)

This admission shows the complex social environment within adolescent sport, this is in line with prior research that suggests that these socially constructed cultural norms can detract from the footballing performance (Parker, 2001; Calvin, 2017). Players whom perceive these aspects as important are at risk of misconstruing wealth or personal brand as achievement which could impact on the identity of that player (Parker, 2001).

This is important because not only is sport team identification positively associated with positive youth development (Bruner et al., 2017) but being part of the international team will influence their social identity. Social identity is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his/her knowledge of his/her membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to it" (Tajfal, 1981: 255). This social dynamic may also alter the way in which their club teammates view the identity of the player:

They did make comments at the start in a joking way like giving it the "Big time" comment or "Look at him now", but I think everyone says it as a joke because they all know you. Now when you come

back they just say “How was it?” and that, when you first go away, especially under 15s that’s the first year anyone goes on international so if you get picked yourself everyone is thinking “Yeah, England?”, so they always get a comment. (Interview with Greg, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

The opportunity is there for everyone so I don’t think it’s fair that anyone can justify you have that title of “he plays for England”, sometimes they say things to me that highlight it like “ah you play for England you should be doing this, you should be doing that, why you making that mistake?...” but I try not to let it get to me. (Interview with TJ, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

Developing footballers are likely to be wary of each other as they are vying for similar positions and consistently searching for where they sit in the social hierarchy. Through selection for youth international representation this may change the players status in their group at the club. Although the players here suggested it was not an issue there are issues here regarding potentially unrealistic expectations of successful performance: ‘you play for England, you should be doing this’ (Greg, player). These expectations show the perceptions placed upon youth internationals to reach a higher level of performance than their peers and that simply through selection into a representative squad there are pre-conceived ideas that players should not make errors in their sporting performance. Issues in player development often occur when a player feels that they cannot make mistakes and therefore it is important for club coaches to effectively manage expectations of players peers – an area of coach support that is not represented in the wider literature.

Players will experience a variety of individuals throughout their career as they travel through different environments, including within grassroots sport, youth academy, international sport and senior sport (Henriksen, Storm & Larsen, 2018). Upon entering the international environment players will not only be exposed to a group of new teammates but also coaches and support staff where the players will have to build new relationships and shape the opinions of these staff. As explained by TJ, ‘I think different people have different opinions and especially when you go to England they have different opinions, so you need to try and show what you got’ (TJ, player). There are similarities here with the youth-to-senior transition where athletes enter an environment that differs from one in which they may have been a part of for a number of years. Players explained the difference in working with international staff whom may have different working practices, organisational culture and perceptions of their performance:

You don't really know what they think of you, or what sort of sessions they are going to do so you need to work it out. If I went out and saw [certain club coaches] I would know that the session is probably going to be a defending session, a lot of heading and have different activities whereas if I saw four different coaches at England I don't know what I'll be doing, I don't even know if the coaches know me or what they're gonna do because they haven't worked as in depth with each other as other coaches at the club. (Interview with Greg, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

Due to this change in teammates and staff there may be specific socio-cultural barriers in place that may make it difficult for the player to transition (Oghene et al., 2017). In particular, when transitioning from junior-to-senior sport athletes experience a more successful transition when organisational culture and values align within each of the environments (Drew et al., 2019). Within youth international sport this would be harder to achieve due to the transition operating between two separate organisations with differing priorities. However, research suggests that organisations who are candid about their working practices and values are more likely to have positive youth development outcomes (Bruner et al., 2017). In support of this adaptation where phase where players are 'working out' teammates and coaches national associations would benefit from putting measure in place to integrate the group as early as possible (e.g. individual player meetings, buddy systems for new players). Players suggested that this was an area that national coaches attempted to focus on through team building activities but that more could be done to help people settle:

You do little bonding things at the start just to get to know each other, it might be stand up and say what team you play for and you do activities and you do like...you have to say things like if you're lying or not, it's just fun and enjoyable but at the same time you don't really think that you're getting anything out of it but actually if you were to do it you'll be laughing, having fun and like the next day they'd ask questions about what was said. You're probably able to give an answer because you're getting to know them, you don't really realise but you're getting to know the person through these techniques. (Interview with Greg, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

We do a lot of activities together like, we'll sit in the classroom or mix up the groups, get to know each other's names by shaking hands and then we have to present who the person you shook hands with, what their name is, club and then sometimes in free times just get to know everyone just to build a bond and stuff like that. So, off the pitch it's fine, just maybe when you get on the pitch

you still don't know each other very well. (Interview with Sodiq, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 3rd February 2020)

To avoid any form of tokenistic group bonding staff could look to identify ways in which they can help the group to 'work each other out' quicker when on the pitch as well as off of it. This could be through using tools such as video analysis of players' club performances in small groups to improve understanding of individual playing styles, for example. Through building an environment where players are understood by their peers and feel more comfortable to express themselves on international duty this may reduce the pressure that the environment will inevitably bring. Players explained that the environment is similar to that of a club where there is a pressure to compete, but that they are more concerned about perceptions by those within the international group than by perceptions of first-team players at their club:

I was more nervous at England than with the first team because at England you're with the best players from around the country and if you don't play well you don't want people to think "why is he here, he's bad" and some of them have been there before and that was my first time and you don't want anyone thinking "why is he here". I was more nervous about what people think of me but at [the club] I wasn't really nervous. I was just more excited. I watch football, I watch the games obviously and I'm always trying to convince myself that I can be better than them or I can take them on and beat them and I just wanted to match myself up against them and see what I'm capable of. (Interview with Tom, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

This shows the competitive nature of youth international sport where players who may previously be deemed as excelling within their age group at their club are now in a novel situation where they may not be the highest performing player in the group. The drawbacks to consistently assessing performance against peers has been well-documented, leading to developmental issues such as identity crisis (Brewer, Van Raalte & Petitpas, 2000) and drop-out (Surujval & Van Zyl, 2014). Although, there may also be positive development implications for players when assessing themselves against their peers in an international setting:

They can have the bravado that "yeah I'm gonna get a chance, I'm good enough" but when they play international football at 18 onwards they get a better perspective because they realise just what their own peers are like and how they fit in and that. If they see where they think they are at then they are able to judge themselves against their peers. (Interview with Neil, Category One Premier League Academy Loans Manager, 14th July 2020)

I think you need to be good socially to be able to get involved and there is a big emphasis on camp in terms of the social dynamics

and the feedback that we get is that it's important for the player to go and get involved socially and be part of that group. Again, looking back at those values, I think that if it's all managed well then they can certainly increase their self-awareness because what they might take for granted at our place (the club) then being around different people and getting reactions and responses from different people can be really beneficial. If they have a really positive experience and come back then that can really enhance their performances when they return. (Interview with Graham, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 15th July 2020)

Positive relationships with peers has long been shown to be an important factor in a young athlete's development (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999; Reverberi et al., 2020). Through the admission that social skills are important for those players wishing to become youth international players a programme to support this transition should incorporate a form of support for players regarding their social skills and the importance of integration into the group. This would also support players in the youth-to-senior transition as common barriers are a lack of social support and feeling isolated from social support (Mills et al., 2012). Youth international football has an important role in exposing players to individuals and groups outside of the echo chamber of their youth academy and therefore, the psycho-social impact of this cannot be understated.

4.2.2. First-team footballers

Next, both footballers and coaching staff highlighted the apparent social hierarchy that develops in international football due to the presence of current first team footballers in the age group squads. As youth international footballers progress through the age group squads the boundaries between youth team footballer and senior football can become blurred. This can be seen by the number of current first-team footballers representing the England age group squads from U18-U21; therefore, the make-up of the age group squad may consist of players who are yet to represent their club at senior level and others who may be first-team regulars. Ben explains that this can lead those players who are not currently members of a senior squad to feel that certain players will have different expectations placed upon them by the coaching staff:

I think there's quite a few...even in my England age, there's quite a few egos, which isn't always good, so they try and manage it in a way where, like players playing first teams are treated different.

(Interview with Ben, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

Sodiq supported this statement by explaining that the first-team players may not socially interact with others in the squad:

There is, there is I'm not gonna lie you can tell the good players will be with the good players and just hang out. They won't really socialise with everyone maybe on the pitch, but outside they're not really [interested], they don't really socialise with others, but you can tell when everyone is getting along talking you can tell they have their own group. On the pitch you can tell the way they play with each other they have a little bond as well. (Interview with Sodiq, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 3rd February 2020)

This admission that players who represent their respective first-team squad at club level are treated differently shows the complex hierarchical structure of youth football. As was explained in Chapter 3 the governance of football has moved away from a traditional hierarchical model to a model of systemic governance (Leftwich, 1994; Henry & Lee, 2004) where a complex web of stakeholders govern the sport. There are parallels at the micro-level within the international dressing room where on-pitch success is not only governed by coaching staff but social hierarchy within the group. Building on this, national team coaches explained that they were aware of instances where players who represent the first team at their clubs may act in a manner that is not in keeping with the expected standards:

Some players come with the ego and possibly think that they should be picked up or should play. I've also heard of national team staff previously giving the ownership of what time meetings were and there were two senior players in a younger age group and they were late by 15-20 minutes and they were named players to start but they actually ended up not starting because they missed the meeting and the coach said these are the rules that we set together and that isn't the kind of behaviour that we want. (Interview with Adam, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 17th June 2020)

From this admission it can be seen that current first-team footballers may have a perception that they hold a higher status in the group than others (see: Carron & Eys, 2012). This perception that first-team footballers may be 'treated different' to other age group national team players may be a cause for concern regarding the cohesion within the group. Cohesion refers to the 'dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs' (Carron, Brawley & Widmeyer, 1998: 213). It is clear that a group lacking

cohesion will have a negative effect on sporting performance due to the group failing to meet their group objective.

In an effort to avoid this breakdown in cohesion it is important that players can trust in the performances of others. Within academy football a superficial level of trust is built between players, individualism is nurtured, and friendships lack authenticity (Adams & Carr, 2019) and therefore it is possible to be a teammate but not a friend (Bruner et al., 2020). As the quality of peer support differs between teammates and friends (Smith et al., 2006) negative relationships between teammates may constrain performance (Reverberi et al., 2020), particularly if viewing wellbeing as a pre-requisite for effective performance in sport (Rees & Freeman, 2007; Larson et al., 2019). Through this view the relationships between peers within the international dressing room could have a negative impact on the sporting performance of the individual if not managed correctly. Better relationships can have a direct positive correlation to several favourable outcomes, including recovery from injury and improved performance (Sheridan et al., 2014; Larson et al., 2019). Therefore, national team coaching staff should make a concerted effort, as was explained by Adam, to ensure that all players, regardless of status, are subject to consistent expectations.

Senior football environments there are often characterised by a nature of round the clock one-upmanship (Jones & Denison, 2016) where individuals consistently compete for status. This will also occur during a youth-to-senior transition, where youth players perceive that they must train and play well to earn the respect of the more senior professionals (Swainston, Wilson & Jones, 2020). A benefit to the inclusion of senior players in age group squads is that being comfortable around senior players is important for young players to help them to reach the same levels of performance that they would in their youth environment (Morris et al., 2015). This can be explained by social competence, which has often been shown as a predictor of transition success (Drew et al., 2019). If the players perceive that they will struggle to build social relationships with senior players then they often will (Swainston, Wilson & Jones, 2020) and through being involved in an international environment that consists of senior footballers, albeit of a similar age, this can help the players to begin to recognise the difference between their perceptions of the senior environment and its reality.

Although the players explained that there were some players representing their respective first team in the Premier League, for the club in which they came through the youth system a number of players and staff also suggested that some individuals were also part of a first-team environment at a lower division loan club. The loan system has been found to be a key tool within youth development to support players to adapt to the increase in physicality and style of play demands of senior football (Swainston, Wilson & Jones, 2020). These footballers will also be exposed to diverse developmental opportunities, having had experience at youth academy, youth international and within the football league. Clubs outside of the Premier League are more likely to operate Category 2, 3 or 4 academies, however, there is still the opportunity for players to represent the England squads upon graduating from these academies.

4.2.3. Category of youth academy

The final key point of the sub-theme regarding the 'social hierarchy in the international dressing room' was that the category of youth academy that the player came from was a factor in their acceptance into the group. As outlined in sub-section 2.4.2 the EPPP dictates the Category that the youth academy will be provided, from Category One to Four, with Category One academies incorporating more contact hours between coach and player and a full-time training model from 16. Through data analysis it has been explained that the majority of international players will be selected from Category One academies. However, within each age group squad, particularly the younger age groups (U15 and U16), there will be a number of players from Category Two or Three academies.

All transitions will have its own set of transition demands placed upon the athlete (see: Drew et al., 2019). In particular, the varied makeup of a youth international squad will differ from a club squad with players from largely similar geographic areas and less diverse playing backgrounds.

Sometimes we do know each other, like the northern boys you might not know them, but you just get used to it when you get training. I don't know it's just everyone wants to because at England everyone just wants to win. England is not a team for losers. (Interview with Tom, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

There's loads of different players, we had a couple [from a Category 2 academy], they did alright... it was different having the there.

Everyone spoke to them, but they were definitely more nervous than other people. (Interview with Greg, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

International football should be seen as a developmental opportunity, in particular for players outside of a Category One academy, as they will now be exposed to opportunities to train and play with players of whom their games programme may not represent. This provides an opportunity for these players to accelerate their personal development as alongside coaches, teammates will have the largest impact on the development of an athlete (Reverberi et al., 2020). A debilitating factor to a transitioning athlete is often through comparing themselves with others, offering a critical analysis of their ability compared to others (Pummell, 2008). It is apparent that those individuals who may not be first-team footballers or from a Category 2 or 3 academy may feel that their abilities are not at the same level as their peers, extenuating adding to the social hierarchy that is in place within the youth international dressing room. An important factor here is for the national governing body to manage this process through managing expectations as well as being aware of the pressure's players may place upon themselves.

This development impact can be affected by the coaching staff's ability to integrate the group. Similar to prior research on the effect of social class on sport participation the category of academy may reflect this in the eyes of the players during international representation:

perceptions and the way kids are, I can definitely see kids saying, 'wow you're at Leyton Orient and I'm at Chelsea', but actually once the kids started to play the qualities will come through, but perceptions will always be there won't they. There are always biases whether we like it or not, that's the reality. What we want to do at the beginning of every camp is set the right culture and tone around how every player starts at the same starting point and everyone gets equal opportunities in terms of contact time, one to ones. We get as much information as we possibly can prior to the first England camp to make sure that those players coming from the so-called smaller clubs felt more confident in the environment, but it is a big step up for those players for sure. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

It is important for national coaching staff to be aware of the social environment in which they operate to not only ensure that all players, regardless of the category of academy, are able to successfully transition but that the group is a cohesive unit as social cohesion has a large influence on sporting performance (Carron et al., 2002). Although the players within an age group international squad will be selected from

a variety of Category of academy they share the common goal of progressing to represent their country and senior squad, which was a factor in building group cohesion (see: MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Although players who may be selected for the international squads from Category 2 or 3 academies may experience a different perception to those that come from Category 1 academies it is important to point out that they are still regarded as elite level competitors for their age group and will therefore often have higher levels of well-being because of this (Reverberi, et al., 2020; Rongen et al., 2020).

Through forming relationships with others young people will widen their social experience which will aid their development (Erikson, 1968). During their time in the national squads it has been shown that players will be exposed to a variety of different groups whom they may not have had contact within their club environment; including first-team footballers, players from different parts of the country and different category academies. These opportunities to not only perform but to socialise with others outside of their normal groups will support the players holistic development and aid in forming their personal identity.

When asked about how the coaches integrate players from different backgrounds the players commented that staff try to identify players who are capable of socialising well: 'If you get on with people as well, they're not just looking for good footballers, they're looking for good people as well' (TJ, player). This was then built upon through the suggestion that national coaches tend not to focus on the standards required at England as players come with expectations placed upon them by the club:

They don't even speak about what the standards are at England, not to me anyways, because I think that's a given. You're going to play for your country, so who is going to turn up late for a meeting? You wouldn't do it at your club so you sure as hell won't do it at England, you don't wanna be a menace off the pitch. (Interview with Tom, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

Everyone wears the kit, behaviour, they don't tolerate lateness, but I think at every professional football club that should be the standard. At [the club] they help with that; they have really high standards. So, at England you don't really need to think about it. (Interview with Sodiq, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 3rd February 2020)

I think it comes with the job, every day we have to know how to conduct ourselves in a professional environment and when I go away with England, I just use the skills that are used at [the club].

It's more or less the same but obviously it's for your country so it's an even bigger step. (Interview with TJ, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

Understanding the roles in the groups is important as it has been found that a successful execution of the responsibilities in a sporting role supports positive group outcomes (Carron et al., 2005). Therefore, for national associations to achieve their goal of creating successful international squads, at either youth or senior level, then it is important for coaches and support staff to understand the roles that each athlete plays in the group dynamic and the effect this could have on group success. Individuals identify with groups who provide opportunities to reach a higher social position (Seta & Seta, 1996) and therefore for those individuals from lower category academies youth international sport could be seen as an opportunity to progress within their career.

The findings in this sub-section highlight the social hierarchy that can occur in the international dressing room, namely through the different status of the players or the status of the academy that the player has come from. This is a novel finding as the extant literature is yet to understand the environment that young footballers find themselves in when entering an international age group squad. Prior research has tended to focus more on the talent development environments of the youth academy or senior football (Henriksen, 2010). Taking the approach that transition support should be focused on support-for-performance we can see that if safeguards are not put in place to support the players in bonding as a group then this may have a negative effect on sporting performance. The below model looks to explain the transition demands and required support, upon entering the international training camp, based upon the findings in this section.

Meta-Transitions during the Transition from Club-to-Country



Figure 4.3. – Meta-Transition 3: Entering the International Training Camp, outlining the expected demands and the organisational support that both club and national governing bodies should offer developing footballers during youth international representation

Meta-Transition 3 is characterised by the initial point at which a young footballer enters the international training camp. Through the data collection it has become apparent that players who have been through this transition feel that certain characteristics will determine the players experience of the camp, namely, the club they had been selected from and their status at that club. More work must be done by the national governing body to avoid players feeling that there is a hierarchy in place dependent on external factors such as club status as this could lead to a failure to successfully transition into the environment and therefore a failure to replicate their club performance in the international environment.

4.3. Chapter Conclusion

In answer to questions 1 and 3 this chapter discussed both the experiences of youth international footballers entering the international environment and players and club staffs perceptions of the support networks and procedures that The FA have in place during this transition. The findings suggest that the call-up process into a national age group squad can vary dependent on the players club and the age group being selected for, with club staff suggesting that they would like to be consulted regarding the identification and selection of players from their squads. Throughout the process of being selected and entering the international environment there appears to be a number of smaller transition phases, otherwise known as meta-transitions. Meta-transitions are “transitions within a transition process reflecting its complexity and phase-structure” (Schinke et al., 2015: 77). Within this process these phases would refer to the initial selection, entering the training camp, the first competitive fixture and returning to the club environment.

Roles are critical components of providing a structure to sports groups (Eys, Beauchamp & Bray, 2006). Through the data analysis it can be seen that players find their role within the youth international squad through several defining features, including senior team experience or category of academy that the player represents. This shows the nuances within youth international sport in comparison to club football where the age group squads will rarely feature players from other groups. The England age group squads also differ in this regard as the squad has been shown to change dependent on a variety of factors such as form or injury. Therefore, at each camp players may need to reassess their role in the hierarchy of the group.

An interdisciplinary approach to youth development is integral to ensure that a holistic perspective is taken (Wylleman, 2019) and therefore support staff (from both primary stakeholders) should have an awareness of the social dynamics that occur within the environment. A practical application for the findings in this chapter is for national associations to incorporate a buddy system within age group squads, as advocated by the wider transition literature (see: Morris, Tod & Oliver, 2015). This would encourage more senior players in the group to offer social support to newer members, helping to remove the sense of hierarchy and facilitate a stronger group dynamic, leading to a more positive talent development environment. A transition programme focused on supporting athletes entering youth international football should reflect the various demands of each meta-transition.

CHAPTER V: Implications for Player Development

The second over-arching theme to emerge from the thematic analysis was that of the 'implications for player development'. This chapter explains the experiences of young footballers during their time in the international environment, as well as describing the relationship between international representation and the youth-to-senior transition. This, in turn, answers research questions one and two of the thesis. In developing this chapter three sub-themes emerged. The first centered on the development effect on 'sporting performance', including technical ability and tactical game understanding. Second, were the 'psychological implications' of representing the national team and its relationship with the transition into senior football. The third was the effect that de-selection from the environment has on the players identity and the influence this has on players trust in the organisation. Please see Appendix G for data analysis categorisation regarding player development during the club-to-country transition.

5.1. Sporting Performance

The first sub-theme to emerge was the effect that international representation had on 'sporting performance'. Two points emerged from this sub-theme. The first was that training and playing with the national team led to opportunities to 'test personal ability' by playing with and against better players, some of which the young footballer would not be exposed to had they not been selected for representation. Second, was the 'tactical development' that players were exposed to due to the different tactical styles of play in international football and how this helped to prepare the footballer for the transition into senior football.

5.1.1. *Test personal ability*

The first point was that of getting the opportunity for players to test themselves against what were perceived as 'better players'. The micro-climate of youth international sport is highly competitive as some of the best talent in the country are brought together to compete for a small number of representative places. International representation is inextricably linked to the youth development process as "once athletes perform at a higher level and train regularly, there is a need...for athletes to participate in international competition" (De Bosscher et al., 2006: 207). This international competition is important to player development as is in line with

research into talent development. Namely that within youth development “the best athletes oppose one another under equal conditions because this creates motivation to always improve and heighten the level of sporting performance” (Gammelsæter, 2020: 11), therefore, through competition for places this drives performance levels and can enhance the talent development environment.

Players suggested that through the opportunity to become part of the national team they were able to challenge themselves against better players in training as well as match play which is an opportunity that they would not normally receive in their club environment:

When you play against Brighton, I marked their 16-year-old striker and you come off thinking you’ve done well...when actually I’ve only marked a 16-year-old, so it does put into perspective where you want to get. When you go there, England is different. When you’re marking a player like [first team player] who is in the [Premier League club] first team squad, when you know you can deal with that, you’ve gotta be consistent with it because that’s what you want to get to. (Interview with Ben, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

I think it’s a big difference when you’re playing for England and playing with the best of the best. I believe they’re the best players in your position, the best players in the country in different positions and I think although we have really good players here in my age group, I think there are some players that you are playing with at an international level that are very, very good players and I think the standard is very different which helps me to get better. (Interview with Tom, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 21st November 2019)

Here it is important to suggest that youth footballers at Category One academies have a varied games programme that will include competing against some of the best teams in the country as well as having the opportunity to compete in the UEFA U19 Champions League if their respective first team qualifies for the senior competition. However, the U18 Premier League is split into North and South regions and therefore players will have limited opportunities to play against players who are outside of their region. Therefore, international football provides an opportunity to train and play with players whom are also amongst the top performers in their age group and locality, providing these players with different opportunities to those who have not been selected.

According to Jack, a current technical director and former England national team coach, the players admission that the international environment can have a positive

impact on their development as young footballers is not something which clubs have always recognised:

I think that there is this historical perspective that clubs develop the players and they come to the international England teams to play games and I guess that what we were trying to point out is that in an under 17 international season we could have your players for 80 days of the season so actually surely the international programme is going to significantly impact on the development of the player. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

The clubs perspective that the national team solely functions as an additional games programme is questionable in that it clearly undermines the role of national associations in player development. As players have outlined, national team representation provides the opportunity to compete in a different environment than their club's academy. This relationship between international football and the youth-to-senior transition has been outlined by other club staff who suggest that being an international player 'whets players appetite' (Neil, Loans Manager) for more competitive football. Neil shared a story of a player who quickly made youth international appearances and after performing well, resulted in the player making his senior international debut before he had made his senior club debut:

It was such a big story in [the country] that they had the back page of the newspaper going on about the under 21s, about the crowds, the quality of football and [*the players*] name was getting mentioned. He scored in that game, they built him up and he felt that [senior national team manager] played him because of the publicity so he could say "I've played him now". He didn't know if it was a bit like... it didn't matter how well he played, it was just like, he's played now. For a young kid to go and play 45 minutes, that was brilliant for him, but he was already an under 19 playing in the under 21s, that was a big step up and then it comes to the Italy game and for the good of the team he's playing tucked in left side and that didn't really suit him. He is such an interesting kid, like [the clubs' first team manager] has sort of done a bit of a [senior national team manager] and realised how old he is and if you are comparing him to [first-team forward player] even though he is quite strong he is nothing like a physical specimen to be a target man which is more of what [*the club*] are playing at the moment. It's not like they're looking for a second striker or a player to play with him. He wants to play. It will be very interesting what the hierarchy decide for him next season. In January I would've thought it would've been a tough thing because there were championship clubs that wanted him. (Interview with Neil, Loans Manager at a Category One Academy, 14th July 2020)

These opportunities for players to test themselves against better players, some of whom may be part of senior club football squads could lead to a development in performance where the player can become better prepared for any upcoming transitions into senior football:

international football...I just expected it to be high tempo, fun, free, hard at times because you are up against good players and I was up against really good players. Yeah it's different but I think it's made me a better player because it's made me look at my defending more and made me open my eyes. I'm coming up against good players, some of them are in the first team, so it helps me improve on everything to be fair. (Interview with Sodiq, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 3rd February 2020)

Through this admission it is clear that players feel that the international environment is a step towards senior football; this was also supported by club staff:

I think the older you get I totally believe in 21s, 20s, 19s and 18s that it is a mixture of a stepping-stone both technically and mentally for them. If you go and play when you're 15, 16, 17 there is more experimentation with squads, bigger groups, people can be brought in and I sometimes worry that a player or his parents get a little carried away [thinking] that everything's rosy because they're playing for England but England might play 40 players in one season and at under 16 that's quite a number of players so the odds of making a real success are not great in football but if you go and play internationally and realise that you need to train a bit more and do a bit more then what you come back with can shape you. (Interview with Neil, Category One Premier League Academy Loans Manager, 14th July 2020)

Within this meta-transition of being part of the youth international environment it is assumed by both players and staff that playing with more experienced or talented players can 'shape' players. However, this could be a transition demand at this point where players must quickly adjust to the requirement of performing at a higher level. Therefore, within this meta-transition the player may require support of how to deal with this step up on sporting performance.

Meta-
Transitions
during the
Transition from
Club-to-Country

Meta-Transition 5: Returning to the Club and De-Selection

Expected Demands: Players not understanding the given justifications for de-selection. Loss of international footballer identity. Pressures from agents and clubs to sign professional contracts.

Organisational Support: NBGs to be clearer with the feedback provided. Manage the expectations of entering the environment early. Clubs to encourage reflection on international performance.

Meta-Transition 4: Representing the Nation in a Fixture

Expected Demands: Incongruence of environments defined by the different playing styles leading to varied tactical and physical requirements.

Organisational Support: NBGs to support players in building tactical understanding in line with prior individual development plans at the club. Club staff represented at international fixtures.

Meta-Transition 3: Entering the International Training Camp

Expected Demands: First team players treated differently by staff. Social hierarchy develops within the group, based on club status, first-team appearances and performance characteristics.

Organisational Support: NBGs – consistent approach to working with all players, regardless of status. Support the development of the team. Clubs - manage expectations on the players entering the camp.

Meta-Transition 2: Selection for International Squad

Expected Demands: Identified as having potential to reach a higher level. Resources required to handle increased intensification of performance. Entering a previously unknown environment.

Organisational Support: Club and NGB to prepare player for the upcoming transition demands. NGB to offer a consistent approach to selection across each professional club.

Meta-Transition 1: Representing the Youth Academy

Expected Demands: Adaptation to performance requirements. Player must continue to perform at a given level in order to move to the next stage.

Organisational Support: Club – Prepare players for upcoming transitions through effective psycho-social support alongside the development in sporting performance.

Figure 5.1. Meta-Transition 4: Representing the Nation in a Fixture

This then leads to thoughts of whether youth representation can lead to elite senior performance:

I don't think it would necessarily mean that [*youth international representation leads to a positive youth-to-senior transitions*] because I think there are so many other factors. I suppose to a degree having gone into a different type of environment like that there would obviously be benefits like playing with good players, access to the type of opposition, those tournaments and events at the international platform. I think it would enhance their development to some degree without a doubt, I don't necessarily think it would have a direct correlation to them going into the first team. As you become an under 18 or 23, if you're a good player you're likely to be included in both anyway so without contradicting myself it's probably likely to be the case but I'm not sure it's because of that. Certainly, there would be areas where the two would go hand-in-hand and being part of the international scene would give our players a boost and help their development. (Interview with Graham, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 15th July 2020)

These comments add new understanding to transition research as show that the youth international environment can be seen as an additional opportunity for performance progression. Prior research has suggested the importance of other career transitions, such as transnational migration (Storm et al., 2022) and the youth-to-senior transition (Champ et al. 2020) supporting performance progression, however, viewing the club-to-country transition in this way is an area that is yet to be discussed in the extant literature. This is in line with viewing transitions through the cultural praxis paradigm as supports the development of career transition research that can directly support individuals in their talent development environments (Stambulova and Ryba, 2014). This finding also adds to the literature through being the first research in the club-to-country transition to offer what Ryan and Thorpe (2013) argue to be an individually tailored approach to support the athletes sporting future.

Regarding this individual tailored approach, research suggests that if an athlete does not have the necessary resources to cope with the new environment in which they are entering then the transition outcome, in terms of sporting performance, could be negative (Stambulova, 2003). These resources can be described as stressors associated with competition (Mellalieu et al., 2006) and would involve areas such as having to test themselves against more established athletes and talented athletes. Similar to prior research in the youth-to-senior transition players must manage the expectations of the novel training group when entering the new environment as well as impressing senior management by performing to the level of the senior group (Røynesdal et al., 2018).

Through the findings of this thesis it is suggested that the club-to-country transition can help in this regard as youth international football would offer them the opportunity to compete with and against individuals whom they may not meet in club football. This is important when considering the youth-to-senior transition as we know that if a player assumes that the gap between environments in which they are transitioning is too large then this can lead to a lack of belief in their ability (Bennie & O'Connor, 2006). Therefore, as the youth-to-senior transition is often perceived to be the most difficult, entry into an environment that bridges this gap will help the athlete in this transition. There is a relationship here between the transition from club-to-country and youth-to-senior as both are characterised by the player facing an increase in physical, technical and psychosocial demands (Haugaasen & Jordet, 2012).

5.1.2. *Tactical development*

To form this sub-theme the second point was that of the exposure to different playing styles that helped the player in their 'tactical development' and therefore supported their progression into senior football. Due to the policy enacted within the clubs' youth academies by the EPPP it is possible that clubs are now offering less tactical flexibility in their development programmes in an attempt to embed their own 'playing style' or 'game model'. Research suggests the developing footballers must be exposed to different tactical variations in order to develop a strong understanding of the game with aspects such as 'game intelligence' often highlighted as a key predictor of adult high performance in football (Williams et al., 2020). Therefore, opportunities to improve players understanding of different tactical principles should be provided by talent development environments in order to prepare athletes for senior performance. Youth international representation was seen as an opportunity for this where current youth international footballers suggested that 'you have to learn quickly so you can keep up' (Ben, player), as 'everyone's from separate clubs and they all have different tactics and that so coming together can be hard, but you have to do it' (Harry, player).

National coaches explained that due to England having a specific playing style and positional requirements the players that are called up may be put into different positions than they play in at their club:

I think the player profiles at the international teams are quite clear so lots of wingers who played out wide for their clubs, physically, potentially play fullback for England because they are so quick and strong and they can attack and defend and that's how they wanna play but for the player to get their head around that sometimes can be quite hard, it can be confusing, but it's about how you talk to the player and the club as to why, that's the first thing. (Interview with Adam, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 17th June 2020)

Different playing positions will each have varying physical requirements (Abbott et al., 2018) but will also require different technical and tactical demands. In the same way that the players recognised the importance of adapting to the game demands of international football both club and national coaching staff explained that being able to adapt to the technical and tactical requirements was integral to an effective transition:

I think the ones with a good game understanding [*are more likely to be successful*], the ones who can adapt to the tactical changes from club football, the ones who can get to know new people, the ones who can help new people, they are normally the ones who have been successful. It doesn't matter what character they have, it's how they relate to other people, lots of kids who form part of the makeup of the squad might be kids who are really good at social interaction because they're good for the squad. You're away for 10 days, they are really important to joining up the squad, they might get limited minutes and they want to be heavily involved in the game, but part of the squad development is that they're ready in three- or four-years' time. (Interview with Adam, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 17th June 2020)

A common theme here was that staff suggested that there was a correlation between how young players adapted to the needs of being part of a new social group and their ability to adapt to the tactical changes in international football. This is a novel finding as prior research is yet to understand the process that developing footballers go through when learning tactical systems in international football. Future research in this area would do well to consider the longitudinal influence that international football can have on tactical development in order to affect future policy developments in the field. A key strength of international football was explained by club staff in that a more varied games programme within youth international football would expose the players to different challenges that they may not get at their club:

I think the federations understand this in terms of the teams that they play against. What's the point in England only ever playing teams where they're going to dominate the ball? If we have a centre back, he's played in the England pathway, we are wanting to be playing against the Brazilians, the Argentinians, they're not going to get the opportunity to play players like that in a Cat. Two games programme unless they're exposed to teams in an older age group, or they're playing in the Premier League Cup. For us, if they're playing internationally they are being tested at their biggest challenge point for them. They're playing the best players in their age group. The only way we can challenge them is if we accelerate them through the age groups. (Interview with Stephen, Category Two Premier League Head of Coaching, 16th July 2020)

For those players who are in the England U20s squad and not playing first-team football then that is the most competitive football they'll play all season. It provides a really positive experience that without it maybe you wouldn't be as ready to transition into that senior team, psychologically it can really benefit you. (Interview with

Neil, Category One Premier League Loans Manager, 14th July 2020)

This was supported by players who suggested similar changes in match requirements on representing the national team:

it's not my natural position but I could go there in the future. I think I'll be a midfielder but it's something that I can go into, can't just be a holding midfielder. If a midfielder is too good then I can go left back, like Milner. He can play in loads of positions. (Interview with Sam, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

There is big differences, at [club] I was more of an attacking player, I wasn't really a defender. I was more of ... an attacking player but here I'm a right back but I'm more of an attacking right back. (Interview with Sodiq, Category One Premier League Player, 3rd February 2020)

These alterations in tactical requirements are to be expected as there are changes in both offensive and defensive actions at different age groups of developmental football (Figueira et al., 2018) and the same can be said for the different developmental domains (e.g. club or international). Tactical understanding will increase over time, with defensive tactical actions experiencing the biggest improvement as players age (Borges et al., 2017). A higher quality in performance as players get older is due to players improving their understanding of the game due to increased complexity in training (Costa et al., 2010). Therefore, different tactical requirements between environments will expose young players to opportunities to continue to stretch their game understanding, perhaps leading to players who are better prepared for the youth-to-senior transition.

Through multidisciplinary, longitudinal studies as well as interviews with coaches and scouts a combination of technical ability, physical and psychological variables have emerged as predictors for reaching senior sport (Williams et al., 2020). Therefore, as the research suggests that international football will provide players with an enhanced opportunity to develop their tactical awareness there is an argument that this environment can be used as a key developmental opportunity for young footballers, supporting them on their journey into senior sport.

To ensure that youth international football can achieve this development in tactical understanding it is important to focus on both the environment and the coaching that takes place within it. Game understanding is positively influenced by the question

and answer coaching styles, to improve players cognitive awareness and positioning (Atkinson & Harvey, 2017). This exposure to collective team tactics helps youth footballers to develop the decision-making skills required to reach higher levels of performance (Machado et al., 2020). Therefore, through this transition it would be beneficial for national coaching staff to focus on tactical development through engaging the player in the learning process through varying the coaching styles used.

An important point here is that if players achieve early success during the transition, they are more likely to be successful in the long-term (Franck & Stambulova, 2018), therefore national associations must provide the players with the opportunity for success, through the means of offering an appropriate number of playing minutes during their initial international camp. Having said this, there is an argument that mental fatigue can negatively affect tactical understanding through players showing more errors in tactical actions (Kunrath et al., 2020), and therefore it is important for national team coaching staff to manage the game time on international duty to negate this. Under mental fatigue players have been shown to increase their total distance run, due to poor tactical actions, adding support to the idea of managing game time for the benefit of the player when on international duty (Kunrath et al., 2020).

These additional technical and tactical requirements are an important finding as they align to the prior research into the youth-to-senior transition that suggests that when moving into senior sport young players will experience the transition demand of a higher level of technical characteristics (Bruner et al., 2008; Morris, 2013; Franck & Stambulova, 2018). Mills et al. (2012) suggests that a players ability to handle this demand will contribute to whether or not the player is successful in this transition. Therefore, in answer to research question two there appears to be a relationship between the club to country and youth-to-senior transition in the demands that are placed upon the athlete. In order to support the athlete in dealing with these demands it is important that clubs utilise the multi-disciplinary team in preparing players for the transition into the national team. The EPPP suggests that the multi-disciplinary review for youth footballers is “a review of all aspects of an Academy Player’s football, athletic and educational performance and development” (The Premier League, 2021: 11). Through the technical and tactical developmental outcomes of international football it can be argued that staff should be involved in the multi-disciplinary process. However, the EPPP does not currently outline

whether the international football environment should be included in the multi-disciplinary review, this is opposed to the role of the MDT review, as outlined below:

Each Multi-disciplinary Review shall assess the performance and development of the Academy Player against his performance targets set at previous Multidisciplinary Reviews. At the end of each Multi-disciplinary Review the Club shall update the Academy Player's Individual Learning Plan to take account of conclusions reached at the Multi-disciplinary Review (The Premier League, 2021: 22).

Considering the good practice outlined above the sporting performance of the player during international duty could be included within the review to involve a more holistic focus on their performance. As has been discussed throughout this section youth international sport should be seen as an important developmental opportunity for players and if included in the MDT review process would offer an additional chance for improvements in technical and tactical understanding. Also, the process could be used to help clubs benchmark their youth international players against other players in the international setup, better understanding where their programme sits amongst similar development programmes (see: Chapter 6).

5.2. Psychological Implications

The second sub-theme to form the overarching theme was concerned with the psychological implications for player development upon international representation. This sub-theme consisted of three key points. First, the effect of the 'autonomous environment' that the national squads create on ownership and independence, the second, the increase in 'self-esteem' that can occur on being selected for an England squad and finally, the learning implications to being exposed to 'varied experiences' within international representation.

5.2.1. Autonomous environment

The first key point of the sub-theme was that the players perceived the on-camp experiences to be an autonomous environment, highlighting a difference between their club environment and that of the international domain. The players interviewed suggested that they found England to be 'much more relaxed' in terms of discipline

but, like club football, there were high expectations and standards. British football has traditionally been situated in a domain where working-class masculinity is rife (Dempster, 2009; Tucker, 2020). Although players suggested this is the case in club football this does not appear to be the case in youth international football, as in line with prior research players suggested there is a 'right way' of behaving at their club. However, research has shown that these increasing levels of management and surveillance can have a negative impact on the psychological wellbeing of the developing footballer (Roderick, Smith & Potrac, 2017). This differed in the international domain where the 'more relaxed' environment led players to suggest that 'England lets you express yourself', in comparison to a potentially disciplinary environment at the club:

They tell you to express yourself. So, they need to tell you the tactics and everything what they want from you, but they just tell you to express yourself and be yourself. That's normally what they say and then they give you, like they never say, do this, you have to do this, they just say you're here for a reason and you've made it this far so show us what you've got. (Interview with Greg, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

I feel like when I'm [*with*] England they let you play, you're more free, you can express yourself more and like... you don't need to worry about anything but [*at the club*] it's like...it's not bad here or anything but it's structured and like, you know, just certain things I can't do... but it's just part of it, just part of the football thing, it's not too bad. (Interview with Sodiq, Category One Premier League Player, 3rd February 2020)

One theory for a perceived 'freer' international environment could be that, compared to club coaches, national coaches are dictated by fewer internal stakeholders' (e.g. Heads of Coaching, Academy Managers etc.) and due to a lack of intensification, the increase in current and new activities which involved time and energy (Ball, 2000), they are able to create what players perceive as a more autonomous environment. This perceived difference between club and international environments is not an immediate cause for concern regarding youth development but highlighted the potentially competing approaches of definitive stakeholders. Through this environment players suggested that it provided them with more opportunities to become independent and showed ownership over their time there:

When you have downtime if you're running about the hotel then obviously that's going to hinder your performance but if you're relaxed and maybe doing some recovery, your stretches, then I think it adds that little edge over your teammates and opponents. You've got to take responsibility to get better and manage the time you're given. (Interview with TJ, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

yeah with me I just usually sleep for a bit and then maybe an hour before I'll just wake up and start preparing. I usually have a foam roller and I'll just foam roll, prepare for the game drink some water stuff like that. They're not too strict, just give you ideas of some things you could do in your own time. (Interview with Sodiq, Category One Premier League Player, 3rd February 2020)

In line with previous research into the culture of English football (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones & Denison, 2017) players suggested their club environments had a disciplinary nature, however, a unique finding within this research is that the international environment was described as being far less disciplinary which led players to express themselves more:

The coaches at England are more like...cos you only see them for 10 days they're really friendly and that, I'm not saying the coaches at [the club] aren't friendly but because they don't see you as much... they don't really have a go at players if you play bad but at [the club] if you play bad you get told, they're not really like that at England. (Interview with Sam, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

The coaches at England...it's just different. England, I feel like when I'm in England they let you play, you're more free, you can express yourself more and like you don't need to worry about anything but here it's like, it's not bad here or anything but it's structured and like, you know, just certain things I can't do. (Interview with Sodiq, Category One Premier League Player, 3rd February 2020)

This autonomous environment was confirmed by coaching staff who have worked with the national teams:

some of the first things that we work on with the players is here is the schedule, here's what's going to happen, these are the times that we are looking to work, this is the kit you need to use when you're here, here is where we have meetings, here is the education room. We let them know all of those things, so we are letting them know where everything is and what happens and then part of it is then then letting them take ownership to ensure they are there at the right time. That they are there in the right kit and they are ready to go and take ownership themselves. (Interview with Adam,

Although the development of an autonomous environment where players get the opportunity to take ownership appears to be an objective of the environment, there is a clear focus on observation throughout this process. This is in line with research into disciplinary environments that suggest the structural aspects of carefully managing a player's time and restricting personal freedoms contribute to disciplinary power that is placed upon the athlete (Denison, 2010). This then has a correlation with poor performance if autonomy is not provided in other areas (Denison, 2007). Therefore, although there appears to be an element of disciplinary power placed upon the players through the careful observation of performance in an intensified residential environment the players have clearly expressed that they felt much more freedom to perform in the international environment.

This research adds to the transition literature as shows a clear difference in players perceptions of the international environment compared to the club domain. From a performance perspective this can have various positive implications to development. Firstly, an environment lacking in autonomy is more likely to create docile athletes who lack the accountability required to be successful performers (Denison, Mills & Konoval, 2017). Second, a dedication towards solely becoming an athlete can lead to a reduced sense of autonomy (Beckmann et al., 2006), however, this research has found that athletes who are currently perceived to be at the peak of performance for their age group are given more autonomy in the international setting, refuting prior research in this area.

This is significant because prior research has suggested that upon entering international sport athletes experience novelty in joining the environment but that there is a great deal of ambiguity regarding expectations and potential demands, with the international environment being deemed as more competitive than the club environment (McKay et al., 2021). This thesis found this not to be the case, with the current youth international footballers explaining that they felt more comfortable to perform in the international environment than in the club, which had greater competition for places. Current youth international footballers may perceive the environment as being more autonomous for three reasons: 1) international football is outside of the gaze of club staff (Jones & Denison, 2017) and therefore pressures to reach performance levels to remain in the academy system will not be apparent,

(2) international football breaks the monotony of club performance where similar patterns of behaviours and schedules have been suggested by players as leading to tedium (Adams & Carr, 2019) and 3) through observation it was clear that players were provided with opportunities to select their own working practices within their schedule, for example, deciding what method of recovery they felt would best support them on a given day. More research into the organisational culture of the youth international environment may be required to better understand this phenomenon. This would then help researchers to better explain the impact of international sport on talent development.

5.2.2. Self-esteem

The second point that was raised by both players and club staff was that they felt that being provided with the opportunity to represent the national team led to an increase in self-esteem and helped the player to believe they had the potential to 'make it as a pro' (TJ, player):

It gives you like 'Oh I'm good enough to play for England, I'm doing well'. So, I think it gives you that boost, that confidence and that happiness. Obviously, it makes your parents proud, it's always a good feeling. (Interview with Harry, Category One Premier League Player, 3rd February 2020)

Self-esteem has been identified as a key factor to reaching high performance in sport (O'Connor et al., 2020) and within youth football several researchers have suggested that those footballers who successfully transition into senior football often have high levels of self-esteem (Ringland, 2016; Drew et al., 2019; Swainston et al., 2020). Prior research into career transitions such as the youth-to-senior transition have found that psychological characteristics such as self-esteem are likely to alter over time rather than through singular events, this was supported by the experiences of young players representing their country:

I think just be yourself because what got you into England is what you do so you shouldn't change what you're doing because you're playing for England. If you're there it's because you've shown what you can do so they want you to do that. So, I just think you have to be yourself, the first camp I went on I was nervous, this was an U18s camp. I was nervous, I was a bit touch and go but the second one I wasn't as nervous. I realised that it's not just a one-time thing, I've come back and it just gave me more confidence and I just played like I did normally. (Interview with Tom, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

Club staff also supported the idea of youth international representation helping to develop players self-esteem:

we have a boy... who is an under 21 International. He's got incredible ability but sometimes he might lack that self-belief which hinders him, but I think that international recognition that he has had, when they come back we almost want them to have that peacock feel about it, but have that humility to understand that it's about their performance and they need to keep working hard. (Interview with Adam, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 17th June 2020)

I think from our side when the players go away certainly if it is managed well it could be a really good confidence boost. There is so much involved with going into those environments and they're a really good test of character. You have to be really confident in your own ability. (Interview with Graham, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 15th July 2020)

In their seminal research into the youth-to-senior transition in football, Røynesdal (2015) found that young footballers were encouraged to 'attack' more senior players in order to establish their position in the group and support their transition into the senior football environment. Through exposure to international football this research highlights that players will experience an improvement in their self-esteem, therefore, better preparing them for the transition demands in the senior environment as described by Røynesdal (2015). Although there may be an increase in self-esteem club staff also explained the potential pitfalls that this may bring:

I think it's right on the edge of being a competitive advantage and being a detriment to the development. The arrogance it can build, there really is a fine line between the two. They need to have self-belief and it bleeds into that. We have got a couple of boys, one lad has always got that arrogance about training with England and that's helping to push him on, and I think that probably because of having those experiences and that self-belief I believe he'll kick on further with the first team and potentially play quite a good level. (Interview with Stephen, Category Two Premier League Head of Coaching, 16th July 2020)

Both players and staff have made the admission that self-esteem, or self-belief, will improve based on the participation in international football. After the transition into senior football, players have suggested that they felt more confident in their own ability and less anxious about the transition, this was in line with research into the youth-to-senior transition (see: Morris, Tod & Eubank, 2017). This is what is explained as performance-based self-esteem, described as self-esteem based on the ideas that an individual must accomplish to feel valued (Hallsten, Josephson & Torgén, 2005). Having a performance-based self-esteem can be problematic as it

is dependent on various accomplishments and setbacks therefore leading to either positive or negative outcomes (Gustafsson et al., 2018). A performance-based self-esteem has also been shown to be a factor explaining why athletes continue in their sporting endeavours when under stress or exhaustion (Gustafsson et al., 2011). Due to this there is a relationship between having a performance-based self-esteem and negative psychological considerations, such as athlete burnout (Gustafsson et al., 2018).

Having said this it may be possible that this performance-based self-esteem may support the youth-to-senior transition. It has been found that a common barrier to successful transition into the senior environment is that players often question whether they are 'ready' to enter the environment, from both a psychological or physical perspective (Morris, Tod & Eubank, 2017) and therefore through the selection into a youth international squad, and the development of the players self-esteem this may aid the transition into senior football. In this sense, first-team coaches can use the experience of a player representing their country at youth level as an important factor in explaining that the player will be ready for the senior transition – reducing the potential anxiety of stepping into the environment.

A number of psychological factors have been highlighted as having a positive impact on the youth-to-senior transition, including self-esteem (Jones et al., 2014), therefore this research shows that through youth international selection self-esteem can be positively influenced, helping athletes to believe that they have the ability to be successful in sport, and pursue football as a career. This is supported by Pummel (2008) that suggests that the perception of self will evolve throughout the duration of the transition. In the club-to-country transition this has implications for players who may not be selected for multiple camps opposed to those players who consistently represent their national team. In answer to research question two there appears a clear relationship between the club-to-country and youth-to-senior transitions in the preparation that international youth football can provide for the player to successfully transition into professional sport. As mentioned, psychological barriers in the youth-to-senior transition tend to be that athletes feel that they do not have the right to be in that environment and that they feel anxiety over their personal sporting ability (Tamminen & Holt, 2010). This research adds new support for observing international football through a developmental lens, where the environment can be used to develop the specific areas which athletes require to be successful in senior sport.

5.2.3. *Varied experiences*

The final point referring to the psychological implications of representation focussed on the variation in experiences that players were provided during international representation and how these experiences related to the transition into senior club football. It was explained by the players that the experiences afforded to them differed from what they were exposed to at their clubs and through exposure to a different developmental environment the players suggested that they were encouraged to take part in activities that they had not experienced at their clubs:

during analysis sessions we would do great work individually or as a group and analyse first-team players and present to the coaches and players the way we see it. We watch ourselves and present on what I could've done better, or what they could have done better so I think over time they help us build a good relationship with each other and the self-confidence to show in front of coaches. (Interview with Harry, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

This was confirmed by those who had coached in the England environment:

we promote this thing about player ownership, we expect players to lead meetings and we try and grow that sense of responsibility and we value their decisions. It's not that a coach is just standing up in front of them to say this is the game plan, this is how you play, it's about sharing footage and clips of players and saying what do you think about that? what does that mean to you? what do you need to bring to the game? and there are instances where some players have found that process really, really difficult saying 'is this my place to do this?' but I like to think that it's creating a safe environment where we would encourage and nourish players to be able to do that. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

Through document analysis it was made clear that within each youth academy clubs are expected to produce an Academy Performance Plan which outlines how the club would deliver various aspects of their programme, including the clubs' approach to coaching and development (The Premier League, 2021). As the Premier League provide clubs with the autonomy to develop their own styles of delivery and philosophies on how to play the game there will be differences in the way that academies deliver. Therefore, the varied experiences of international football may provide certain players with experiences to present their ideas that they may not

have experienced in the past. The benefits to development here are three-fold, firstly, through putting young people in situations outside of their norm this will reduce the monotony of practice that can be commonplace within youth development programmes and increase engagement in the programme (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003: 2017). Second, within a late specialisation sport such as football elite performance can be reached through sampling (Côté et al., 2007). This suggests that variation in activities, particularly regarding different physical and tactical requirements, can lead to expertise. Third, research suggests that those footballers who are successful often experience a greater number of training hours in organised sport in adolescence (Zibung & Conzelmann, 2013). As the youth international football squads begin at 15 years of age, this would support the promotion of national team representation as a development tool.

Through the varied developmental opportunities that national team football can provide, players have expressed that it offers them a fresh perspective on their performance that their club often do not provide:

At England there's different styles of goalkeeper so you see how different goalkeepers at different clubs do certain things. I think that's really good, over here you see the same people but over there it's new to you so over there it's a good experience. (Interview with Harry, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

I think when you go out with England if there are different playing styles, I think they fit within the England DNA because it's quite easy to see it for yourself in the squad when you're playing with players who can do more and do as well as you. It's good that there is a different variety of players as well. You've not just got players who will go down the line and cross it, you've got different players who might cut inside and do combos so there are different types of players, different tricky wingers, big, hard centre backs. (Interview with TJ, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

Through focusing on the individual's development club staff generally assumed that they did not 'see any negatives to being called up' (Luke, Head of Coaching). However, there are still times when clubs will stop their players from being selected due to meeting the needs of their own priorities, such as ensuring their best players are available for fixtures – with the worry that the player would get injured on international duty, rather than putting the player at the heart of that decision (see: Chapter 4). Experiences to train and play with a wider variety of players is one in which clubs will find difficult to offer, based on the continued increase in clubs having even more defined playing styles (O'Gorman et al., 2020). Once the players are

exposed to these different experiences good practice would be for clubs to have a mechanism in place where they can embed the players learning into their environment, as explained by Nigel and Jack:

We [the club] did learn, the players at [the club], we asked them to do little presentations on the England camp and it was great. They presented to teammates and staff around what the camp looked like, what they learnt, how the team play. Which was really useful because it helped them articulate it and it helped us learn. (Interview with Nigel, Category One Premier League Academy Manager, 20th July 2020)

We've just had a kid who has just come back from a trip with Australia from the under 17s World Cup. We had the coach here and he gave a full day of his time to tell us how they play, gave us ideas on what the player was like and we found out some fantastic things four-cornerwise. That's brilliant because we are seeing some of that stuff as well or there might be something totally left field, a little technique or something that the coach has implemented that he seen a positive result from the player so if you listen you get a different perspective. Sometimes when they go away they portray a different set of skills or traits that you don't always see on a day-to-day basis at the club. Certainly, from our point of view being a smaller Premier League club to give those players the opportunity to play against best v best is brilliant for us. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

The youth-to-senior transition is categorised by personal factors such as the development of sport-specific knowledge and personal growth and development. This includes areas such as technical and tactical development as well as psychological areas such as mental toughness (Gucciardi et al., 2009). Through the varied experiences that the youth international environment affords the developing footballer there is a clear relationship between the opportunities that youth international football can provide players prior to entering the senior football environment. This is an important finding as has not yet been represented in the wider literature and shows how a specific within-career transition (club-to-country) can prepare athletes for upcoming transitions. This views the athletic career from a holistic perspective and assumes that transitions do not occur in a vacuum and therefore have far-reaching impacts on both performance and development. From a cultural praxis perspective this is significant as takes the approach that the athlete career discourse should focus on the career pathway rather than the transition as a singular event (Stambulova, Ryba & Henriksen, 2020).

5.3. Perceptions of De-Selection

The third and final sub-theme regarding the implications to youth development during international representation focused on the players perceptions of de-selection, where it was explained how, although they may have represented the team on multiple occasions, de-selection is commonplace in the youth international football environment. This sub-theme incorporated two key points. The first was the pride of being selected to represent the national team and the acceptance that this can lead to 'challenging athletic identity' when de-selected. The second point was the players 'lack of trust' in the coaches and system due to the lack of clarity surrounding the de-selection process and the justifications provided for not being selected at a future camp.

5.3.1. *Challenging athletic identity*

In acknowledging their desire to stay within the international setup the first point to emerge from the analysis was the pride of representation and the influence this had on the players' athletic identity. It became clear that the players showed a great deal of excitement at being selected: 'when she told me it was crazy' (Jeremy, player), and saw this as an important opportunity to progress in their careers through the competitive environment which was afforded to them. TJ explained how the opportunity to wear the England shirt was important not just for him but for his family:

when you put on that shirt in the changing room I think you're carrying your family's name, especially when you go out and play it was such an honour to play for England. Not a lot of people can do that and not a lot of people experience it in a footballing career, but I think getting that experience under your belt, especially as a young player is very good. (Interview with TJ, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

TJ showed that the pride in representing a country can stretch beyond personal pride but be a source of pride for family members as well, due to 'carrying your family's name'. Family members have long been seen as an important stakeholder in the development of young footballers (Côté, 1999), therefore, the pressure to continue to bring pride to your family could lead to an increased need to perform and be selected at future camps. The process of becoming an England international is part of an environment where the young player begins to view themselves as

having the potential to reach senior football. Through understanding that players, and their support networks – family, coaches and friends, will feel pride in the selection this can bring into question the potential difficulties which may occur when a player is deselected from the national team, something which has been shown to be commonplace in youth international football.

As the squad list for the national teams exceeds the number of players who will be called up to the squad there will always be times where certain players are not selected. In club football de-selection can result in being released from the youth academy, often leading to dropout from the sport (Brown & Potrac, 2009), however, in international football de-selection appears to function as a normative transition where a player may miss one camp before being called up to the next: ‘They say you get picked based on your performance, you might get dropped but they won’t tell you you’ve been dropped, you just don’t get a call up’ (Greg, player).

Due to the pride in being selected for the squad it was clear that the players felt it changed how they were perceived by the club staff:

I think by being an international player, it doesn’t matter if you’re a keeper or an outfielder. I think it gives you that level of respect to the coaches, it could open up their eyes and they could say ‘if this guy is an international player then maybe we should step him up’. I think it gives you a platform to live off, gives you a reputation. (Interview with Harry, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

The perception of players that they feel their ‘call-up’ could alter how the club see the players’ performance highlights the importance that players place on this opportunity. It was clear that that players feel international representation could have an influence on the likelihood of the player to transition into senior football. Although players suggested that they felt the club coaching staff perceived them differently when they were called up, the interviews with club coaching staff suggest that, often, coaches were aware of the importance of assessing the player themselves rather than viewing national team selection as a key indicator of the young players potential or performance:

They can have the bravado that “yeah I’m gonna get a chance, I’m good enough” but when they play international football at 18 onwards they get a better perspective because they realise just what their own peers are like and how you fit into that. If they see where they think they are they get to judge themselves against

others. (Interview with Neil, Category One Premier League Loans Manager, 14th July 2020)

As well as perceived changes in coach perceptions the players changed the way they viewed their own ability and opportunities to develop a career in the game:

Honestly I never really saw myself being a footballer until I was about 14 or 15, until I more or less got called up to England and then I started realising that football is quite serious. (Interview with Callum, Category One Premier League Player, 16th June 2021)

This player shows the shift in athletic identity that can come upon international representation. This was also supported by club staff who explained that they noticed that certain players experienced a change in their identity where they viewed themselves as ‘an England player’:

you just hope there’s not too much noise that goes on or too much bullshit or materialistic stuff and you hope that they don’t come back thinking about the pair of boots on their feet rather than the bigger picture. It’s just that I’m saying that it will inevitably happen when you say “I’m part of the England squad”, the shoulders go back and they feel like they’re getting there, and there is a risk that a few of them, that it goes to their heads and they lose focus and that’s the biggest thing for young players - it just knocks them off course. (Interview with Stephen, Category Two Premier League Head of Coaching, 16th July 2020)

One of our goalkeepers had only been with [the club] since under 16s so we hadn’t spent loads of time with him and the second he was in the England set up he loved it; it was just a big status thing for him. He loved being around it and he’d say things like this pitch ain’t good enough anymore or why don’t I get my kit. [*Another player*] was socially a good kid but he struggled, he came back and I think coaches, there was just a different tone being spoken to him and I think he found it really hard. He felt like he was becoming this commodity, he wasn’t able to articulate it like that, but I think that was our impression. He eventually went to [a Category One club] a year later. (Interview with Nigel, Category One Premier League Academy Manager, 20th July 2020)

Identity is the constantly evolving sense of self, both as an individual and member of society (Erikson, 1968). Athletic identity is built through the athletes’ strong bond with their chosen sport (Mitchell et al., 2014), emphasised in the international environment by the pride of representation, both individually and from stakeholders. This shift in identity will affect the players perception of self but also the expectations placed upon them by peers, club coaches and family, as explained by Graham:

It's certainly something players have to manage I think it can be positive, but it can also be negative. I'd imagine players might come back and say all of a sudden you're an international and you can really change but at the same time you can come back in and there's a lot of expectation that goes with that. So, I think it is double edged, over the years probably depending on how it's gone, depending on where that players at, at that certain time, it would have an influence on their identity. I'm sure that when you come back sometimes you've got to be careful that you don't put players on a pedestal and that when they come back they become part of the club and I think going back to the values. (Interview with Graham, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 15th July 2020)

Here, Graham mentions the importance of clubs offering support to players on re-entering the club environment to re-introduce them to the values and expectations of the club. The interactions with the international setup can lead the player to believe that they have 'taken their game to the next level' and as athletic identity is based on the current athletic circumstance (Grove, Fish & Eklund, 2004) can lead to a shift in identity. This is important as despite the strides that youth academies have taken in recent years to professionalise the environment and create positive developmental opportunities there are still concerns around the high rate of de-selection (Güllich, 2014) and the impact that this can have on players development (see: Ivarsson et al., 2015) and identity (see: Mitchell et al., 2014).

Due to the de-selection being commonplace within international football, particularly in the younger age groups, if a player creates a strong athletic identity associated with their representation of the England youth football teams then they may be more likely to experience emotional concerns when de-selected. This is due to the public reputation that being selected by the national team will bring, particularly for those players from Category 3 or 4 academies. However, it is important to suggest that the de-selection from a national team may not have the same impact on athletic identity as the de-selection or release from the professional club. Players have often suggested that their lives centre on their experiences at the club, however, this is not the case with international sport, due to the fewer touch points with the group throughout the season.

To develop what the EPPP describes as 'educationally rounded people through a holistic approach' (The Premier League, 2021) it is important for organisations to prioritise areas outside of athletic performance. This is integral to international selection as the career of the young footballer is based upon the national governing

bodies selection criteria as well as the players own standing within their current football club. This therefore lends itself to an environment where if a young player wishes to remain involved in international sport, they must invest more time into the development of a performance-based identity in an attempt to be selected for future camps which can cause issues where athletes develop a singular identity.

Identity development is an ongoing process and as such is shaped by social interactions and relationships as well as the environment that the individual is part of. A narrow identity can lead players to neglect other identities, perceiving that this would negatively impact their athletic performance (Cushion & Jones, 2014). This can be seen within this research through the admission that the players felt that they were seen as 'an England player' by club staff and therefore this builds greater expectations on what they should be achieving at their club. To avoid any potential negative consequences of an identity solely based on athlete performance it is important that the developmental environment (professional football clubs and national governing bodies) help the players to develop multiple identities where the players self-worth is not based on becoming a successful athlete.

Upon entering this environment players will be motivated to spend more time on their personal development through experiencing an increase in the significance of the sport in their lives (Pummel, 2008). This leads to athletes who are more motivated to train and play, however, will often prioritise this over other parts of their lives such as schoolwork. Therefore, as the player enters the international environment, particularly at the age of 15-18 where they are required to part-take in compulsory education this may have negative effects on the educational progression of the individual.

Through an identity centred upon a win at all cost mentality there can be issues for those athletes during a transition – particularly the transition out of sport (Breslin & Leavey, 2019). Each youth academy has a different organisational structure with staff at one academy having different roles and responsibilities to staff with the same job title at another club. Having said this a key member of staff in supporting the transition into, and out of, the international environment should be the player care officer/manager. The discipline of player care is still a burgeoning area within youth football academies, with early research into the area suggesting youth coaches are encouraged to care about players and results due to the implications for their own careers (Cronin et al., 2020). According to the Youth Development Rules (The

Premier League, 2021) each Category 1 and 2 academy must employ an individual who is responsible for player care, who would manage the “mental and emotional wellbeing of Academy players” (p. 40), with this role undertaken as an additional responsibility by senior leadership teams at Category 3 clubs. This is a positive step in transition support in a sport that is often described as “cut-throat, competitive, and at times uncaring” (Potrac, Jones, Gilbourne, & Nelson, 2012: 79).

Although professional youth academies are required to provide full-time staff focused on player welfare (The Premier League, 2021) players did not suggest they received support from these staff members when de-selected from the international environment. Through document analysis it is clear that the Youth Development Rules do not currently provide sufficient guidance to player care officers, sport psychologists or safeguarding and welfare officers as to the requirements of their role surrounding de-selection, whether this be from the club or international environment. This raises questions about the efficacy of the welfare programmes in place at professional football clubs and whether the working practices are supportive of the needs of the players in their care.

Using designated staff to focus on areas such as Duty of Care shows a shift in approach within modern academy football, which is important as elite sport development pathways have a duty to understand welfare, education and transition support (Grey-Thompson, 2017). The Duty of Care refers to “the responsibility of each Club to promote, protect and support the individual wellbeing of each Academy Player” (The Premier League, 2021: 80). Although this is an area outlined in the EPPP it has become clear that this has not incorporated the care that young players may require when being released from the international football programme. This remains the case even though the policy document clearly outlines the below:

201. Each Club shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that it protects the welfare of each of its Academy Players and Players up to the Under 23 age group who continue to train with the Academy on a regular basis by offering support for his wellbeing and pastoral care generally (The Premier League, 2021: 63)

Through this approach to protect the welfare of young players this research and its unique findings regarding the issues that young footballers face when de-selected from the international environment should be used as a guidance for policy creators. Although the EPPP is not a document which governs youth international football it would be beneficial for the document to recognise that a key part of the

developmental experience for young footballers may be their experiences with their national team. Hence, future policy should reflect the holistic nature of the talent development environment that players will move through. Through viewing the transition as an opportunity for development these potential shifts in policy are important as there is a relationship between player welfare and long-term team performance and success (Nesti & Sulley, 2015).

When an athlete holds the identity as an England international this may also be seen as an important part of the identity that is perceived as useful for retaining the players position at the club. There is a risk that de-selection from the national team could lead the player to question whether de-selection could be on the horizon at their club as the athletic identities developed are entwined between club and national representation. The football club are required to have an Induction and Transition Strategy which should include provision for new players joining the club (The Premier League, 2021), players leaving the club and players transitioning between development phases. This does not include the international transition, or the wellbeing support required when deselected from a national team.

Issues of athletic identity have been well documented in the extant literature when discussing de-selection from elite sport environments. However, this shift in athletic identity upon entering youth international sport is an original finding from this thesis. It is possible that players can be de-selected based on factors that are less important at a later stage in their development (Williams et al., 2020) and therefore identification, selection and de-selection are difficult processes that, due to an ever changing football environment leads to selection criteria that may become less important over time. It was clear that through international representation the player developed their identity to become that of an 'England player' and they experienced a stronger self-belief which they may not have developed had they negatively transitioned (Brewer, Van Raalte & Petitpas, 2000; Ryba et al., 2016) or not had the initial opportunity to enter the environment. The increased desire and commitment to be successful as a footballer is in line with research into psychosocial competencies in elite adolescent footballers which suggested these characteristics as important for elite player development (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mills et al., 2012), suggesting the importance of international representation to development. Although there needs to be a greater focus on the study of athletic identity in youth international football this potential shift in identity upon entering the national team clearly shows the importance of understanding the required support during the de-

selection process from the squad and the influence this can have on the developing athlete (see: Figure 5.2 below).

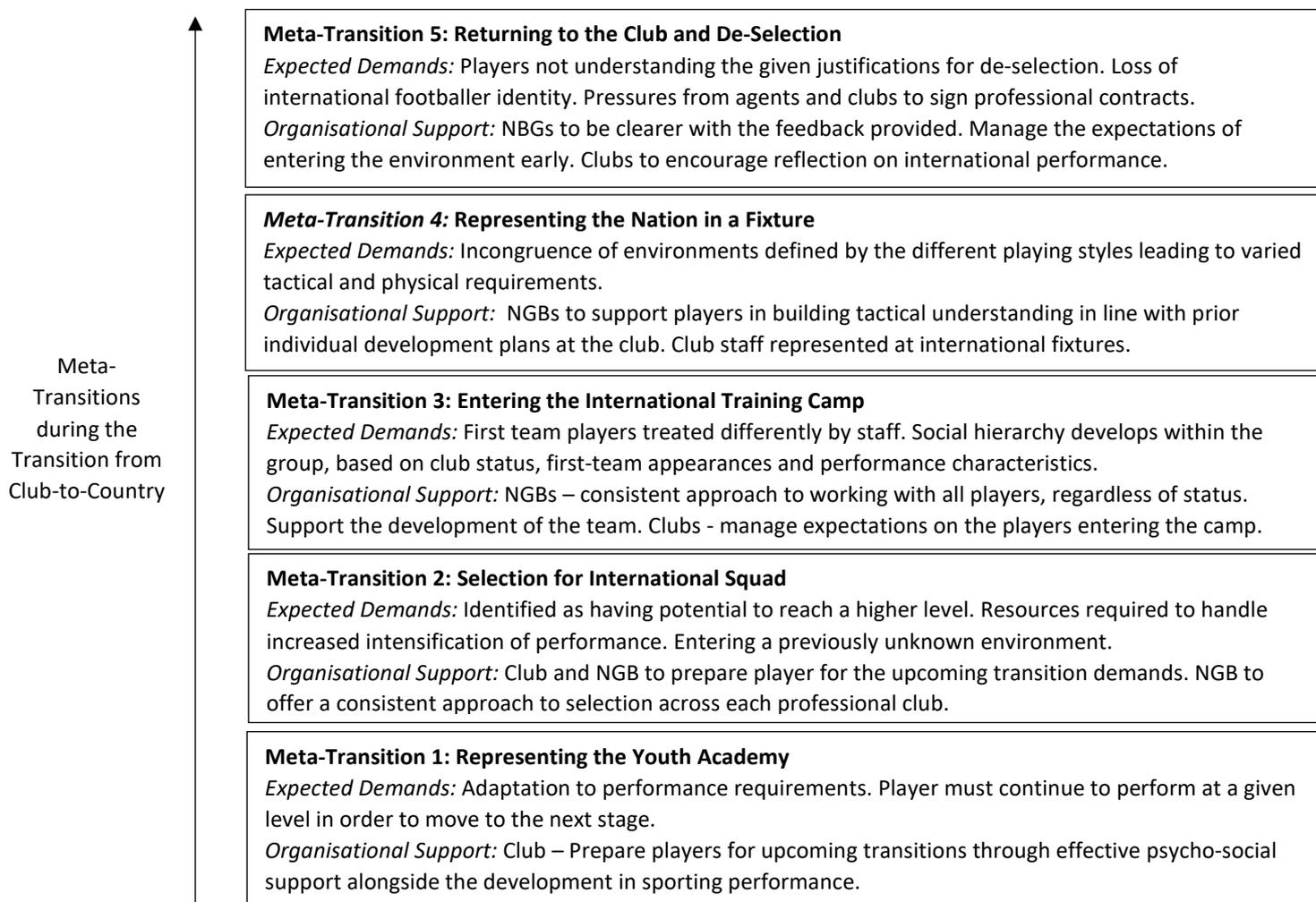


Figure 5.2. Meta-Transition 5: Returning to the club and de-selection

5.3.2. Lack of trust

Having already discussed the shift in athletic identity the next point centred upon the players perceptions of the de-selection process and how this led to a ‘lack of trust’ in the justifications for selection and de-selection. Selection to represent a national football team is unlike selection for other international competitions, such as the Olympic Games, where selection criteria are often objective measures such as time and distance (McEwan et al., 2018). In comparison the players interviewed perceived that both selection and de-selection for national team representation in football to be ambiguous and subjective. Although players appeared aware that their

non-selection at a training camp or fixture may not be permanent there was some frustration with the information provided as to why they have not been called up. A consistent theme was that players valued honest coaches as this built a trusting relationship, however, if a player deemed a coach to not be honest then this appeared to damage their relationship:

I think it would help to be told why you didn't get called up for certain camps, because I think the last camp I went to...I think one of the goals came from my side and it wasn't really great defending and I think they could've told me and contacted me and told me what I could've done with my defending and say why they didn't call me to the February camp. I think that would really help. (Interview with Sodiq, Category One Premier League Player, 3rd February 2020)

Through providing specific developmental feedback that the players perceived as honest the national coaches may reduce the chance of players becoming disillusioned with being part of the environment and meet their objectives of keeping a core of players in the youth international environment for a longer period. As Ben explains, although he had featured in the majority of tournaments and fixtures from U15-U18 he has begun to question 'whether that's true or not' when being told why he was not selected for the UEFA European Championships:

They rung me the other day, they just said it's not based on performance, which I don't think it was, they give you feedback forms after and my feedback was fine, it could just be....they wanted to give people game time. There's the Euros next year and they said they wanted to have a look at others. Whether that's true or not I don't know...Yeah I don't trust England, I've had a few, like when we were under 17s there were eight camps leading up to the Euros and I was the only defender that went every one, started every game which was like 16 games and it came to the Euros and he rang me and said I'm not going because 'I'm not versatile enough'. I think that was just a little cheap excuse, I don't know what his real opinion was, obviously he didn't like me for some reason, but he didn't want to tell me that, I don't know why. (Interview with Ben, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

Although a possible reason for de-selection here may be the requirement for coaches to rotate their squads to provide opportunities for each of the players in their squad list, the lack of critical feedback provided, both in explaining de-selection and in previous training camps, has brought the integrity of the coaching staff into question. Due to a lack of trust in the organisation this may provide a decrease in motivation to be involved in the environment in the future and also cause pedagogic issues where the player no longer applies the feedback from international camps to

their performances and therefore fails to make sporting improvements. This adds further support to building strong coach-athlete relationships that are based on high-level communication in order to avoid missed opportunities for development (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Jowett, 2017). These findings are in line with current research into coach competency and trust that suggests that if a coach is not seen as competent then their trustworthiness will be questioned (Kao et al., 2017). Although the lack of trust in the coach was suggested by certain individuals the trust in the coach is highly influenced across groups (Myers et al., 2005; Kao et al., 2017) and therefore it can be suggested that there may be other players who also do not trust the opinions or actions of national coaching staff.

Through a lack of feedback on de-selection, this not only reduces the perceptions of the coach's competence, an area which would lead players to question the coach's judgements (Malete et al., 2013) but also can result in a reduction in the trust the athlete has in the coach, leading to a worse personal relationship (Middlemas & Harwood, 2018). Pedagogically, the element of trust in sports coaching is integral to coaching practice as the quality of the coach's delivery can be dictated by the trust that the athlete places in them (Cushion & Jones, 2006). Therefore, situations, such as, not providing actionable feedback, which cause players to question whether the coach can be trusted should be avoided. This finding is in line with prior research into coach-athlete relationships that suggests that relationships that experience conflict, such as losing trust in the coaches' methods can incur a great deal of stress on the transitioning athlete (Franck & Stambulova, 2018).

Trust is an indicator for close relationships (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003) and therefore as athletes require effective and functioning support networks to help them achieve high levels of importance (see: Chapter 6) then it is integral the athlete has trust in the coach's competence and opinions. Research suggests that through individualised meetings with players this can help to build relationships and trust between player and coach (Middlemas & Harwood, 2018) and therefore there may be an argument to suggest that the de-selection process for youth internationals would be more beneficial if bespoke meetings were offered, particularly when viewing this transition through the lens of 'support-for-performance'.

De-selection can lead to doubt in one's own ability and even humiliation, compounded by the initial pride that the players felt in being selected this could

result in a fear of failure (Brown & Potrac, 2009). This can be counterproductive to development as a fear of failure has a negative impact on long-term improvement (Sagar, Busch & Jowett, 2010). After de-selection the players also commented on an adjustment to their athletic goals where they appeared to disengage with previously held sporting goals to mitigate their non-selection:

I'm more worried about club football now than international cos I've played my game and I want to see if I can get into the first team now. Obviously if I get selected, I'll go but it's one of those ones where I want to push on and get selected by the new manager [at the club]. (Interview with Sam, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

Sam's comment is in line with previous research that suggests that international selection can help to put athletes long-term goals into perspective (see: MacNamara & Collins, 2010). It is important to suggest that the transition process occurs long before the moment of transition (Torregrossa et al., 2004) and critical moments that take place earlier in an athletic career can impact the success of future transitions (Morris et al., 2015). Indeed, the transition into (and out of) the international environment, is an important developmental period for youth footballers that may not only have an impact on their international career but the likelihood of successfully transitioning into senior sport. Due to the nature of this selection and de-selection process the players would benefit from being provided with structured feedback regarding the reasons for de-selection, which would result in players understanding how they can continue to improve their athletic performance and avoid situations of ambiguity. Jack, who had previously been involved in the England national youth teams as an age group coach proposes some key points regarding the de-selection process of international sport:

That de-selection process is massive, and we don't always get that right, did we always consider the individual? Do we do it face-to-face? Do we go and meet them? Do we liaise with the club effectively? Do we speak to the parents? Do we follow it up a week or two weeks after to see how they're doing? There is a lot of that stuff that clearly is important but unfortunately the coaches get caught up with camps and it doesn't become a priority which is frustrating because once you've made that commitment I think it's important we follow that through. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

This admission from a former member of the national coaching staff explains that national governing bodies must have an awareness of the long-term development of the young footballer, through offering effective support when not selected for

national team representation. This is particularly relevant for those players whom experienced pride in their national team selection and therefore may have begun to build their athletic identity around that of being 'an England player'.

5.4. Chapter Conclusion

The aim of this section was to explain the perceived development impact of international representation. From the analysis it is clear that the opportunity to represent the national football team provides several developmental opportunities that the young footballer can use as to help them to improve their sporting performance. Regarding the transition into senior football it is clear that through selection to international squads the players can replicate a future transition into senior sport through being provided with opportunities to test themselves against players of which they will have not played prior.

The individual factors associated with the club-to-country transition - namely, sporting performance, psychological implications such as self-esteem, and the athletic identity tied to performance, are in line with the individual factors associated with the junior-to-senior transition (see: Drew et al., 2019 for a meta-study of research into the youth-to-senior transition). These similarities show that the youth international environment acts as a similar opportunity for player development as the senior football environment, acting as a bridge between the environments of youth academy football and the oft perceived competitive environment of senior football. Not only does youth international football provide the player with the opportunity to test their ability against other talented players but it helps to develop the self-esteem, confidence and commitment required to be successful in the senior environment.

Players outlined the difficulties involved in being de-selected from the national age group squad that can lead to a lack of trust in the coaching staff and organisation due to not being provided with a sufficient justification of the de-selection. This lack of trust could occur due to the players athletic identity becoming entwined with their status as an international footballer, compounded by the great pride that players feel during representation. Practical implications here are for national staff to offer bespoke support to de-selected players, explaining the reasons for the lack of selection, as well having an awareness of the importance of international representation on the developing players identity.

CHAPTER VI: The relationship between professional football clubs and The FA

This chapter deals with the third overarching theme, which, in predominantly answering the second and third research questions presented in sub-section 1.3, begins to explain how clubs perceive both the support network offered by the national team as well as building a better understanding of the relationship between the international transition and the youth-to-senior transition. In the development of this chapter, three sub-themes inductively emerged: the first focused on professional clubs use of 'international representation as a key performance indicator' for their academy; the second referred to the 'club coach support during international representation' and who held responsibility for the development of the player at this time; and the third centered on the 'national coach support post-camp' and its relationship with the transition into senior football. This information was then used to finalise the development of a model outlining the support young footballers require, at each stage, when transitioning into youth international football.

6.1. International Representation as a Key Performance Indicator

One sub-theme to emerge from the analysis was that of the club's using the number of international players that they developed as key performance indicators to measure the perceived success of their academy. Three points arose from this sub-theme. First was the admission that the development of players who were selected for the national team helped clubs in 'measuring the effectiveness of the programme'. Second, was the use of the players 'international status as a recruitment tool'. The final point surrounded the 'financial implications' that developing international footballers can have for the club, from a contractual and external revenue perspective, and the relationship this can have with the likelihood of the player to reach senior football.

6.1.1. Measuring the effectiveness of the programme

The first point centred on how clubs perceived the selection of their talented players was a measure for how effective their academy programme was. Club staff described that this was 'an indicator that your programme works' (Luke, Head of

Coaching), suggesting that youth development success is linked to factors outside of simply progressing players into first-team squads:

it's something that we are really proud of. When you come into our offices there is a map with the flags of the players who have represented their countries, as a roll of honour, so it's something we are really proud of. I think we went from one cap a few years ago and we've got a lot more than that now. (Interview with Graham, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 15th July 2020)

within our Academy Performance Plan part of that is to create internationally recognised players so again we would actively encourage them to make sure that they are getting that recognition and we wouldn't stop them. Especially within the younger age groups, sometimes they might get one chance of exposure, especially the development camps that some of them do. So again, with us being a Cat. 2 potentially they might not get the opportunities and the exposure that some of the big Cat. 1 players get. They might just get one chance, so from our performance plan perspective and our business model that is something that we would actively work towards because it's good exposure for the programme. (Interview with Stephen, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 15th July 2020)

if our chairman is putting in X amount of million pounds and the average age of a debutant in the Premier League is 21.2 years of age then that's a long time to wait. So, if they get called up it helps you to judge whether you're on the right track. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

Regarding measuring success of youth academies in England, academies will be audited every three years by the external company Foot Pass¹⁵ (O'Gorman et al., 2020) as well as taking part in annual monitoring and evaluation processes by the Premier League (The Premier League, 2021). According to the EPPP, each year the Premier League will provide clubs with a Productivity Profile, with each academy anonymously ranked against other clubs (The Premier League, 2021). The EPPP has 292 key performance indicators that are used to rank the success of the youth academy, with six fundamental principles; 1) increase the number of home grown players playing at the highest level, 2) increase the coaching contact time, 3) improve the quality of coaching, 4) implement effective metrics for quality assurance, 5) provide value for money and 6) seek to improve all aspects of player development (The Premier League, 2021). These KPI's are used to rank the

¹⁵ 'Foot Pass is the English derivative of Double Pass, a Belgian-based advisory and auditing body for professional football academies' (O'Gorman et al., 2020: 14)

effectiveness of the academy and although none of these KPIs directly relate to the development of youth international footballers, clubs have explained how their internal KPIs may differ from the KPIs used by the PL and external auditing companies:

one of our internal KPIs is about having as many players as we can, involved in the national teams from under 16s upwards. Yes, we want as many players as possible because it represents the kind of kids that we've got and who we are selecting and recruiting ready for the later age groups. (Interview with Adam, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 17th June 2020)

one of our KPI's is 50% homegrown [players in the first team] but one of the sub factors of that is that the player has more of a chance of doing that if they become a youth international, so it is definitely something that is important to us. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

we [academy management staff] don't wanna be here for a year or two, you wanna be here for the longer term and make a success of it. To have those international appearances in our KPIs and meeting these KPIs is a big sign to the powers that be that we have talent and we're doing things well. I've said this at numerous technical board meetings where you try to convince them that you've got players, of course that's very subjective, so having that objective measure of, he is a good player, or we do have that talent because they're internationals is much more powerful. (Interview with Nigel, Category One Premier League Academy Manager, 20th July 2020)

Furthermore, the final principle outlined in the EPPP of measuring academy success, 'to improve all aspects of player development', is most pertinent to the transition of footballers from club to international. If clubs are to meet this KPI then there must be policies in place at the club to help them to achieve this. This could be through practical implications, such as, sharing match footage with national associations or creating opportunities for national coaches to attend training sessions, therefore building relationships with the national association to ensure a higher number of players are identified. This is in line with research by De Bosscher (2006) who suggests that stakeholders who work closer together can better support athletes.

Club staff also suggested that a reason for using international representative status as a metric for academy success is that it helps to provide players with additional developmental opportunities: 'it's great life enrichment, you get to travel the four corners of the globe often, to me it's healthy that you go in mixing with other elite players' (Luke, Head of Coaching). This falls in line with club's suggestion that they wish to 'develop people as well as players' (Adam, Head of Coaching):

well we have a mantra here that to play in the Premier League you need to be a youth international, you have to have had those experiences or ideally you have to have had those experiences away from us. To play at the top level in these tournaments where you're playing against the best young players all around the world, if you get the opportunity to go to a World Cup for a sustained period of time, we actually view it as something that we can't provide for them, and actually it's a massive benefit if we get a player who gets an opportunity to go to the World Cup. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

Having suggested that the selection of developing footballers to represent the national teams is an important measure for their academies programme, club coaches suggested that although their players have been selected this does not mean that the player is more likely to transition into senior football. On discussing the likelihood of the player being offered a contract, Adam (Head of Coaching) mentioned that the international status does not necessarily mean that the player will be retained at the academy:

we don't measure it [the players performance] by whether they get called up. I've learnt this in the last two years, that actually we try and succession plan from 12s, 13s, 14s, as to where we see the kids going and their prospects. If we really recognise a future talent at 15 you can offer them a pre-agreed scholarship under the rules and they can formally accept it, so obviously at 12 you can offer them a two year deal, 14 is a two year deal to 16s so if anyone gets a two-year deal for instance and suddenly gets called up for England it wouldn't be 'Oh my God, they've been called up for England let me give them a new contract', because that would probably make us a bit... it wouldn't be part of what we are trying to aspire to do because we want to work with a player to keep improving and we wanna keep them hungry to want more. Just because you played for England doesn't mean you've made it as a professional footballer. (Interview with Adam, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 17th June 2020)

There was a similar finding from other club staff around the international status of the footballer and potential to successfully transition into senior football:

and if you look at the stats of England players at youth level it doesn't mean they're going to play for the first team. It would probably mean that they will have a career at some point or some level but it's not a prerequisite that they would play for the first team in the Premier League. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

This suggests the complexity in organisational priorities within youth academy football in England, as clubs have identified both the selection of player into international representation and the movement of players into senior football as key

performance indicators. Therefore, as club staff have suggested that call-ups may be due to a rotation selection policy rather than sporting excellence this suggests that there are other organisational benefits and implications for youth academies to have international youth footballers amongst their ranks.

A further benefit to clubs for developing youth internationals can be the introduction of proximal role models for other youth players that can have additional performance benefits (Larsen et al, 2013). In wanting to avoid barriers in the transition into senior sport coaches often encourage their players to train with older age groups (Christensen, Laursen & Sörensen, 2011). This provides the developing footballer with the opportunity to build relationships with role models in a more senior environment. The transition into international sport will also offer those players who were not selected similar opportunities to engage with their peers around their experiences which may ease the transition for those individuals upon being selected, a technique often used in successful talent development environments (Henriksen et al., 2010). Henriksen et al. (2010) developed the theory of athletic talent development environments to better understand the factors associated with high performance environments. Their research was in line with these findings as suggested that high the micro-environment of effective talent development environments was characterised by internal role models that show others how to reach a high level of performance. This notion is particularly pertinent within the club-to-country transition as the clubs will have an opportunity to engage their current youth internationals in acting as role models to their teammates. In practical terms this could be through using techniques such as asking the players to present their experiences of international camps to the rest of the group.

6.1.2. International status as a recruitment tool

The second point to emerge from the analysis was that clubs explained how they are beginning to use the status of having international footballers to attract other talented youngsters to their academy. This highlights how the development of players who represent their country can have beneficial implications for the clubs as well as the players:

our budget wasn't as big as other peoples, so it was more of a political recruitment tool. Our investment isn't as much as some of the other Cat. Ones, but I think we were ahead of other people when it comes to providing England internationals from the 15s to 21s,

the number of internationals we had there was a lot. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

for recruitment it definitely helps if you've got players coming in that know of colleagues who are international level or even for younger players who are aware that we've got players that are going into the first team who represent their country. It's certainly very, very valuable and I think what comes with that for the club and the staff are those opportunities to showcase the club. I think it's good for everyone, it would certainly have an impact, you want to be known first and foremost for somewhere that produces players. We want players in the first team, I guess if you do that in the Premier League nowadays as a by-product of that those players more often than not will have some international involvement as well. (Interview with Graham, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 15th July 2020)

it will give an indication of the quality of player you've got in your pathway so it can be a positive recruitment tool. We found that actually we've got a lot of boys from outside the UK, especially the Irish market, where we've generally picked up a couple because of how well a player has done. He might be in the year above them, so UK age group, but same international year group, we pick them up because of how well another player had done so it can help. (Interview with Stephen, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 16th July 2020)

As the identification and selection of talented young footballers increases its intensification of unearthing the sports next superstar (Larkin & Reeves, 2018) the use of novel means to recruit additional players will become commonplace, in part due to clubs needing to balance financial restrictions (see: Financial Fair Play) whilst wishing to remain competitive (Carling et al., 2009). Certain clubs are now incorporating the provision of full-time private education to recruit players from further afield (Rumsby, 2017) and it is clear that the number of international footballers that a club possesses can also act as a 'political recruitment tool' (Luke, Head of Coaching), helping to market the club to parents and players. This is particularly pertinent in that grassroots football, amateur sport outside of professional development programmes, is a key space for identifying talent (Larkin & Reeves, 2018) and due to the competitive nature of recruitment at the younger age groups clubs may wish to advertise the successes of their academy. In this way the status of having international footballers in the academy can help the club to meet other key performance indicators such as the recruitment of local talent. This is particularly the case for smaller clubs who would want to publicise the selection of their academy players to show the strength of their academy setup and encourage others to join their programme:

I think there are clubs who want to link up with [The FA] press guys because they want to make a big deal of it and I imagine they utilise that through their website to say 'look we got another England player through, look how good our Academy is doing'. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

These comments suggest the importance of developing international youth footballers to clubs in that it enables them to source additional marketing opportunities. Sporting organisations continue to invest heavily in talent identification systems (Bailey & Collins, 2013), such as identifying developmental factors (including family support and parenting, see: Finnegan et al., 2017) or technical ability, however, club staff have suggested that certain 'bigger clubs' identify players who are England youth internationals from Category Two or Three clubs and make them a key recruitment target:

what you find is as the players go through the pathway those players who were at category two or three clubs and are still in the England system at 17 or 18, have generally moved clubs. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

Regarding recruitment of players this notion of Category 1 academies identifying international players from Category Two clubs was explained by Stephen, a Head of Coaching at a Category Two club and also by Nigel, a current Category One academy manager who formerly managed a Category Three youth academy with a number of international players:

we've got five boys that were offered scholarships early and part of the reasoning around that was that at under 15s three out of the five of them had got international recognition and we had to act on that to discourage interest from other clubs. (Interview with Stephen, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 16th July 2020)

I'm going to be a little bit critical of our own industry here but the recruitment industry and, not all of it, this is generalising, but there are a hell of a lot of lazy recruitment models and scouts out there and the number one thing they do is identify those international players. One that sticks out for me is [player] who was our first experience of an international. He was at the time under 17, so you read the squad list down and obviously he was near the top because he was a goalkeeper and then after that it was: Arsenal, Chelsea, Man United, Manchester City, Tottenham and he sticks out like a sore thumb. We knew what was coming, you couldn't really protect him against it, it was inevitable, and we knew we would lose him. (Interview with Nigel, Category One Premier League Academy Manager, 20th July 2020)

Through the club staff comments it may be suggested that international representation helps the player not only gain a professional contract but would in

turn have implications for their likelihood to transition into the senior club football environment, due to being offered a contract that they may not have been offered had they not represented their national team. This was also represented in the data gathered with current international players who were aware that clubs may view the international status of a young player as an indicator as to whether to offer a player a professional contract at the age of 18, suggesting that international player status could impact the way that the club perceives their own players:

I knew players that have gone away who are at smaller clubs, like at [Premier League club] for instance, he didn't have a pro and then he went away with England and then they offer him a pro contract straightaway, before he played a game, because he had that status of going away with England. (Interview with Ben, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

The above comments suggest that the international status can have two implications for recruitment. First, that the clubs may use the number of international players that they have as a marker for success which is used to entice future academy footballers to their programme. This is in line with the proposed neoliberalist shift within English football where success is a circular relationship that leads to further success – perhaps exemplifying the inequality that can occur between clubs at an intra-league level (Karak, 2016). As a larger number of clubs continue to search for the best players to add to their squads, those clubs who do more to identify and retain their talent will benefit (Elliot, 2017). This means that players recruited may feel that they will have similar opportunities to represent their national team, however, if clubs wish to develop more international players then there must be a strategy in place to ensure that their players are identified by the national governing body. Certain clubs showed that they have built a strong relationship with the FA, inviting national coaching staff to observe training but there still appeared to be a reluctance to share video footage of players performance on a weekly basis.

Second, that the international status of the youth footballer may be used by scouts and recruitment departments to identify players from smaller clubs who are outside of the formalised games programme of Category One football, and therefore may not be 'in the shop window' (Jack, Technical Director) unless they were international players. This idea of players being targeted due to representing their national team may be a cause for concern for certain clubs who may not want other clubs to identify their prospective talent, particularly if the player has not signed a professional contract, as they may not only lose a player with the potential to make

it to the senior team, but also not receive the maximal financial package for that player (see: 6.1.3). From a talent development perspective, it may be better for youth academies to not promote that they have youth internationals as this could be a stressor (Franck & Stambulova, 2018) that would influence the transition.

In answer to research question three the relationship between the club-to-country and youth-to-senior transitions may be based upon the likelihood of players to be offered an earlier professional contract than their peers in order for other clubs not to offer them a professional deal. Therefore, there may not be a direct correlation as to the number of players representing their country at youth level and then senior club but there may be between youth international representation and being offered a professional contract. more research would have to be done in this area. However, this would imply that national associations have a large part to play in the decision-making processes of professional clubs, and that the selection into the squad can have far-reaching impact on that players career post-representation.

6.1.3. Financial implications

The final point regarding youth academies viewing international footballers as key performance indicators (KPI's) was that it became clear that there were financial implications for developing these players and that this could inform the recognition of international footballers as KPI's. One of the implications was that it led to club staff being able to use the players international experience to help with negotiating contracts at their own club, and in turn led to clubs being able to retain those players, as opposed to players leaving the club to gain more money elsewhere:

if you've got a very talented young man at 14, 15 or 16 you start to talk contracts, so if you're talking contracts the chairman and the chief exec. are involved because it's money and you're competing with the best [clubs] in the world now...when you sit down with the chief exec. and say how much you are going to pay, you have to be able to justify why you are looking to pay that for that player, so if they are an England international or a Republic of Ireland international, for example, then it puts their mind at ease that they're investing in a product that might give them a return to the first team. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

This admission of using the international status of the player during contractual negotiations shows the implications of developing international footballers for clubs. Football clubs have varied core priorities that can be dependent upon a multitude of

factors, however, a return on investment regarding player development has been shown to be a key performance indicator for the internal assessment of success in the operating of youth football academies (Laurin, Nicolas & Lacassagne, 2008; Richardson et al., 2004). This return on investment could be through the player making first-team appearances and therefore saving the club future first-team player transfer fees or through receiving compensation and a fee for the youth player from another football club.

As the price of first-team footballers continues to increase (Larsen et al., 2013), many club's will start to factor in the development of their own footballers as a cost-effective solution to first-team recruitment (Bullough & Jordan, 2017). Professional football clubs will receive up to 49% of their total revenue through commercial markets (Deloitte, 2020), and although Deloitte do not include player transfers as commercial revenue, they do recognise the importance of player transfer income on football clubs' financial strategies. Youth international football is often seen as a by-product of development; however, it may be in the clubs' interests to develop international footballers whom can provide the club with a potentially lucrative revenue stream, if sold. This has led UEFA (2005) to suggest that 'sporting and ethical values are being eroded under increasing commercial/ financial pressures' (p.18). This idea of 'commoditised childhood' (Gammelsæter, 2020) has the potential to ask difficult moral and ethical questions to clubs and is a factor in how the Premier League and The FA work with clubs to ensure their legitimate stake in the developing footballer is "desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (Suchman, 1995: 574, cited in Mitchell et al., 1997: 869). From the data collected, reference was made to the desire of clubs to generate income through player sales and that international footballers form part of this model:

I think a lot of those Cat. Two and Cat. Three clubs, if they've got a young international star, they do put their players in the shop window in order to get them sold to the highest bidder. Obviously it's a competitive market so when you've got two or three clubs that are in for the same player it's up to the club whether or not they up their offer isn't it. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

It is important to suggest that none of the club staff proposed that the development of the young person came second to the requirement to generate revenue, but it was accepted that due to the increasing demands of football as a business there

must be a means to ensure clubs academies can generate revenue. Professional clubs have complex objectives, where public objectives may differ from what happens in practice, for example, “economic maximization is rarely expressed, contrary to sporting performance which is over accentuated” (Senaux, 2008: 16) within elite sport. It may be cynical to suggest that youth players provide clubs a financial return on investment (Nesti & Sulley, 2014), however, with some Premier League youth academies reporting an annual spend of up to £4.9 million (Larkin & Reeves, 2018) clubs must search for different solutions for revenue generation. Professional football clubs may not openly suggest that income generation from selling youth players is a core priority, however, through receiving compensation for the transfer of youth players (The Premier League, 2011) the economic generation opportunities that this provides cannot be ignored:

we would never stop a boy from going on international duty or on an international camp because profile wise for us, obviously that's recognition for the boy, but recognition for the programme and also around compensation and transfer fee it adds to the profile and value of the player. So, we're not in that bracket that some of the Cat. 1 clubs are where they might say that it's not appropriate for that player to go on that camp. (Interview with Stephen, Category Two Premier League Head of Coaching, 16th July 2020)

there are certain cases where, especially with the international boys, it's too hard to fight against it and as part of the business model of smaller clubs you need to sell one or two players, potentially every year. That was our model we went with, it cost the club £350,000 a year to run the academy so we needed a way to fund that. (Interview with Nigel, Category One Premier League Academy Manager, 20th July 2020)

The FIFA training compensation mechanism introduced a form of protection for clubs and limits international transfers of the most talented youngsters (Laskowski, 2019). Club staff interviewed explained that the scheme helps to compensate clubs for the development of footballing talent: ‘whether he’s an England International at a Cat Three he is still worth the same amount of money to a Cat. One’ (Luke, Head of Coaching). According to the EPPP clubs will receive compensation for their academy products, decided by the Professional Football Compensation Committee (PFCC), in order to ensure competitive balance in the football market (Laskowski, 2019). The PFCC includes an independent Chair, representatives from The Football League and Premier League, and representatives of The Professional Footballers’ Association and the League Managers’ Association. In making the decision of how

much compensation clubs should pay there are a number of factors to take into consideration, including; the status of both 'the transferor club and the transferee club, the age of the player, the amount of any fee paid by the Transferor Club upon acquiring the registration of the Player, the length of time during which the Transferor Club held the registration of the Player, the terms of the new contract offered to him by both the Transferor Club and the Transferee Club [and] his playing record including any international appearances' (EFL, 2020).

Through the compensation scheme clubs are limited in terms of the value they can receive for the player, however, in order to find additional ways to increase revenue over a longer period club staff have suggested that there are additional means to generate income outside of the formal compensation scheme:

A lot of the contracts might say, I'll pay you the going rate for the compensation, however, we'll give you 10% on X amount of international appearances, we'll give you another 15% if he plays X amount of first-team games and then if you sell him on again we'll give 5%. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

there are standard development fees based on the length of time at the club. Probably the selling club would want to put a case forward for an increase sell-on fee or some international payments if the player went on to represent the senior [international] team, for example. So, it would have some impact, but it wouldn't have a significant immediate impact on those initial costs. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

It was also explained that if multiple clubs were interested in a player then this could encourage the buying club to offer above the expected compensation:

basically, in the English market it became a bidding war because obviously there is a set compensation for that player. He had, had international recognition at 15s and 16s so if one club had gone in they would've been able to get that fee but because there was more than one club they were offering more money. The UK clubs were in a bidding war because of the situation that he was in, however, what happened was and this goes back to one of your original questions, the agent made the most money out of it because what the [buying] club did is they pushed the fee to the agent and not to the club. The club got the set fee which would've been the European cost but in reality we probably lost a few hundred thousand from that because what they did was convinced the player to go there, loaded the deal with the agent and family and that's why he ended up going abroad. It's an issue that they can legally do that they can pay the money to the agent and the family. They only have to pay a

set compensation fee to that club and that's how they blew the other UK teams out of the water. (Interview with Stephen, Category Two Premier League Head of Coaching, 16th July 2020)

The above comment tells us much about the financial dealings within youth academy football and explains the changing face of elite youth sport in England. As clubs have been shown to use the international representative status of their players for a financial benefit, through demanding fees for players above the level of compensation, placing specific clauses into contracts and using the status within contract negotiations, this shows the paradoxical relationship between club and governing body. This is because, although clubs have described international youth football as an added benefit to their programme, they are quick to explain that the player is 'theirs' and therefore not the commodity of the national associations. This brings into question the relationship between clubs and international football as it would appear that due to the financial implications that having players in the national squads can bring, international football can have real benefits to the future financial success of professional youth academies.

Clubs have also identified the potential pitfalls of international representation, suggesting that: 'something that goes hand-in-hand when you are selected with England is that other external factors come into play that you cannot control, you cannot control agents, family, friends people giving them advice, telling them what they should do and how they should do it' (Adam, Head of Coaching). Although clubs are bound by FIFA regulations to release players for international duty when called upon (FIFA, 2018) there may be a lack of willingness to do this due to the points raised in the previous section around 'putting players in the shop window' and also the financial costs for a club:

It was always a big frustration of the clubs and the clubs would be the first ones to say at 15s and 16s we don't really want them with England because we are trying to secure them on a scholarship and it puts him in a shop window and the agents are knocking on the door saying he's an England player now. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

The way the European market works is completely different to the UK, so we've got a lad, he's now signed a long-term deal with us. If I'm honest if he hadn't had the international recognition when he did... it completely inflated his profile, he is a good, good player but... would we have offered him something past his scholarship had he not had the international recognition? We had to do that [offer the contract] to safeguard against losing him because if the

likes of Bayern Munich comes in and offers a player and the parent to go over there, even at our club as a relatively well-known Cat. Two club we wouldn't be able to compete with that, it does bring its pitfalls in certain areas. (Interview with Stephen, Category Two Premier League Head of Coaching, 16th July 2020)

When a player goes on international duty we need to check in, especially if it's gone really well. Certainly, for us, with our players, there will be lots of players from other teams, other clubs, lots of scouts and lots of agents at the international scene. We wanna make sure that they come back to us in a similar place as to when they left. We don't want it to be something where they go, and those distractions are there and they might get swayed to go somewhere else. (Interview with Graham, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 15th July 2020)

Clubs have suggested that the status of developing players who represent the youth international teams can be used as a measure of the success of their development as well as a recruitment tool for future players and a financial benefit through the use of contractual clauses. Youth academies will benefit from the enhanced performance of their stakeholders (Relvas et al., 2010), such as the PLs continued growth as a commercial entity to drive more revenue towards its clubs or the successful management practices of the England youth national teams in providing developmental experiences for their players. If youth footballers are seen as "marketable assets" (Stratton et al., 2004: 201) it would appear that academies with international youth footballers can use this status as a key performance indicator, from both a developmental and financial standpoint.

This should impact the compensation scheme policy enacted by FIFA as if foreign clubs had to abide by the transfer and compensation regulations of the national association in which the 'selling club' was based then less money would be lost by players leaving to go abroad. Difficulties here are that the compensation scheme currently in place by English clubs is part of the EPPP, which was voted for by its constituent clubs and therefore, as foreign clubs have not accepted these policies it may be difficult to find an understanding of compensation payments. A solution could be for a FIFA policy on compensation that considers national associations policy and governance procedures to safeguard clubs from not receiving viable compensation to the same extent as if their player were to join a club in the same national association.

6.2. Club Coach Support During International Representation

The second sub-theme to emerge regarding the relationship between clubs and The FA was the support provided to the developing players by the club coaching staff during and after international representation. Two points emerged from this sub-theme. The first fixated on the 'support networks' that clubs have in place for their academy players during the international transition and the relationship of these networks with FA staff. The second centered on the 'sharing of performance data' by both the football club and FA to support the development of the young footballers.

6.2.1. Support networks

The first point to emerge from the sub-theme was the support networks that clubs have in place to support players during the transition. This is important as the social support provided by both teammates and coaches is a significant factor in the success of a transition within football (Morris, 2013). A consistent finding with transition research is the importance of social support during retirement or de-selection to avoid negative consequences of the transition (Park et al., 2012). Here, social support can be defined as "the perceived comfort, caring, assistance, and information that a person receives from others" (Lox et al., 2010: 102). Through the data analysis it became clear that each club adopted its own methods of how to support players and the role of the individual managing the international transition was club dependent. Some club staff suggested that the academy manager was the key point of contact whereas others suggested the lead phase coach or head of coaching. Stephen explained this further:

In some instances, I could be chasing a report up that has been sent to our head of operations and that person may have left and they're still sending it to that email address. So, I guess from a process perspective how often are they updating the contact information for the appropriate person at the club? There is then a disconnect, for instance, I have a good relationship with the out of possession coach for the under 16s, we've had two or three call-ups from the last season, so I'll speak to him but then he's not the one that sent the report. I don't know how the report gets to us. They could probably be a little bit more tailored in their approach to how they send their report and then they know the appropriate person that it goes to. (Interview with Stephen, Category Two Premier League Head of Coaching, 16th July 2020)

This lack of identification of the key stakeholders at each club who are responsible for effectively disseminating the information from the player on the camp will lead to difficulties in how the club can support player development at this time. High levels of social support have been found to increase the likelihood of a successful transition due to support staff able to help the athlete cope with any potential setbacks that may occur (Stambulova, 2003). It has also been shown that an increased social support structure improves the prospect of a successful senior sport transition (Holt & Mitchell, 2006). Within the international transition one player explained the good practice that his club offers in the way of support:

there is a coach that goes and watches, travels with the International boys. He used to be the under 15s and 16s coach. He is quite experienced; his job role now is when players go on International break, he's flying out to wherever they're playing to be a scout for [the club] and report back to you. So, when we played Germany he went out and watched it and when I got back here, he sits down with you and speaks about how he thought I done. I have a really good relationship with him because I worked with him at 15s and 16s, so I know that he's honest with his feedback. It's quite informal just a chat. (Interview with Ben, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

Other professional clubs would benefit from offering support similar to this to youth internationals in order to show the player they are invested in their development and to align what the player is doing on international duty with their club focus; to better prepare them for a potential upcoming transition into senior sport. In the youth-to-senior transition a common barrier to transition success is the lack of social support that players receive, leading to increased uncertainty and a lack of focus on development (Richardson et al., 2012). Therefore, methods such as this will help the player be more successful in the transition. It has been found that through educating parents on the youth-to-senior transition the athlete could have beneficial conversations with their parent about any issues during the transition (Morris, Tod & Oliver, 2015). An important concept here is to educate club coaches on the transition into international sport as although many academy coaches may have played professionally (O'Gorman et al., 2020) few will have represented their country at youth level, particularly during the modern structure of academy football outlined in the EPPP (The Premier League, 2011).

Since the emergence of the EPPP club coaches have been encouraged to take more responsibility for the players that they are working with (O'Gorman et al.,

2020), however, players suggested that the contact from club coaches after international representation felt like they were being tested rather than having a developmental focus:

sometimes you get a message from [academy manager] asking how I did...when he might of sent a scout out to watch and the scout might have already given him feedback... he wants to hear your feedback ... we might talk one-to-one about it but he just wants to see how you evaluate the game to see if you remember everything so he might give you a message an hour or two after the game and then maybe when you come in he will talk to you after a few days or something. (Interview with Greg, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

This surveillance of performance is not unique in youth football (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Partington & Cushion, 2012) but international footballers must meet the objectives of dual 'policy actors' as both the club and international coaching staff will have their own micro-level policies dictated by their organisations and the youth international footballer is at the centre of this. This was demonstrated by the following interviewee, who stated: 'they asked me how it went and that but not one to one where you're sitting down, it was in the corridor. They asked me how I done but they probably got feedback from England themselves' (Interview with Sam, player). Through a lack of interaction from the club coaches post-camp the club staff are missing an opportunity to encourage reflective skills in their players that "can cultivate an environment in which athletes and teams are empowered to engage with, and contribute to, their technical and tactical development" (Mills et al., 2012: 1602). This increased self-awareness through reflecting on performance is integral to career development (McCarthy & Garavan, 1999) and provided alongside increased levels of social support during the transition will result in a positive impact on player development.

It was widely acknowledged by the club staff that although the player was signed to the club, when they were away with the national team they were the Governing Body's responsibility and the club coaches felt that to offer support to prepare players technically and tactically for national representation would not have been an effective use of resources. From the club coach's perspective incorporating the needs of another organisation and preparing their players to best perform for the national team may be counterproductive, as outlined by Luke:

I don't give a shit about his international team if I'm brutally honest, it's a real bonus that occurs but I'm not gonna do anything

particularly different. For me it's about them doing that, they need to bridge the gap to us because ultimately he is our player, he goes on loan to England. So, they should be working very hard, I don't think we should be sticking the olive branch out, they should be doing that. It's hard enough as it is to get players stuck into a first-team Premier League club, if we started to divert some of that time to get them prepped for an U17 Euros then there is no chance. It's a diversion of resource that I don't think I'd be comfortable with. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Club Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

The approach of assuming a player 'goes on loan to England' explains the perception of clubs ownership of players, discounting the holistic development environment that is afforded these players. One of the key factors related to success in talent development are environmental factors, such as the impact of significant others and the provision these individuals provide (Mills et al., 2012). If national team representation is to be seen as an important talent development environment, then it is integral that an optimal environment is created that allows for player development as well as player representation.

Support must be put in place by stakeholders to not only support the players well-being during any transition but to ensure the performance of the individual is not negatively affected (Hollings et al. 2014). Clubs have been shown to offer support to players during international representation that is less focused on offering direct support to the player but act more as an ambassador for the club. The role of the loans manager tends to show that the club have a vested interest in the player whilst on international duty: 'If England are at St George's Park I try to connect with the parents who have gone to the game to show that the club are interested in how their boy is doing away from the club as it were' (Interview with Neil, Category One Premier League Loans Manager, 14th July 2020).

Although this approach may not be directly focused on the player this role could help to manage expectations of the parents. This is important as parental support has been shown to be a source of stress during a sporting career transition (Morris et al., 2017). It is important for professional clubs to manage the expectations of parents throughout the talent development programme, in particular, during international selection parents should be told exactly what will be required of their child and the relevant support that the child may require during this period.

From a club perspective it is important for the player to be supported during this transition as if insufficient social support is provided the athlete is likely to experience

loss of confidence and increased stress (Bruner et al., 2008). If this was to occur during international representation, then it would be fair to assume that performances at the club would be affected post- representation. Moreover, when a player perceives their environment to be supportive and focused on their long-term development, they are more likely to have higher levels of well-being and as a result suffer from less stress (Ivarsson et al., 2015). Hence, practical implications such as club representatives attending international fixtures, informal conversations with players post-camp and managing parent expectations are all important tools to better support players at this time.

6.2.2. Sharing performance data

The second point surrounded the desire, or lack of, for clubs to share performance data with the FA, leading to players entering an environment that may not be aware of their recent physical load, individual programmes, from a tactical or technical perspective or psychological profile. Since the introduction of the EPPP clubs are required to collect large swathes of data from their academy players on a daily basis. However, the EPPP does not currently incorporate any guidance or policy on the requirements of clubs to share performance data with external parties, although, this could be considered good practice. In a study by McCunn et al. (2018) sport science and medicine staff across a number of different professional football academies suggested the importance of sharing injury data with the national team, however, only 49% of practitioners suggested that coaches would formally review this data. This has implications for injury prevention measures during international representation and could contribute to the reasons that clubs deny their players entry to international camps. In support of prior research, the club staff interviewed explained how other developmental data can also be ignored in the international environment:

as it's evolved and England has had some more success it's more of a snobbery and arrogance which has come back in, which is natural in elite football so it's not a bad thing that I say it that way. They're almost like, 'it's our camps, our DNA, so we're going to work on the bits we want to work on', in regards technical and tactical stuff. So, I don't really care what his ILP (independent learning plan) is when he's with you and the classic example of that is we've currently got a player who plays number 10 but England see him as not good enough as a number 10 so they want him in the camps as a left back. They said, do you mind us calling him up as a left back,

I said it's got nothing to do with us it's about the boy isn't it. I'd be amazed if any boy turned down the opportunity to play for his country, but you have to ask the player. We are telling you he's a number 10 and we think you're wrong to say he's a left back however it's up to the player. The player goes but he's not happy, his ILPs don't line up at all when he goes off to England. He is learning defensive stuff and out of possession stuff and then when he comes back to us he is an attacking midfield player, so it's evolved over time, those discussions aren't really had any more. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

As outlined in Chapter 5, professional clubs do not always perceive the international environment as being one that is concerned with player development, viewing it as an opportunity for an extended games programme. This is in line with previous research that suggested that from a sample of 26 leading youth academies across Europe, only the Swedish clubs (n=4) suggested that their purpose was to also help to develop players for the Swedish national team (Relvas et al., 2010). This appears to also impact upon the likelihood of these clubs incorporating the data gathered from the international domain into the players' review process, limiting the developmental impact that international football can have upon the player. From a national coach perspective, it was explained by Jack that whilst working for England he would share an 'international individual development plan (IDP)' with the clubs but that some clubs responded negatively to this introduction of a more formalised player feedback system from national camps:

we will send them an IDP and they will say, we don't want to see this, we don't want anything to do with this, we develop the players. It's quite a traditional idea I think, and we have been quite open to get club staff to spend a couple days on camp with us to give them the perspective that they don't just train for two hours per day. They train, there are one-to-one meetings and unit meetings, there are team meetings, there are on-site programmes going on. There is such a vast programme that goes on internationally to support the players development that the clubs, some of the clubs, aren't really seeing so it is a difficult one and it is frustrating. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Cub Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

It is important to share performance data as the subjective view of the coach is not always reflected in the objectively assessed data (Niederer et al., 2019). A solution to embed national team performance data into the player development process would be for each club that has international footballers incorporating the feedback from national coaches into their individual development plans as part of the multi-

disciplinary review process. This process takes place every six weeks for 12-18-year olds and as necessary for 19-21-year-old (The Premier League, 2021). The EPPP suggests that best practice in multi-disciplinary review meetings is that they “should not only measure the academy player’s progression against his own performance targets, but also benchmark his development against that of his peers” (The Premier League, 2021: 24). Through incorporating international feedback into the formal review process this will not only continue to support the players development as an international footballer but will help to provide the player with the developmental implications as outlined in Chapter 5, namely, improving their game understanding and technical ability as an elite youth footballer. The use of data informing the academy review process is compounded by the recognition of club coaches that certain academy players have performance targets based on being selected for the England squads. Therefore, through a transparent approach from both parties in sharing performance data, club coaches can ensure the long-term development of youth international footballers for the benefit of club and country.

If clubs do not buy-into the learning opportunities that occur on international camps then it appears likely that players will not engage with the data or video footage they are provided after the camp. When discussing national team match footage, a player explained, ‘I’ve probably still got access to it on my phone somewhere, they’ve got their own video thing’ (Sam, player) but described that he would not be likely to watch it as it wasn’t by mentioned by his club. This was also highlighted by other current England youth internationals:

I haven’t really watched a video of me playing for England with a coach but I don’t know how but they saw me play one of the matches and then I spoke to one of them and they gave me feedback and said what I could’ve done better and we just spoke about it. (Interview with Sodiq, Category One Premier League Academy Player, 3rd February 2020)

Therefore, the fact that players do not engage with national team performance data outside of camp could be due to the lack of joined up thinking between club and national association, and that the club do not often take an interest in what happens during the national camp.

A current Technical Director, formerly heavily involved in the management of international youth football explained that the inclusion of international performance data could create an optimal development opportunity for those young footballers who represent their national team:

you don't necessarily need to be face-to-face so the back end of the camp it will be really good if the coach, the player and the national coach can have a proper in-depth conversation about the players experiences. You might say, we see some of those traits, or no that's totally different to what we see, he's actually really good at that, okay then let's have a conversation to talk that through. It might be a tactical reason for that or we might be asking them to do something totally different and that's okay and that's fine but I definitely do feel that it's almost as if you had the club IDP and then underneath that you have the international and a number of reports that maybe twice per season we then come together with the parents, the player and the club to have a really open 360 degree review from a club and international perspective and even just those open conversations will show the player that the international programme and the club programme are connected together to benefit them... I think that will be utopia. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

The ability to remain focused on long-term development is important during a transition (Drew et al., 2019) and therefore through clubs and national governing bodies becoming more transparent with performance data this enables the partner organisation to continue conversations with the player around their progress. This is important as research suggests that successful talent development environments are characterised by an alignment between organisational objectives (Martindale et al., 2005).

To support the transition into a new environment athletes should be helped to understand the new environment that they are moving to and how this differs from the one they have left - or in the case of international sport, the one they are due to re-enter. A means to achieve this would be to not only share the performance data with the club staff but also with the player. Club staff could then explain the differences between their data to help them to understand the technical and physical differences between performance for club or country. An issue here could be the hyper-focus on performance and lead the player to feel the scrutiny that often comes with elite sport (Cushion & Jones, 2011). However, this could also help to prepare players for the upcoming transition; a factor often shown within the literature as supporting athletes with future transition demands (Alge, 2008; Olsson & Pehrson, 2014; Jones et al., 2014).

6.3. National Coach Support Post-Camp

The third and final sub-theme to emerge regarding the relationship between professional youth academies and the FA was the 'national coach support post-camp', including the communication between national coaching staff and club staff between camps. This sub-theme involved two key points. First, both players and club staff commented on the 'national coach-player feedback' provided by national coaches and the impact this can have on player development. Second, was the 'contact with club and player' by national coaches between camps and how the relationship between clubs and the FA can impact the players experiences of representing their country.

6.3.1. National coach-player feedback

The first point surrounding the national coach support provided post-camp regards the feedback provided to clubs and players at the end of the international camp experience. Adam, a current Head of Coaching at a Category One club and former national team age group coach explained this process from a club perspective:

we get a four corner template with a few remarks in each of the four corners and some stand out things that might of happened and then a small action plan as to what might follow and then I usually get a brief phone call from the 16s coach or 17s coaches to say what it means and I will then make some notes and probably relay that to the academy manager and the phase leads, if there's anything they need to know I'll probably drop some information in because I'm conscious of giving too much to too many people and then it probably gets a bit distorted along the way. (Interview with Adam, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 17th June 2020)

The current international footballers interviewed commented that they were aware that their club received feedback on their international performances, however, similar to the findings on sharing performance data in sub-section 6.2.2, the players were unclear on the feedback the club were given and did not know whether the club and The FA had communication about their performance. From the players perspective, there appears to be a perceived lack of communication between governing bodies and professional clubs regarding international footballers' development during international representation. This has been shown by players explaining that they were not aware whether their national coach had access to their independent development plan, and this led to feedback which the players felt did not support their development when they returned to the club environment:

they say like a summary but they don't give you individual feedback for each game so I wouldn't know [what to improve] they might say you did well at this during the camp. They said, for example, passing through the lines, I don't know if they mean in the first game I played or the second time we played. I need to know more specific stuff. (Interview with Greg, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

It is clear that talent development programmes must provide congruent support networks and messages to athletes (Martindale et al., 2005). Although the organisational priorities of professional clubs and The FA differ, each stakeholder has an interest in the continued development of the player and therefore, there is an incentive to cooperate in order to support each other to meet their objectives (Aoki, 1984). In order to achieve this, it would appear important for national associations to build relationships with clubs to source as much information on the players as possible and, if aiming to help the players develop, ensure that clubs are aware of the feedback that has been provided:

in the past it was a must that the England coach rang the club coach up and gave them formal feedback. Now as time constraints occur that's hard but I think it's really important and from that you've got stronger rapport and I can then sit down with that player in his review, link the ILPs [individual learning plans] a little bit, mention some of the feedback from England within that as well so it's a much more joined up holistic approach because it was part of the players journey, it doesn't matter if club or international, it needs to be joined up. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Academy Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

This is in line with stakeholder theory that suggests that "a good system of governance should then be one where managers take into account the interests of the different stakeholder groups" (Senaux, 2008: 6) and that governing bodies must cooperate with other organisations whom have similar interests (Henry & Lee, 2004). Due to the high stake both stakeholders have in the players development a more comprehensive approach may be needed to safeguard their assets (Hill & Jones, 1992). In practical terms this may be through clubs ensuring players independent development plans are shared with national coaches, as mentioned in sub-section 6.2.2, but also through national coaches providing feedback which can then inform the development plan on return to the club. Pedagogically this would avoid feedback from national coaches which is tokenistic in nature (Weakley et al., 2019) and would encourage players to reflect upon their international performances, particularly as during transition athletes are likely to make more mistakes and

therefore reflection on their performance is vital to future development (Morris et al., 2016). From a pedagogic view point the player would benefit from more contact by national staff between camps, as outlined below:

I would like to have seen England able to do more... away from football contact to show they care about the players and I think often the players heard from the staff because there was a camp coming up rather than consistently hearing from national coaches when things were good for them or bad for them and they knew they were a support mechanism to help them but it is difficult when you only get 60 or 70 days if you're lucky. I do feel like they could do more on that social connection side for sure. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

for me it's about paying an interest and having that understanding of the person. It might be nothing to do with the England camp or England games but if I have got something around receiving in the pockets, or trying to get into the no man's land to receive between lines then if you noticed that in the game and you know that's their ILO then you can say, 'listen, well done on this bit and I'll make sure I tell Luke that you did really well'. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

Having a strong relationship with the coach can have a range of benefits, including performance-related (Jowett et al., 2012) as well as a positive influence in psychological well-being (Davis & Jowett, 2013). Using basic tenets of Bowlby's attachment theory Davis and Jowett (2014) suggested that proximity maintenance (e.g. coach is close when needed) is integral when fostering a supportive relationship that can enhance sport performance and positively influence athlete well-being. Therefore, opening "channels of communication appear to be an obvious mechanism that would allow coaches and athletes to know and understand each other" (Jowett, 2007: 71). This finding could be explained through the following model of the meta-transition, 'return to club':

Meta-
Transitions
during the
Transition from
Club-to-Country

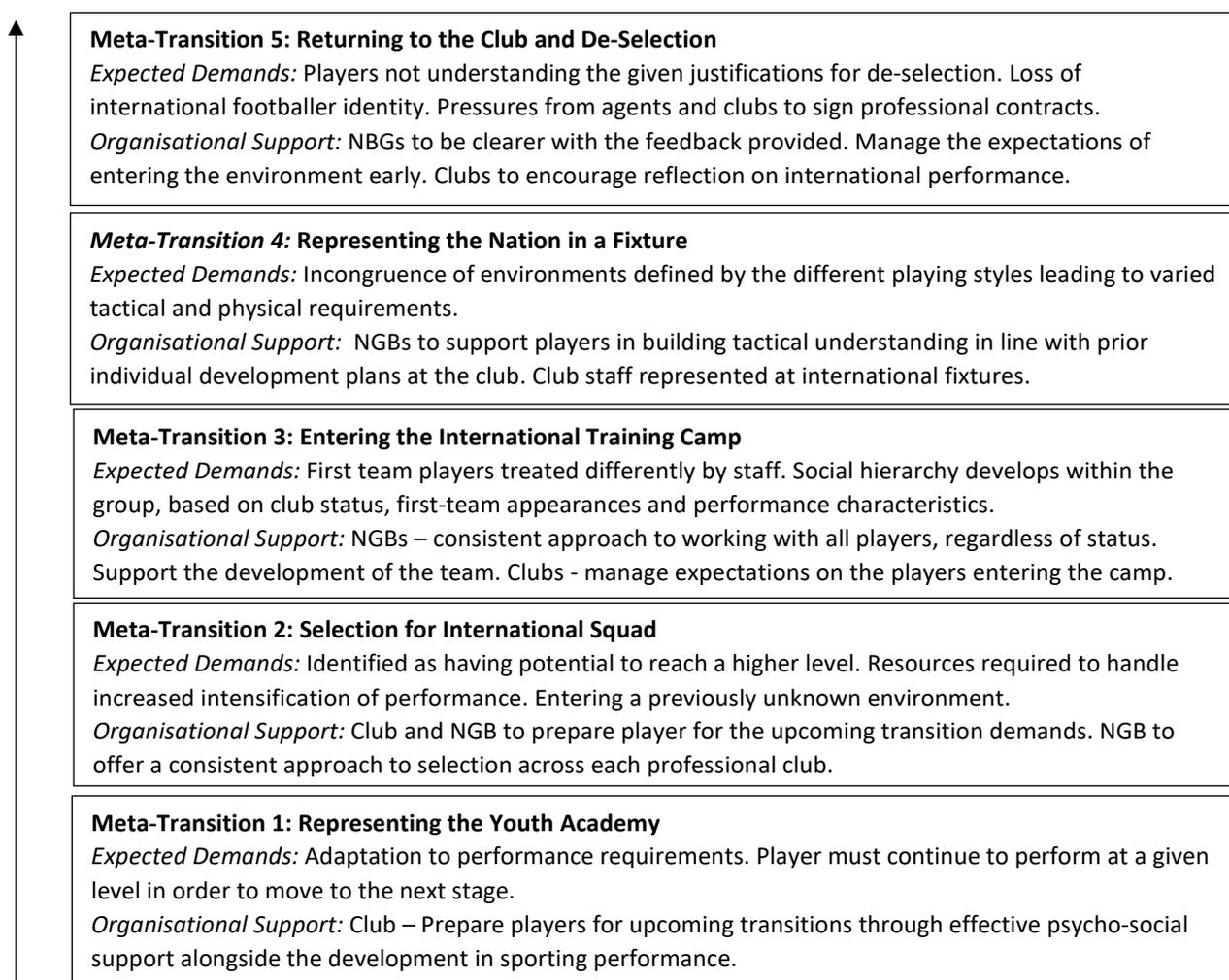


Figure 6.1. Meta-Transition 5: Returning to the club and de-selection

6.3.2. Contact with club and player

The second point refers to the contact that the national coaches have with the young footballers between training camps and fixtures, and how the relationship between clubs and the FA can impact the players experiences of representing their country, informing the success in the youth-to-senior transition. Jack, a current technical director and former member of staff working with the England development teams explained the difficulties that The FA can have in managing relationships with different clubs:

each club wants different things, you're really dealing with 20 or 30 individual clubs that all want the information and correspondence to look very, very different and often I feel that the player and parent will sometimes be left out of the loop. There are about 12 clubs that provide the majority of England players so clearly the time that the national coaches have will be spent in those clubs because that is where the players are and that's where our opportunities to

influence and impact on their development are, so we're going to clearly do that. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

The youth footballers explained that although they felt supported by the national coaches on camp: 'the way they look out for us, especially in training is quite nice' (Interview with Jeremy, player), on return to their parent club, following international duty, they did not receive additional support or contact from National coaches:

I would like some contact definitely, it shows that like, you know, I think they obviously do care for me but it would show they care for me, and still wanna make contact, and it would make me a better player and look at feedback on me and what I done good and that would help. They have done that before, but I would like contact as well. (Interview with Sodiq, Category One Premier League Player, 3rd February 2020)

obviously at the end of the camp they give you what they thought of the performance, what you did well and what you can improve on but after that you don't really hear from them unless you go back. (Interview with Sam, Category One Premier League Player, 21st November 2019)

As players have suggested that they would like more detailed feedback and support this may have an implication for policy makers when thinking about how best to support the transition in and out of the youth international environment. This is a concern within the wider literature as was mentioned by Kristiansen et al. (2018) in their work in understanding athletes experiences of the Youth Olympic Games, here, it was found that those athletes who participated in the games felt it was a motivating factor to continue in the sport but that poor relations with the coach led to dropout. This is important here as although the players made it clear that there are times during the season that the national setup may send scouts to their club fixtures they suggested that they would rather see representation from coaching staff: 'one scout could think one thing and someone else could think another, and then the managers like "I don't know what to think, I'd rather hear what he thinks"' (Ben, player). The challenge for national coaches lies in the ability to offer support to such a large pool of players but also to provide different levels of support at different times throughout the season or competitive phase: 'If the Euros are coming up then I wanna hear more what's going on' (Jeremy, player). This suggests the importance of national team coaches understanding the needs of their players and providing contextual information outside of the international camp environment as well as during. The youth footballers interviewed each had a clear understanding of their own career

journey to date and each showed a desire to progress and learn. As they were aware of the competitive nature of international sport, they also explained how contact from the national coach prior to a camp could help them to meet their objectives:

I think that sometimes before camps it would be nice to get a heads up in terms of a little phone call from the head coach just to notify why you get called up on the Saturday. If you get called into the squad you wanna know why you are being called up, you wanna know what you've been doing well so you can keep doing that. (Interview with Frank, Category One Premier League Player, 24th May 2021)

The notion of national coaches offering more support between camps was also raised by club coaches:

I think England need to engage more in communication with age group coaches, I often wonder if you're only working 52 days a year on the grass what are you doing for the other 300? You've got plenty of time to have relationships with those clubs, to build the bridges and the understanding I get that they will have paperwork, talent ID stuff but for me there is no excuse that they can't pick up the phone and have a real in-depth conversation. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

I think it's more about trying to support the player from both ends. Kids do it really well because they are resilient, they can switch hats, when they get transferred to another club or other points in their career they're going to have to be able to do that. I think it's more about the support during the transition of the player between environments and helping them tactically, socially, psychologically to make that transition easier and help them adapt to the two different demands that each environment asks of them. You don't get that if you don't get contact between international camps. (Interview with Nigel, Category One Premier League Academy Manager, 20th July 2020)

Although there was a theme that clubs desire more support from national coaching staff it was also suggested that clubs would be treated differently by the national staff due to the status of the academy, on discussing the lack of contact from national staff, Stephen (Head of Coaching) suggested 'the cynic in me says would it be the same situation if we're talking about a star player for that international team at a Cat one Premier League club'. This was also explained by other club staff:

I think the big thing for me is consistency of practice. That would be fine if we had that. We are a modest Cat. Two, we've got a good training ground and stuff but being cynical I think it's always really nice to go to Disneyland at Man City and sit with five of their players in an IDP review process, but will the coach go to Crewe Alexandra

on a Tuesday night when the parents come in? That's a bit different, but what they will say is that we are governed by the clubs to a certain extent in terms of what they're willing to buy into. (Interview with Stephen, Category Two Premier League Head of Coaching, 16th July 2020)

they might say we know you're a big club and you're going to be one of the biggest sources of our players so they'll ring your [academy manager] because they wanna keep him on side a little bit because they know in the past that if he has an international tournament in Qatar then suddenly the players are injured and can't get called up. He knows that England don't have the teeth to invoke the FIFA rule for the player to get called up and check with their medical staff that they are injured so they'll just pander to the clubs...it's a bit like, 'they're the little club, they're alright, they'll love having an international player, they're not gonna say no are they'. Well actually we will because... if the first team manager wants him then he's going there, you've got to be careful you don't take people for granted and I think that's part of the case, we're not all wet behind the ears, we understand that there are certain stakeholders in the game that you've got to look after, that's just life but if you're going to do that with the top then you can't forget this end as well. They have to play a very clever political game; you've got 92 stakeholders you've got to keep sweet because you don't know where the next Harry Kane is coming from, but I think a lot of those relationships aren't watered enough to help them flourish. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

These comments are the first within the wider literature to show the often-strained relationship between clubs and national governing bodies regarding youth international football. Here, club coaches are describing an organisational dichotomy of the relationship between clubs and the FA. When reviewing stakeholder theory this is a cause for concern as "a good system of governance should... be one where managers take into account the interests of the different stakeholder groups" (Senaux, 2008: 6) and that governing bodies must cooperate with other organisations whom have similar interests (Henry & Lee, 2004). Due to the high stake both stakeholders have in the players development, a more comprehensive approach may be needed to safeguard their assets (Hill & Jones, 1992). In practical terms this may be through clubs ensuring player's independent development plans are shared with national coaches but also through national coaches providing feedback which can then inform the development plan on return to the club. Pedagogically, this would avoid feedback from national coaches which is considered to be tokenistic in nature (Weakley et al., 2019) and would encourage players to reflect upon their international performances, particularly as during

transition athletes are likely to make more mistakes and therefore reflection on their performance is vital to future development (Morris et al., 2016).

Inter-level collaboration should be optimised through creating an 'organisational triangle' (Mathorne, Henriksen & Stambulova, 2020) consisting of the youth academy, national association and The Premier League. The first two organisations should work closely together in direct support of the individuals, helping to build coherent organisational cultures that help the athlete function in that environment. Whereas The Premier League's role should be to work closely with both organisations in the development of new policy surrounding youth international representation, an area that is not currently represented in the EPPP. The efficiency of an organisation is based upon clear communication and role clarification (Woodman & Hardy, 2001), therefore, in order to maintain effective stakeholder relationships between organisations it is important that stakeholders have clear communication systems to successfully understand each other's values and goals (Relvas et al., 2010). This is particularly integral in the case of international youth footballers as both stakeholders (club and the FA) are reliant upon the continued development of the youth footballer and if organisations have communication failures then this often results in workplace stressors and inefficiency.

Further to this, athletic talent development environments are most effective when organisations are integrated, there is a focus on long-term development and there is a coherent organisational culture (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017). Organisations that prioritise talent development are more likely to offer effective performance support and therefore the athlete will have a more positive transition (Morris et al., 2015). However, as mentioned in Chapter 2 the core priority of The FA is to develop winning England teams at senior level, alongside supporting the growth of grassroots sport, and therefore, there appears to be ambiguity as to who is responsible for talent development during international representation. This is a cause for concern as uncertainty in the programme is synonymous with how prepared an individual feels for the transition (Jones et al., 2014). Hence, to add clarity to the process policy developed in the area would do well to clearly outline each stakeholders' responsibilities during national team representation.

This thesis has shown that clubs relationships with the national associations are based on individual relationships, 'it tends to be the relationship follows suit, having worked there I've got a good relationship with a few of them...you talk, you have

chats, they'll have an understanding from informal stuff' (Luke, Head of Coaching) and therefore club coaches whom have prior experience or close personal relationships with FA staff have appeared to include certain areas of good practice into their delivery at the club:

it allows us to do some best v best stuff. We've done three different types of these where we've had small groups of these players and a few players around them and then the national coaches will come in and coach them with us and our staff, so it's been quite collaborative. That's happened with the 16s and 17s national coaches and that helps us set our standards as to what we want and where we're going but also shows the players and parents how joined up we are with the national governing body. (Interview with Adam, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 17th June 2020)

Club staff also suggested that there are issues of communication with other national associations, other than The English FA, where they tend not have these close relationships and therefore do not have an insight into the players experiences on camp:

it varies, being at [Premier League club] we had a Portuguese player, literally we would get the fax a day before he was due to be on camp. There would be no flight details, you would have to book it all yourself. There would be no correspondence or communication, you wouldn't have to send any information, you wouldn't get any information back, so it really does vary nation to nation. (Interview with Jack, Premier League Club Technical Director, 7th July 2020)

The idea of clubs' relationships with the national governing body being reliant upon individual relationships also makes it difficult for those international players of different nationalities. The same member of staff stated that though they have provided access to England coaches the same has not occurred with other nations: 'we haven't had that, we haven't offered it, but we haven't had them come to us to say they would like to see them' (Adam, Head of Coaching). This is up to the clubs to build and develop the support networks with NGBs, dependent on the players they have in their academy. In a practical sense clubs may benefit from using a relationship manager to manage club to NGB relationships during international representation. Due to the increase in young English nationals choosing to play for clubs across Europe (Perry & Steenson, 2019) The FA would benefit from creating a more formalised relationship with clubs, within European countries as well as England, that is not based on personal relations. Through a more structured

approach these stakeholders can ensure that they are working together to safeguard the future development of the young professional footballers in their care.

A further area highlighted by club staff affecting stakeholder relationships was the suggestion that The FA do not have a PMA system¹⁶ which links to the performance clock to outline the players development over time. The Youth Development Rules (The Premier League, 2021) outline that the performance clock is an important mechanism for monitoring performance over time and therefore this may be a beneficial means to contact players safely and effectively whilst not on camp:

I'm amazed that England don't have a PMA system. At clubs once they have played the coaches will have to upload feedback and bits and pieces. I'm astounded that they don't have like a vehicle in place, even if it isn't a PMA, it's still a valuable record and resource for the club to interact and touch base with the player especially when you are in an England camp and you do have 52 days a year with them it might be three months until you get any contact with him again. So through technology you should be able to just pick up some stuff with a player between camps, even now you can send out a little message as to how are you doing? how's your last game been? or I watched you against Manchester City, thought you did well but I understand that from your coach you've been focusing on, your ILOs, receiving on the back foot, make sure you pay attention to it. You know what I mean, that complimentary stuff that's really powerful. (Interview with Luke, Category One Premier League Head of Coaching, 23rd June 2020)

As it has been found that club staff tend not to offer formal player development focused support or share player learning objectives and national coaches offer limited support between camps and do not follow up on feedback provided to players then it can be argued that more needs to be done to improve the support players are provided during the transition in and out of international representation. An environment where neither stakeholder truly takes responsibility for the development of the player during this period brings into question who is responsible for the development of England internationals and whether the current policies outlined in the EPPP are relevant to youth national footballers. The 'responsibility of equipping players with adequate resources lies in the talent development environment, and not in one specific person or institution' (Larsen et al., 2013: 1) and therefore both clubs and The FA have a responsibility for providing the players with the resources to help them to improve during this period. This integrated approach to sport policy would enable stronger "support structures [in order] to

¹⁶ The system used by clubs operating under EPPP guidelines to track and monitor player development (The Premier League, 2021)

develop an optimal micro-climate in which the athlete can develop” (De Smedt, 2001, cited in De Bosscher et al., 2006: 206). The micro-climate of elite youth sport is highly competitive, with approximately 2% of youth athletes reaching senior International level in their chosen sport (Höner et al., 2015). British football is no different where only 0.012% of youth footballers currently playing organised football will get the opportunity to make it as a professional in the Premier League (Calvin, 2017; Conn, 2017). This adds further support to a reciprocal approach to policy development between key stakeholders to ensure optimal talent development environments can be developed.

In answer to research question two Figure 6.2 clearly outlines the features of the relationship between clubs and governing body and should be used as a basis for policy development.

Features of the Relationship	Descriptors
Sharing performance data	Physical data rarely shared with governing body, making it more difficult to manage load on camp
Social Support	Lack of alignment between the support provided by the club during international representation and the support the player requires
Aligning individual development plans	Club development plans often not shared with governing body, therefore difficultly in aligning practice
Club visits	International staff failing to visit each of the clubs in which they select players on a consistent basis
Internal politics	Clubs not allowing players to attend camps due to wanting them to represent their club at tournaments
Competing Sporting Priorities	England want to support players entering senior England team, clubs want players for their first team

Figure 6.2. An explanation of the features and descriptors of the relationship between professional youth academies and The Football Association regarding the transition of youth footballers into youth international representation

6.4. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter set out to answer research questions two and three, focusing on the relationship between the transition into international football and the transition from youth-to-senior football in England and the players and clubs’ perceptions of the support networks and procedures that The Football Association have in place. The

findings are unique in the field of transition research as put the current international footballer at the heart, being the first to clearly outline their experience of international transition from the perspective of the support networks that are in place.

The players and club staff explained that there is varied support available during international transition, dependent on the club, with some clubs attending international fixtures and others not. They suggested that they would like to have more contact from national coaching staff between camps, not only as it showed they were 'cared for', but also that it could help them to embed the feedback they were given into their club environment. This was supported by other players who questioned the feedback provided by national coaches' post-camp, explaining that they would benefit from more specific feedback that was related to their individual development plan.

Club staff explained that they deemed the development of youth international footballers as an important key performance indicator for the youth academy. The fact that the coaches show an awareness that developing youth international players can help them to 'prove their programme works' adds to the extant literature suggesting that coaching in youth football is a micro-political activity (Potrac et al., 2012; Cronin et al., 2020) with a range of personal agenda involved.

CHAPTER VII: Conclusions and Recommendations

The final chapter of the thesis aims to provide an explanation of how the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 have been answered throughout the thesis. This section also provides a summary of research findings before explaining the implications for policy development within youth international sport, and research into sporting career transitions. Finally, this chapter identifies limitations of the research and opportunities for future research.

7.1. Aims of the Thesis

The thesis findings are considered in regard to the initial research questions outlined in Chapter One. The aims of the research were:

1. To identify whether there is a relationship between the youth-to-senior transition and the club-to-country transition.
2. To develop a transition support programme for developing footballers entering, and leaving, the youth international football environment, supporting the development of talented footballers.
3. To influence policy change, regarding transition support, within the Elite Player Performance Plan policy document, developed by The Premier League.

Chapter 1 introduced the study and topics for discussion, identifying the area of youth international football as a key gap within the extant literature and explaining the importance of the field of study. Chapter 2 then explained in further detail the current literature trends in career transition, highlighting a move towards a cultural praxis as well as reviewing the literature in the area of youth development in football. This chapter made clear that the aims of this thesis had not yet been discussed in the published literature. Chapter 3 discussed the research methodology used, justifying the use of the constructivist ontological paradigm and interpretivist epistemology used throughout the research process.

Chapters 4-6 addressed the research aims of the thesis directly. Chapter 4 addressed aims 1 and 3 through highlighting the experiences of players during international representation and explaining the social hierarchy of the youth international squad. Chapter 5 addressed aims 1 and 2 and presented the perceived

developmental impact on players during and after international representation, taking the novel view that a transition is an opportunity for performance-support, where, through understanding the talent development structures performances can be enhanced. Finally, chapter 6 addressed aims 2 and 3 of the thesis. This chapter was concerned with understanding the experiences and perceptions of club staff using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, as well as outlining the relationship between the two primary stakeholders in a youth international footballers development, the club and national governing body.

7.2. Significant Findings

The following section offers several key findings from the thesis. These findings hope to have a positive effect on the talent development structure of youth football in England as well as influence youth development policy and the coach education pathway.

7.2.1. Players experiences of the club-to-country transition

As with other within-career transitions players explained that the step into international football from club football required a period of adaptation where they will adapt to their role in the team and gain more experience (Stambulova, Pehrson & Olsson, 2017). Through the interviews players failed to suggest that their clubs provided them with any support to cope with the transition, explaining that clubs would often view the international environment as separate to the perceived developmental environment of the club. If clubs do not offer relevant support, then players may have issues with adapting to the transition. In this way, the transition into youth international representation can be seen as a quasi-normative transition in that it is predictable for a specific group (see: Schinke et al., 2015) and as such, clubs should be able to support players in preparing for this transition.

Regarding players experiences of representation, current youth internationals explained that they felt that the youth international environment was far less disciplinary and led them to be more able to express themselves compared to their club environment. This is a novel finding that differs from prior research into professional football that suggested that in an elite environment there is an

increased level of surveillance that has a negative effect on the psychological wellbeing of the athlete (Roderick, Smith & Potrac, 2017). This is important as an environment that lacks autonomy is more likely to develop athletes who fail to have the skills required to take accountability for their actions, something required in the youth-to-senior transition (Bruner et al., 2008; Pummell & Lavalley, 2018).

In addition, players, and club staff, felt that there were clear performance and developmental benefits to representing their country at youth level. Namely, that it provided them with opportunities to test themselves against players whom they would not normally compete against but would also expose them to different tactical approaches that would build upon the development work completed at the club. Although these developmental benefits are perceived by the individuals in the study and not objectively confirmed as truths it is important to suggest that research has shown that the attributions athletes give for performances will influence their expectations (Le Foll, Rasclé, & Higgins, 2008) and therefore could support their readiness for any other upcoming transitions. More research needs to be done to attempt to measure the true effect of youth international representation on sporting performance post-camp.

7.2.2. The relationship between youth international football and senior sport

This research found that the importance of youth international football increases as the player gets older, with the older age groups (U18-U21) providing a developmental steppingstone to senior football. Both players and club staff felt that the younger age groups (U15-U17) tended to be much more fluid, with players selected and de-selected from a large pool of athletes, leading to an environment which is less competitive in a sporting sense but competition for places remains high.

The key factors in the relationship between youth international football and senior sport are three-fold. Firstly, the average age to make a senior football debut, for a player from a high performing youth academy is between 19.5 and 21.5 years (Bullough & Jordan, 2017). Therefore, the youth international transition that will occur before or close to this time period can be used as an important development tool to prepare the player for the upcoming transition into senior sport, often

described as the most difficult transition in an athletes career (Wylleman, Lavallee & Alfermann, 1999; Morris, Tod & Oliver, 2016).

Second, both international football and senior football have similarities in that they provide the youth footballer with an opportunity to be exposed to a different social setting, and are often given more ownership and independence over their own development. Having said this, there are also some key differences in the definition of a successful transition into each of the environments. Where the youth-to-senior transition is defined as the point at which a junior athlete enters the senior environment (Morris, 2017) the international transition tends to be one which is accepted as being a longer-term process. As the contact time with the international domain is within small snapshots of up to 9-day international windows, several times per season, there is a limited time for indoctrination into the domain to take place. For a player to understand the values and working practices players have suggested as taking multiple camps to adjust to, which could be over the course of multiple seasons. Therefore, from a support-for-performance perspective, a successful transition into the international environment can be defined as one where the player is able to adapt to the environment created by national team representation and reach a level of performance similar or above that of their club performance. This approach to understanding the transition into the international domain is heavily focused upon footballing performance, however, it is important to highlight that there will also be other psychological, social and physical adaptations that may be required for international success. This can only be achieved if there is alignment between the international age phases and teams.

Finally, the youth-to-senior transition tends to be linked to debilitators that can have a negative effect on the transitioning athlete, namely, poor coach-athlete relationships (Bruner et al., 2008), the increase in sporting demands of the new environment (Morris, 2013) and organisational stressors (Franck & Stambulova, 2018). Through the data analysis it is clear that the club-to-country transition will also have very similar debilitators, particularly for those individuals who may be moving from a Category 2 or 3 academy into this environment. More research needs to be done to specifically study the relationship between these debilitating factors and whether the youth international environment could be viewed as an opportunity to help players manage these stressors.

7.2.3. Youth development support networks

There is a lack of understanding of what a positive transition into the youth international environment looks like. Therefore, the success of the transition should be defined by both the club and the governing body, this would take into account the club-specific priorities and the developmental needs of the player. Henceforth the success of the transition into international football is not clearly identifiable by one metric but through viewing transition as an opportunity for talent development, a successful transition should be focused on whether the transition has provided the player with positive developmental outcomes. This ambiguity surrounding defining a successful transition process causes issues for the level of support required.

This thesis has shown that there is a complex relationship between the support networks provided to youth international footballers and the different stakeholders involved in the player development pathway at different points of the players career. Throughout the interviews with both current footballers and leadership staff at clubs it was clear that there is ambiguity regarding whom is responsible for the player development process whilst the player is on international duty. Within any programme of support within this career transition it is important that players understand they can access social support away from their club environment (Pierce, Kendellen, Camire & Gould; 2018) and that the national association are well placed to offer this. However, according to both players and club staff this is not offered to clubs on a consistent basis and appears to only be offered to clubs who already have personal connections between club staff and national coaching staff (e.g. an England coach who once worked at a specific club, for example).

When viewing this transition from a performance enhancement perspective it is also important to understand the data that is shared between organisations. Club staff and players both suggested that club performance data (namely, individual development plans) were not shared with the national association, often leading to a dichotomy between developmental feedback provided to players on national team camps. Although this is not an immediate cause for concern as there could be an argument that being provided with more varied feedback could help the holistic development of the player, players did explain that they were sometimes told information that conflicted with that of the club. To avoid players receiving conflicting information that would lead to confusion in the development process these

stakeholders would do well to work closer together on communicating the areas that the player may wish to continue to develop.

The key findings were used to create a model of the meta-transitions that a young player would move through during the transition from club-to-country, please see Figure 7.1 below:

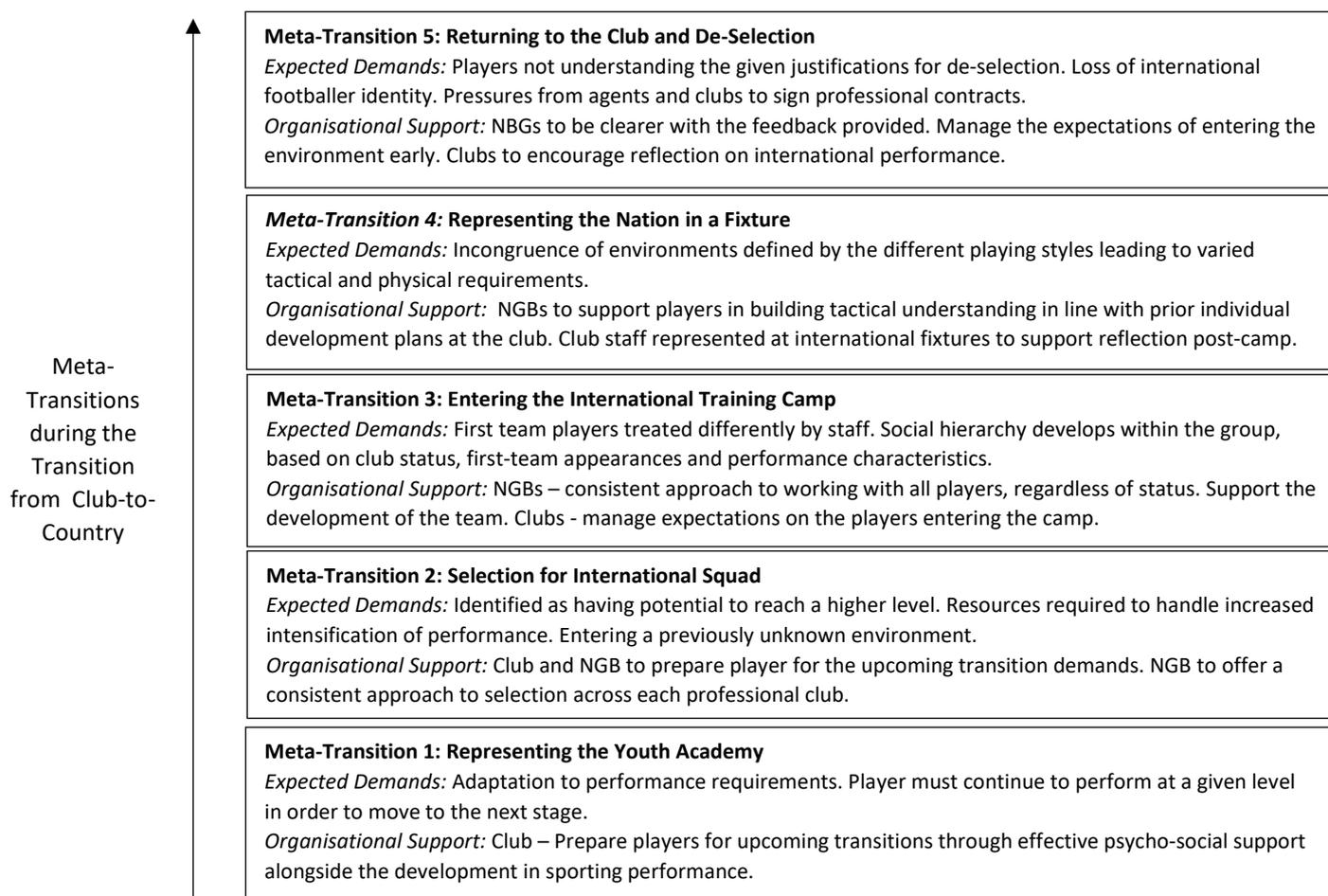


Figure 7.1. *Meta-Transitions in Youth International Football, including relevant expected demands and required organisational support*

Stage-like models are often criticised within athletic career research as athletes careers tend to be non-linear and diverse, with models often not taking this into account, however, this model is in line with calls for models to reflect the duration of the transition and the different resources required at each phase (Stambulova, Ryba & Henriksen, 2020). As this model outlines the quasi-normative transition of club-to-country it is important to suggest that not every player will follow this process, however, the model does reflect the process followed by players in this research, during the cycle of international representation, regardless of the number of camps

the player has attended. This model will contribute to research-driven practice in the support of young footballers.

7.3. Implications for Transition Research

The discussion chapter of this thesis has further developed the existing literature of career transitions in sport through shedding light on a previously underrepresented group. This thesis has re-framed the area of transition, viewing the club-to-country transition as an opportunity for performance-support, differing from previous literature in the field that often-viewed transitions from a career termination perspective (Stambulova, Ryba & Henriksen, 2020). Viewing a within-career transition through the performance-support nexus takes the assumption that a transition is an opportunity for growth and development, and that talent development environments should use this period to expose their athletes to situations that can aid rather than hinder their future development. Although it is important that coaches and support staff are aware of how to effectively achieve this.

This research differed from early career transition research as chose to take a more holistic perspective, adding research to the paradigm of cultural praxis of athletes careers through embracing the whole person and the whole environment perspectives, contextualising athletes experiences in their lived environment (Ryba, 2017). This approach enables the researcher to take a holistic perspective on the athletes career and navigates the researcher to take a reflexive position in their sociocultural context (Stambulova, Ryba & Henriksen, 2021). Scholars have previously tended to discuss transition from a psychological perspective; however, this is a reductionist view to explain a change in an athletic career that in reality will involve several performance disciplines, including coaches, sports scientists and performance lifestyle advisors. Therefore, this thesis approached the chosen transition from a holistic viewpoint to understand the performance-support provided to the athletes and the impact this could have had on their development.

There are comparisons between the findings of this thesis and the wider literature. Prior research found that club coaches perceived there to be a range of performance demands on entering the international domain, namely: “time pressures; adapting to a new football education; gaining international experience; subjectivity of the transition; and physical demands” (McKay et al., 2021: 12). However, this research

is the first to explain the clubs perceptions of the importance of developing youth international footballers to show the success of their programmes. This is a novel finding which adds complexity to the transition when thinking about the role of clubs in youth international football. A finding that is in line with this prior research is that there are organisational demands based upon the disparity between both club and international development programmes (McKay et al., 2021). Although, this thesis builds upon this finding in greater detail through adding the players and coaches perceptions of the difficulties this can cause, regarding player development, to the wider transition literature.

Often research looks at transition from a singular standpoint, for example, failing to understand the relationship between two transitions in a specific sport, this research aimed to identify the relationship between the club-to-country transition and the youth-to-senior transition, making a significant philosophical contribution to knowledge in the area through developing a model of the transition that can be used to explain the effect of youth international support on player development. This differs from prior models (see: Stambulova, 2003; Schlossberg, 2011) that focus on observing transitions from a psychological support perspective and do not take into consideration the effect that the transition can have on other areas of sporting development, hence why this research takes the approach of framing the transition as an opportunity for a support-for-development.

The phases of a career transition as outlined by Stambulova et al. (2017) are relevant, however, the movement of athletes through preparation, orientation, adaptation and stabilisation in a club-to-country transition will occur over a longer period of time and players will be required to consistently undertake this process during multiple camps, often several months apart. This makes the transition into international football unique, and therefore will have specific implications for policy development when creating a transition support programme.

7.4. Policy Implications: Towards a Transition Programme in International Sport

There are several policy and practical implications to have emerged from the data throughout the thesis. The following section explores the key considerations in

developing a transition programme to support player development during the transition into, and out of, youth international sport.

7.4.1. The Elite Player Performance Plan

Through the discussion two clear implications emerged for the EPPP. First, the current guidelines specified within the EPPP regarding transition support lack detail and guidance for youth academies (see: Youth Development Rules, 2021). Through providing clearer guidelines on the introduction of an international representation transition programme this would enable clubs to begin to integrate the performance benefits of international sport within the club's development pathway.

Second, the EPPP clearly outlines the job roles of both senior members of academy staff and the support staff. The policy document would benefit from adding more clarity to whom could be responsible for the international transition within the youth academy. This would aid the club in managing the transition but also the relationship between club and country, an area shown to cause players issues with their successful transition through avoiding ambiguity between clubs for who to contact regarding the call-up. This may involve a staff member offering support to build relationships with NGBs through liaising with national team coaches on call-ups, observing and feeding back to club coaches on performance, ensuring IDPs are reflective of national team performances and arranging good practice such as inviting national coaches to training sessions to build relationships with the players. This would be particularly helpful for those clubs who have multiple internationals across different age phases and different governing bodies and would also support the clubs in achieving their KPI of developing more international footballers – a unique finding of this research.

7.5. Practical Implications: Towards a transition programme in international sport

Through the completion of the four-year thesis several practical implications have emerged which will influence the future success of youth footballers transitioning into youth international squads.

7.5.1. The club perspective

As a primary stakeholder in the developing footballers career the professional football club plays an important role in ensuring youth international footballers can successfully transition to the international environment. Through the empirical research several practical implications were explained in order to close the bridge between research and practice (Stambulova, Ryba & Henriksen, 2020). First, it was suggested that good practice should incorporate the use of a dedicated staff member to support the transition into the international domain in the same way that clubs are moving towards using loans managers or first-team coaches to manage the transition of players into senior sport. As clubs are often concerned with the rising costs of delivering their academy programme – up to £4m for a Category One academy (Nesti & Sulley, 2015) – this role would encompass the wider responsibilities of a loans manager, player care officer or lead phase coach.

Second, it would be beneficial for clubs to share their individual development plans with national staff to ensure alignment between talent development environments. This would also enable national coach feedback to inform the developmental work occurring at the players club and answer calls in the literature for congruence between athletic talent development environments (Henriksen et al., 2010). A new finding here from this thesis is that there is ambiguity during the club-to-country transition as to organisations roles in player development, with a lack of clarity on whom is responsible for player development during international representation. Through a closer alignment between the information provided in the players individual development plan this would take the novel approach of viewing the transition as an opportunity for development.

Finally, from the club perspective it is important that players understand transition demands prior to their first transitional experience. A factor in the success of a transition is where an athlete's perceptions of the transition align with the actual experience of the transition (Morris, 2013). To support first-time call-ups in understanding the requirements of the transition professional clubs should provide the player with a mentor from an older age group who has experienced the transition and able to offer social support to the individual through managing expectations and explaining the environmental standards. This is supported through a support-for-development approach as athletes that have an accurate understanding of the

transition are more likely to be successful (Morris et al., 2016).

7.5.2. National Association perspective

The national association in question, The FA, would benefit from working closer with the Premier League in the development of the annual Youth Development Rules (YDR) to write policy that encourages clubs to share performance data prior to international representation. The first issue here is that the current YDR are solely written by the PL, in consultation with the needs of the clubs and therefore any shift in policy should be led by club demand. A second issue surrounding the sharing of performance data is that The FA do not currently operate a formal PMA system, and therefore the specific work that the player completes on international duty is not logged on the performance clock in the same way that clubs log and track the players progress. The FA would benefit from either having their own PMA system that they could share with clubs or negotiating the opportunity to access international footballers progress on the clubs PMA system – although this would not be without its difficulties surrounding the sharing of personal data.

A second practical implication for national associations is that the players explained that they wanted national coaches who were able to offer bespoke support between camps so that the player felt ‘cared for’ but also that the coach could help them to improve on the areas they have identified whilst on camp. Difficulties here lie in the competing priorities of both clubs and national associations, outlined in Chapter 6. This could make it more difficult for national coaches to work closely with certain players if the relationship with the parent club is not positive. This adds to the argument that if national coaches may not be able to support in between camps due to organisational politics then it is the club’s responsibility to put measures in place to support the player in their initial, and ongoing, transition to becoming an international footballer.

7.5.3. Youth international transition strategy

Through the data collection and analysis, it is clear that there is a strong relationship between the developmental implications of international football and, as outlined in the literature review, the requirements to being successful in the youth-to-senior

transition. Players and coaching staff have explained the opportunities that international sport can provide developing athletes; hence, it is important to suggest that national team representation at the youth level can be used by talent development programmes as an effective tool to prepare players for the youth-to-senior transition. This is important as this transition is often highlighted as the most difficult transition within sport (Stambulova, 2009; Franck & Stambulova, 2021) and due to the low numbers of home-grown players in the PL talent development programmes must identify novel means to ensure their players are as prepared as possible for the next steps in their career. Having said this, the data suggests that more should be done from both a club and NGB perspective to support players in the transition into the international domain. Therefore, the following section highlights an outline of a transition programme which could be implemented between professional football clubs and The Football Association to support players at this time.

To date transition programmes in sport have focused on either dual career or preparing athletes for retirement rather than supporting the development of athletes through the within career transitions that occur during an athletic career. To support athletes effectively organisational stakeholders must work together to provide optimal talent development pathways (Pankhurst, Collins & MacNamara, 2012). To achieve this there must be a shift in policy regarding transition programmes and transition support, particularly though the guidelines outlined in the EPPP. In adding detail to the EPPP guidelines this will not only provide practitioners a structure to work within but help key stakeholders such as the PL to understand the enactment of their policy.

Effective interventions should have an assessment of athlete's needs, take a holistic approach to development and support the athletes in each context in which they operate (Stambulova et al., 2020). This thesis argues the importance of bringing the international domain into the multi-disciplinary team of academy football. International football will have different priorities and requirements that it places upon the developing footballer, but the central argument is that both clubs and governing bodies require the player to continue to improve to meet their KPIs. A transition programme to support the club-to-country transition should incorporate support at each of the meta-transitions outlined in Figure 7.1 and include areas discussed in the thesis such as coach support, developing effective support networks, effective communication and an awareness of the club's role in

supporting this transition. Good practice shared by clubs is as follows; loans manager watching International performances and providing effective feedback to players, a more formalised club review of international performances, International staff to follow up on otherwise tokenistic feedback and to show they care to the players, and using a club staff member (e.g. Head of Player Development/U23 manager/Head of Academy) as an integral link between academy and international performance to embed national squad feedback in the MDT review process.

To ensure this transition strategy can be applied it is important for key stakeholders to understand the 'bigger picture' of youth international sport, particularly regarding its influence on the senior transition. There tends to be an organisational divide between youth programmes and senior sport (Relvas et al., 2010) and therefore youth international sport should be seen as an opportunity to bridge this gap in player development, preparing the athlete for the upcoming youth-to-senior transition. To effectively achieve this staff will need to be better prepared to offer this support.

7.5.4. Coach Education

Through the semi-structured interviews with academy leadership staff it was shown that there was limited support provided to academy staff on the transition process. In particular, staff suggested that they had not been exposed to the importance of managing the transition process throughout their time in coach education.

Through the researchers own experience within coach education at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, as well as through UEFA coaching licenses the aspects of transition support were not represented. This could be that research into career transitions has often taken a psychological approach, however, viewing a transition in a players career through solely this lens is a reductionist approach that fails to take the complex nature of talent development into account. Therefore, coach education should frame the transition of youth athletes as an important factor in supporting the development of the youth athlete, viewing transition as an area of coach accountability as well as the responsibility of the wider support staff.

7.6. Limitations

Through completion of the PhD research there were a number of limitations that occurred throughout the process. The first limitation was the case study research design that was selected. Although there are strengths of the design, particularly regarding the nature of studying a specific phenomenon such as the youth international transition, the research findings should not “make any claim about the generalizability of their findings” (Ruddins, 2006: 797; Bowles et al., 2011). This is particularly pertinent through the approach of understanding the athletic transition through a cultural praxis paradigm as the sociocultural environment will differ due to the context that is being studied and therefore the results may not generalize to other international domains outside of the England talent pathway. Questions regarding generalisability are also relevant due to the data collected being from players and staff who were primarily based in professional football clubs in the South of England. Due to the interviewees explaining that there appeared to be a social divide between players from different regions the data gathered may not be generalizable to populations outside of the interview group. In addition, the narratives outlined in the empirical chapters may not be representative of the experiences of other age groups or different time periods in the England youth setup. Players experiences will have been affected by the specific cultural characteristics of their club as well as being part of a specific age group or camp that will have different environments.

The next limitation of the research refers to the methods of data collection. Semi-structured interviews were used with both adolescent footballers and club staff. At times this was difficult as both groups had busy schedules and particularly when interviewing the players this would often take place either directly prior or after a training session and therefore, we would often have to cut the interview short due to time constraints. Through these discussions it was difficult to build the rapport needed in order for the player to open up about their experiences. As an interviewer I also had the impression that players were reluctant to offer a critique their club or their national team with the worry of repercussions for them. As a result of the reduced timescale, and as a novice researcher, I initially found it difficult to build rapport with the player in order to encourage them to provide the most accurate account of their experiences.

The third and final limitation regards reflexivity as the interpretation of the data may have been biased by my own experiences of working within professional football (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). With this in mind, another researcher may have interpreted the data differently. It is important to show this reflexive self-awareness as “bias should stimulate inquiry without interfering with the investigation...to understand the bias itself is not the problem” (Wolcott, 1995: 165). This is why the research purpose was clearly outlined in Chapter 1, giving meaning and focus to the study and recognizing the researchers part in adding meaning to the gathered data.

7.7. Future Research

Through studying a unique research area, the transition into youth international football, the thesis has helped future researchers understand the experiences of young footballers within an international football environment. However, more needs to be done to understand the club-to-country transition and its influence on talent development. Future research would do well to consider the long-term impact of youth international representation on both player performance as well as wellbeing and participation in the sport. Therefore, a longitudinal study into the transitions of youth footballers into international football may be needed, providing the research landscape with an opportunity to evaluate the long-term impact of youth representation. Although I have suggested the importance of club-to-country transition in preparing individuals for the youth-to-senior transition to club football more needs to be done to study this process over a longer time period.

Additionally, research could use a case study approach to review the transition programme of a current Category One club to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme in supporting players in entering the international squads. Results of studies such as this would help to inform policy development within youth football, such as the EPPP, and influence the long-term development of youth footballers into senior football. Since the introduction of the EPPP there have been no published studies focusing on the effectiveness of transition programmes or the influence of youth international sport on player development. Through additional research the EPPP may tailor its guidelines towards what denotes a transition strategy employed by clubs and whom is responsible for specific transitions.

The thesis outlined the potential shift in athletic identity that occurs upon international representation, however, further research may be required in the field of sport psychology to understand the manifestation of the athletic identity within

international football and the effect that de-selection from the environment can have upon this. Finally, further research exploring the relationships between professional clubs and The FA and explaining how these stakeholders work together to support player development would be beneficial.

7.8. Chapter Conclusion

This thesis explored the transition of youth footballers from their club's youth academy to the England men's youth football teams. This research was the first of its kind conducted within professional youth football in England and sought to shed light on the experiences of becoming an international footballer in order to inform youth development policy. It is hoped that the research helped to deepen the current understanding of youth development in football and offer a detailed insight into international football which has been grossly underrepresented in research. Findings suggest that the 'Induction and Transition Strategy' section of the EPPP does not account for the detailed transition demands within youth professional football and nor does it represent youth international footballers.

Finally, the findings from this thesis make an original contribution to the discipline of career transitions and youth international football. The findings from this research may help to advise professional bodies tasked with coach education (such as, The Premier League and The Football Association) to incorporate more information on transitions and the youth international football domain as a developmental tool.

In football a successful transition can be open to interpretation. A definition of successful club-to-country transition should not be solely focused on athletic performance but take into consideration the long-term player development considerations of this transition. Therefore, through the lens of viewing transition support as an opportunity for talent development, a successful transition here is one that reduces performance debilitators and facilitates the development of the individual, through aspects such as, effective coach support, aligning individual development plans and carefully managing any de-selection process. The successful transition into the environment should be characterised by the individuals optimal functioning in the new environment. As the club-to-country transition in youth sport takes place at a critical point in the athletic career it is important that this opportunity does not negatively influence the development of the individual. This will

ensure that the individual is able to sustain a healthy and long-lasting career and life – athletic career excellence (Stambulova, 2020). Through understanding these different aspects of the developing footballers career the support networks put in place can ensure the individual can strive for meaningful goals as well as maintaining health and mental well-being (Stambulova et al., 2020).

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Appendices

Appendix A – Field Notes Extract

Day 1

As I arrived at the venue I was excited to see more of what I had already heard about from the players and staff that I had spoken to. I had already been to a number of female pathway talent camps through a prior role and had worked for The FA so had a basic awareness of the demands of the environment, but this was different.

I managed to arrive at the same time as the players so took up a position to watch them come through the doors. They all seemed excited and were greeted by staff who either knew them or immediately tried to make them feel comfortable through engaging them in conversation or guiding them towards a group of players who were sat waiting. Once the players had sat down and arrived there was the opportunity to talk for a while with staff also joining in, in what looked like an attempt to get everyone use to the environment before they began the first session. There was one player who I was told hadn't been on camp before and there wasn't any other player in this squad from his club. He was introduced to other players and left by the staff to speak to the group. The group seemed very accepting of him and all seemed to speak to him about where he plays and asked if he was excited to be there. There was a positive feeling amongst the group.

Once the players had all arrived they were given their rooms keys to drop off their bags before they had their first meeting and food. I was able to have an informal conversation with one of the support staff who spoke about the importance that players that first enter the environment start to feel relaxed and can have some time to settle in so they can feel more comfortable to perform amongst a potentially new group of players. I asked about whether support staff were expected to speak to the newer players about what it's like on England and was told that they saw this as part of their role but that also the current players in the group were supposed to help the newer players settle. They suggested there wasn't a formal 'buddy system' but that the players knew that in the international environment it was important to help 'first-time call-ups' to settle and that players were consistently reminded of what it was like for them when they first came to the camp. I was told that they aim to create an environment that is similar to a club environment in that they want players to bond, on and off the pitch, and that they try to design different ways for them to do this, for example, using team-building games or doing team quizzes throughout the camp to foster some form of togetherness.

We then spoke about the make-up of the squad as I was aware that there were players from a variety of clubs and also some players whom had played first-team football in The Premier League.

Appendix B – Ethical Approval



18/02/2020

Project Title: PhD - Transition from Youth Football to International Representation

EthOS Reference Number: 11842

Ethical Opinion

Dear Dominic Edwards,

The above amendment was reviewed by the Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee and, on the 18/02/2020, was given a favourable ethical opinion. The approval is in place until 30/09/2022 .

Conditions of favourable ethical opinion

Application Documents

The Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee favourable ethical opinion is granted with the following conditions

Adherence to Manchester Metropolitan University's Policies and procedures

This ethical approval is conditional on adherence to Manchester Metropolitan University's Policies, Procedures, guidance and Standard Operating procedures. These can be found on the Manchester Metropolitan University Research Ethics and Governance webpages.

Amendments

If you wish to make further changes to this approved application, you will be required to submit an amendment. Please visit the Manchester Metropolitan University Research Ethics and Governance webpages or contact your Faculty research officer for advice around how to do this.

We wish you every success with your project.

Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee

Business and Law Research Ethics and Governance Committee

For help with this application, please first contact your Faculty Research Officer. Their details can be found [here](#)

Appendix C – Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule – Understanding the Life Histories of Premier League Footballers – Transitions from Youth Footballer to International Representation

Opening

The researcher will establish rapport, explain the purpose of the study and outline how the results will be used. The participant will also be given a timeline for the duration of the interview.

First, we are going to discuss your background as a youth footballer and your experiences of International football.

Body of the Interview

Topic – Background as a Youth Footballer

How long have you been at this club?

How did you get recruited to play here? How did you feel when you joined?

What are your experiences at the club?

Are there any skills you think you need to be successful as a professional footballer?

Are there any other skills you might need as an International footballer?

Topic – International Experiences – Processes and Procedures

How do you find out that you have a call up? (Support networks that are in place)

What does the setup of the camp look like?

How long do you train for? What do you do in downtime?

What happens if you are late?

Do you hear from the England coaches between camps?

Why do you think this is?

Would you like to hear from them? Why?

Topic – International Experiences – Coaching and Performance

Are there any differences between the coaches at your club and the coaches in the International setup?

What do you think the coaches think of you? Probe: Why?

How did you perform when you played Internationally?

Was there anything different about your performances? Why?

What was expected of you? Were you able to deliver that?

Do you ever have different opinions about your 'game' than the National coaches?

Are there any differences between the types of sessions that you do on an International camp?

Are there any differences in how you are expected to play at an International camp?

Is there anything that stands out to make someone an excellent coach?

How has playing for England helped your development?

Topic – Closing Questions

Once rapport has been built – What did you think of the process to entering an International team?

Do you require any more information?

- a. To what extent was playing for England what you expected?
- b. Has being an international footballer altered how you view yourself when you play for the club?

What does a successful transition look like to you? (help to define successful transition into Int. football)

As you have got older are you more aware of the different organisations in football and how they impact you?

Do you know which organisation to speak to if you need more support?

Do you have an idea of how The FA/ PL work with your club to support you?

Closing

Briefly summarise the answers given and thank the interviewee for participating in the study. Ask whether it would be okay to contact them in the future to gather additional information, if needed.

Appendix D – Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

The Making of British Professional Footballers: Understanding the transition from youth football to youth International representation

1. Invitation to research

I would like to invite you to take part in an interview regarding your experiences in working with young footballers who have represented the England national football team. My name is Dom Edwards and I am a Postgraduate doctoral researcher from Manchester Metropolitan University. Our research project aims to understand the transition into youth International football from academy football in England. The research hopes to better understand the process that young footballers go through to become International footballers and focuses on the following areas; processes of selection, coaching and the multi-disciplinary team.

2. Why have I been invited?

You have been invited to interview as you have worked with young footballers who have represented the England national team within the past two seasons. There will be approximately 15 young footballers in the study as well as club coaching staff, national coaches and national support staff.

3. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide. We will describe the study and go through the information sheet, which we will give to you. We will then ask you to sign a consent form to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

4. What will I be asked to do?

You will take part in a maximum one-hour discussion surrounding your experiences in supporting England youth footballers. You will only be required to take part in one interview and each interview will take place in a public location or via an online meeting. If you agree to take part, you will be asked to read and sign a consent form.

Audio recording equipment will be used to record the interview so that the discussion can be transcribed verbatim. The interview will not be recorded using visual recording equipment.

5. Are there any risks if I participate?

There are no perceived risks for participating in this interview. However, if you experience any distress following participation you are encouraged to inform the investigator.

6. Are there any advantages if I participate?

There will not be any financial reward for participating in the study, however, the information we gather will help to increase the understanding of transition into International football and be used to help to improve this process for young footballers.

7. What will happen with the data I provide?

When you agree to participate in this research, we will collect from you personally identifiable information.

The Manchester Metropolitan University ('the University') is the Data Controller in respect of this research and any personal data that you provide as a research participant.

The University is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and manages personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the University's Data Protection Policy.

We collect personal data as part of this research (such as name, telephone numbers or age). As a public authority acting in the public interest we rely upon the 'public task' lawful basis. When we collect special category data (such as medical information or ethnicity) we rely upon the research and archiving purposes in the public interest lawful basis.

Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we will keep the information about you that we have already obtained.

We will not share your personal data collected in this form with any third parties.

If your data is shared this will be under the terms of a Research Collaboration Agreement which defines use and agrees confidentiality and information security provisions. It is the University's policy to only publish anonymised data unless you have given your explicit written consent to be identified in the research. **The University never sells personal data to third parties.**

For further information about use of your personal data and your data protection rights please see the University's Data Protection Pages (<https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/data-protection/>).

What will happen to the results of the research study?

We will only retain your personal data for as long as is necessary to achieve the research purpose. The data collected for this study will be stored securely and only the lead investigator conducting the study will have access to this data:

- Audio recordings will be deleted once the project has been submitted for examination.
- The typed version of your interview will be made anonymous by removing and identifying information, including your name. Anonymised direct quotations from your interview may be used in the report or publication from the study, but your name will not be attached to them.

- All personal data will be confidential and will be kept separately from your interview responses.

Who has reviewed this research project?

The research project has been granted Ethical Approval through Manchester Metropolitan University Ethics committee and has been reviewed by my University Director of Studies (Dr Paul Michael Brannagan).

Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?

If you have any concerns, wish to complain or have additional questions then please feel free to contact the following;

Researcher

Dominic Edwards, 18050797@stu.mmu.ac.uk, 0208 223 6706

Director of Studies

Dr Paul Brannagan, P.Brannagan@mmu.ac.uk, 0161 247 6779, 4.09 Business School, Manchester Campus, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, M1 5GF

Faculty Head of Research Ethics

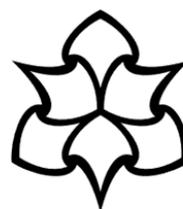
Ian Ashman, I.Ashman@mmu.ac.uk, 0161 247 3893, Business School, Manchester Campus, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, M1 5GF

If you have any concerns regarding the personal data collected from you, our Data Protection Officer can be contacted using the legal@mmu.ac.uk e-mail address, by calling 0161 247 3331 or in writing to: Data Protection Officer, Legal Services, All Saints Building, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, M15 6BH. You also have a right to lodge a complaint in respect of the processing of your personal data with the Information Commissioner's Office as the supervisory authority. Please see: <https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>

THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROJECT

Appendix E – Consent Form

Faculty of Business and Law
Manchester Metropolitan University
All Saints Campus
Oxford Road
Manchester, M15 6BH
United Kingdom



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: The Making of British Professional Footballers: Understanding the transition from youth football to youth International representation

Name of Researcher: Dominic Edwards

Please initial all
boxes:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet (*insert date and version no.*) for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had them answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to leave at any time without giving any reason.
3. I understand that data collected during this study will be processed in accordance with data protection law as explained in the participant information sheet.

I agree to take part in the above study.

<u>xxxxxx</u>	03/02/2020	xxxxx
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

<u>Dom Edwards</u>	03/02/2020	D.EDWARDS
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix F – Interview Transcript

Transcription 2 – Understanding the Transition from Youth Football to Youth International Representation

Emergent Themes	Transcript	Exploratory Comments
Indoctrination	<p>Interviewer: How long have you been at the club?</p> <p>Participant: Since I was 7. So about 11 years, I was signed at u7 or u8, but I was there before that when you couldn't sign and could only train, so grassroots before that yeah</p> <p>Interviewer: How did you get recruited?</p> <p>Participant: I was just playing Sunday league at a tournament and a [club] scout went up to my dad, he just come to Lewisham, a little satellite centre and then I came here, but it weren't this, it were over there.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, so obviously you were so young, but can you remember how you felt?</p> <p>Participant: I remember when I was like... 6 months into it I went and watched the first team and there were players like Modric, Bale and Crouch and got to be around that but I can't really remember.</p> <p>Interviewer: So, now you play for England as well, and you've been on how many camps?</p>	<p>Involved in professional football for over 10 years</p> <p>Scouted from grassroots</p>
Highly experienced in Int. football	<p>Participant: About 15, u16, 17, 18, 19s</p> <p>Interviewer: So, you've played for four different age groups, how do you find out when you get called up?</p> <p>Participant: When you were, say, 16s-18s you get an email but when I was u19s I think I got a phone call to say I was going, from the coach. And then it works the other way, if you aren't going then the coach rings you and says why.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, so they do ring you if you aren't in the squad?</p> <p>Participant: Yeah but I think they only ring players that go quire regularly, say if you've been once but not coming the next time then they'll ring you.</p>	<p>Played for multiple age-groups – can't remember how many he has been in, shows that it is normalised</p> <p>Gets told when he's not called up. Only due to attending a large number – they manage expectations</p>

<p>Lack of trust</p>	<p>Interviewer: Have they ever done that to you?</p> <p>Participant: They rung me the other day, they just said it's not based on performance which I don't think it was, they give you feedback forms after and my feedback was fine, it could just be....they wanted to give people game time. There's the Euros next year and they said they wanted to have a look at others. Whether that's true or not I don't know.</p> <p>Interviewer: Did they say anything to you about maybe being in the squad for the Euros?</p> <p>Participant: Nah, that's next year so anything can happen.</p> <p>Interviewer: You've been on a lot of camps, how do they look</p> <p>Participant: last time we met on the Sunday and our first game was on the Wednesday so I hadn't played first game against Greece, I played the second game against Germany so we train Monday, Tuesday but Tuesday is more shape for Wednesday game and then I played on the Friday but because I didn't play I the Wednesday we did a hard session afterwards.</p> <p>Interviewer: before the game is there a lot of shape work?</p> <p>Participant: yeah, a bit of set pieces</p> <p>Interviewer: why do they focus on that do you think?</p>	<p>Start to question the honesty of the coaching staff</p> <p>Relaxed about prospect of being selected</p> <p>Shape work on camp, focused on developing tactical awareness</p>
<p>Disciplinary coaching</p>	<p>Participant: we are not with each other a slot of time, so they cram everything in and try and get us to play how they want so it's a lot of pattern of play.</p> <p>Interviewer: how long do the sessions last for and what else do you do</p>	<p>Focused on how coaches want them to play</p>
<p>Lack of hierarchical observation at England</p>	<p>Participant: depending on what you're doing, when we do quite a hard session it was like 2 hours. And then shape it could be 45 minutes to an hour and the rest of the day we just do like gym stuff , meetings recover, there a lot of free time, a lot!</p> <p>Interviewer: That's one of the things I wanted to ask, when you have the down time what are you doing?</p>	<p>A lot of free time offer additional activities as well. Could time better be used to build relationships, team cohesion, wider educational practices etc.</p>

<p>Normalising judgement</p>	<p>Participant: you can go offsite if you are away in another country but if you are at St. Georges there's nothing around so it depends where you are but you can only go out if you are this age now, not if you are u16s, they wouldn't let you go wandering around Slovakia. Definitely not.</p> <p>Interviewer: Of course, so if you can't go out then, at SGP for example, then what are you doing?</p> <p>Participant: relaxing in the rooms, they do quite a few 1 to 1 meetings, they've got attacking coaches, defending so you go and have a chat. They've also got activities going on, indoor cricket, table tennis so a bit going on.</p> <p>Interviewer: what are the standards like when you go to England and how does this compare to club football?</p> <p>Participant: It's a lot more relaxed at England. The standards are still high, but you are left to your own devices quite a lot of the time as you're responsible for whatever you do but here is a lot more regimented so it's a lot more chilled at England than here.</p> <p>Interviewer: Why do you think it's more chilled then, what's the difference?</p>	<p>Able to take responsibility at England – more freedom</p>
<p>Group hierarchy in place</p>	<p>Participant: I dunno, I think there's quite a few... even in my England age, there's quite a few egos, which isn't always good, so they try and manage it in a way where, like players playing in first teams so they're different. Just over half in my England team, you've got Saka, Arsenal, Curtis Jones, Liverpool, like when I've been on other camps you have Mason Greenwood, Jimmy Garner at United so there's quite a few.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay, do the coaches treat them differently to you guys or do you treat them differently because they've played first team?</p> <p>Participant: I don't, some might but I don't think that's me to treat them different. The coaches, you can see they might.</p> <p>Interviewer: In terms of England coaches you've been on a lot of camps so must know them quite well, in between camps do you ever hear from them?</p> <p>Participant: Not really, you don't hear from them unless you see them at games watching you'll chat to them but after the camp, 2 weeks after they send the 4-corner report back but that is the only feedback you get after and before the new camp.</p> <p>Interviewer: Do you want more support from them in between?</p>	<p>Working with high profile footballers – awareness of egos, even in youth football</p> <p>Coaches might see them differently as they've played first team</p> <p>Lack of feedback provided pre/post camp</p>

<p>Values honesty and integrity</p>	<p>Participant: I'm happy with that report they give back because obviously they don't come to every game, they send their scouts out, I'd rather they just gave me their opinion and told me that from the time I'm with them.</p> <p>Interviewer: So, you wanna hear more specific feedback rather than from the scouts?</p> <p>Participant: yeah specially from my club game because one scout good thing one thing and someone else getting another and then the managers like I don't know what to think I'd rather hear it from what he thinks</p> <p>Interviewer: That's fair how often do you think they watch your games?</p> <p>Participant: They could always be there, but I don't know.</p> <p>Interviewer: What are the main differences between your club coaches here and the international coaches?</p> <p>Participant: Not a lot, not a lot of difference really. I think the coaches here can be a bit more hands-on because you're with them all the time and that because you see them more, but I only see the managers at England whether I'm training or at a meeting or at dinner but that's it.</p> <p>Interviewer: If you don't get to build that same relationship do you know what they think of you or do you not really know?</p> <p>Participant: Some you do but others you can't really read them, but that's like any manager really. There's some where you know where you stand and some where you don't.</p> <p>Interviewer: What do you want from a coach? What makes a top coach?</p> <p>Participant: Someone who's chatting to you, like telling you how to get better, what you can do well, not just someone that when it comes to the match then they talk, they're always building that relationship around the training ground.</p> <p>Interviewer: In terms of your performances for England you have played quite a lot of games, how many?</p> <p>Participant: Probably about 28 maybe</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay so I guess you must've had positive or negative performances in there, can you tell me a bit about that?</p>	<p>Prefers to have contact with the coaches rather than scouting department, to avoid miscommunication</p> <p>England managers don't tend to so any 1-2-1 work with players</p> <p>Doesn't know where he stands</p> <p>Respects coaches that are honesty and build relationships</p> <p>Very experienced int. player</p>
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<p>Confident in own performance</p>	<p>Participant: I've had quite a few positives, I'd say in the bigger games, I don't know why but I seem to play better in a big game like against Germany in September. I did alright we played in Rotherham two years ago, I did alright. There are some negatives where I could've done better, when I was younger, I was a bit inconsistent but in recent years the positive performances have been more consistent.</p> <p>Interviewer: Can you remember the first time you played for England?</p>	<p>Ability to play well in the bigger games</p>
<p>Varied development in Int. experience</p>	<p>Participant: I came on at left back against Mexico when I was under 16 England, under 15 here. I was just buzzing; I only came on for 10 minutes but then I started the next game against Portugal two days later. I was getting nervous in the tunnel, you could hear the national anthem and then you have to come out and seeing it when you come on it goes really quick but when you start...because when you know you're starting you've got more time to think but if you're on the bench, especially as a defender you know you're not coming on.</p> <p>Interviewer: How do you actually find playing with players who you don't know?</p>	<p>Passionate and excited about representing his Country</p>
<p>Social comfort zone</p>	<p>Participant: I think it's difficult but because I've been on quite a few camps I know the boys quite well now, first time I went it was hard I didn't know anyone, and it was only Paris from here. He was the only one I knew, and he is a midfielder so he's not a player who I work with so it's hard to adapt. They might have different playing styles, the other centre half, and you have to learn quickly.</p> <p>Interviewer: What about the social side of it, does everyone stay in their groups?</p>	<p>Int. experience provided the opportunity to experience different styles of football. Particularly beneficial for players who have been at the same club for their whole career</p>
<p>Strong game understanding</p>	<p>Participant: I know the London boys, it's normally the London boys stay together – Arsenal, Chelsea, Tottenham, sit together and that. I don't know why it's like that...the Northern boys stay together...it's nothing...it's just because we live in London, we know them better because it's not big.</p> <p>Interviewer: You said you came on at left back, but that your normal position is centre back, is there any other ways they ask you to play differently?</p>	<p>Players from certain areas tended to stick together rather than socialise with others</p>
<p>Strong game understanding</p>	<p>Participant: There are certain things they prefer but nothing major really. Like at [club] when we play out from a goal kick, they asked me to drop down the side of the box whereas at England they want you to stay in front of the box and receive it there, that's the only difference really. They do that so if you lose it when we drop down the side of the box in the middle</p>	<p>Strong understanding of the tactical differences in environments</p>

<p>Academy football as a developmental tool</p> <p>Realistic</p> <p>Enjoys the challenge</p>	<p>where the pitch would be wide open, whereas if you play out on the edge of the box and you lose it you're still quite narrow which makes sense.</p> <p>Interviewer: So, thinking about players from different backgrounds how do you think the coaches develop the team to make them successful?</p> <p>Participant: I don't know, everyone comes from different backgrounds but most of us are coming through the age groups at Academy, so we all know what is required and what is accepted. So, it's like you have your behaviour away from football, your background, and then you have your behaviour at football, and everyone knows how to behave in a football environment. You don't have to manage anyone differently really, there is no disciplinary problems or being late, no everyone is always on time. You take that away with you when you go away.</p> <p>Interviewer: What about the perception of players here, there might be some players who have been called up before but maybe don't get called up again. What do you think they think about someone like you who has played for England so many times? Do they make any comments about that?</p> <p>Participant: Not really, it's good playing for England at this age and it means a lot, but you still haven't played for the first team. You could play for them one week but the next time you might not go but in the first team Harry Kane is not going to get dropped to look at Callum Wilson so you're not a cemented in England player at this age.</p> <p>Interviewer: Is playing for the first team more important than playing for England?</p> <p>Participant: Yeah, I'd rather get called up there than play for England.</p> <p>Interviewer: When you've trained up to the first team how do you think your performances have been?</p> <p>Participant: Yeah, I think they've been quite good, with the old gaffer [manager] there was a lot of 2v2s and 1v1s which is very hard. Like the other day we were doing 2v2s and I was against [1st team player] and he'd get the ball and when you think you can tackle him, he will slow down and then speed up and his acceleration is too quick for my speed. So, you do one thing well and then when you see you're up against him you think 'Ah no' so you do somethings well and then you need to step up and improve to combat that.</p> <p>Interviewer: You said when you went up to play for England you were quite nervous, was it the same when you train with the first time?</p>	<p>Perceives academy football prepares them well for England duty.</p> <p>Professional approach to his performance</p> <p>Manages himself well</p> <p>Views Int. as important and is realistic about his journey</p> <p>Focused on first team training rather than Int. call-ups</p> <p>A large step to the senior team, the Int. representation can be a bridge between youth and senior</p>
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<p>Willingness to impress</p>	<p>Participant: Yeah really nervous when I went over there that all the older players, he had [players]. It was only them four and seeing them and know when you're going to train with them it's very nerve wracking because you just wanna impress but you know 'I've got to mark [striker]', which on the back of nerves is very hard.</p> <p>Interviewer: Did anyone help you control those nerves?</p> <p>Participant: No, you just go and do it. When you come back over this side the coaches will say how was it and you can talk to them about it but not really very much. The other day actually the assistant [coach] was chatting to me about how he thought I did in training but that's the only time I've got some feedback from the first team staff.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay so thinking about when you come back from England. Do the coaching staff here ever sit down with you and feedback with you on your International performance?</p>	<p>Ambitious to impress the first team players Independently controls his own nerves</p> <p>Feedback provided from first team staff</p>
<p>Strong support network</p>	<p>Participant: One coach does, the one that goes and watches, travels with the International boys. He used to be the under 15s and 16s coach, [coach]. He is quite experienced; his job role now is when players go on International break, he's flying out to wherever they're playing to be a scout for Tottenham and report back to you. So, when we played Germany he went out and watched it and when I got back here, he sits down with you and speaks about how he thought I done.</p>	<p>Loans manager observes and feedbacks on performances. Good practice!</p>
<p>Formal coach support</p>	<p>Interviewer: That's really interesting, does he normally deal with player loans?</p> <p>Participant: Yeah, he goes out and watches the players on loan and Internationals.</p> <p>Interviewer: Not all clubs have that so that's really good.</p> <p>Participant: Yeah and I have a really good relationship with him because I worked with him at 15s and 16s, so I know that he's honest with his feedback. It's quite informal just a chat.</p> <p>Interviewer: Would you go through videos?</p> <p>Participant: No not videos.</p> <p>Interviewer: Do you get access to the videos from England?</p>	<p>Strong relationships with loans manager due to working with them before. This staff member must be embedded to be successful</p>

<p>Increased contact with England</p> <p>England supporting the youth-to-senior transition</p>	<p>Participant: Yes, on Hudl.</p> <p>Interviewer: Can you access them at any time?</p> <p>Participant: You can watch it any time. I could go on there now and watch my individual clips of my game from last year.</p> <p>Interviewer: Okay so thinking about England in general and the process of becoming an England player, what do you think about the process of entering international football? Is there anything that needs to change, or do you need more information before you go?</p> <p>Participant: I think because I've done it quite a bit, I know what is expected but for someone going like... for my first time I didn't really have a clue what the process was and what was expected. I think they could, I don't know what they could do to like ease you into it more, so I'm not sure...</p> <p>Interviewer: Could they come and watch your games and maybe discuss this with you before you go? Would that help?</p> <p>Participant: Maybe, but that's quite hard for them because there is only one manager and one assistant it would be hard for them to get around to every game. Before, maybe he could watch a few clips of you and then when you arrive, he chats to you about what you're like as a player, maybe that way will be good.</p> <p>Interviewer: How is playing international football or training with the first team altered how you see yourself as a player?</p> <p>Participant: Yeah, I think when you're playing youth football it is quite easy to think you're ahead of where you are and then when you go 'over there' you get a bit of a reality check. Like, this is where I wanna be, marking [1st team player], then what do I do to stop [player] shifting and shooting. When you play against Brighton I marked their 16-year-old striker and you come off thinking you've done well and it's easy to get caught up thinking you've done well when actually I've only marked a 16-year-old so it does put into perspective where you want to get. When you go there England is the same when you're marking a player like Saka who is in the Arsenal first team squad, when you know you can deal with that, you've gotta be consistent with it because that's what you want to get to.</p> <p>Interviewer: Being an international footballer hasn't changed the way people think of you here?</p> <p>Participant: No, at other clubs it might, say if you're at a club where there's not many international players then I'm sure they would look at you differently. Like I knew players that have gone away who are at smaller clubs, like at [a club] for instance, he</p>	<p>Access to training and match videos</p> <p>Would value contact pre-camp</p> <p>Awareness of his long-term development and wants to challenge himself against better players</p>
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Perceptions of Int. players	<p>didn't have a pro and then he went away with England and then they offer him a pro contract straightaway, before he played a game because he had that status of going away with England.</p>	England status boosts the reputation of the player
	<p>Interviewer: So, in terms of your performances then, is that ever in your mind? Would you think 'if I play well for England maybe when I come back, I might get offered a pro?'</p>	
	<p>Participant: No not here. There's a lot of Internationals here so it wouldn't work like that.</p>	
	<p>Interviewer: Do you ever have different opinions to what the national coaches or loans manager feedback to you in terms of performance?</p>	
Hierarchical Observation	<p>Participant: I've never really thought that about England, I've always thought the feedback is honest, they don't really give you many negatives but from the last six games I've played I think I've done quite well without being big headed. I've played well, so the feedback has been good feedback and I agree with what they've said. Sometimes here you can think you play really well but they don't agree with that, sometimes here you play really well, and they'll give you negative feedback whereas it's never the other way around, you never play bad and they're positive.</p>	Hierarchical observation – unaware of how the coaches might respond to his performance, particularly when negative.
	<p>Interviewer: Was it last year you had a problem with one of the coaches who targeted you?</p>	
	<p>Participant: Yeah, I know why he done it, it was because I had been sent off against [club] and we lost the league so I could see why he did it.</p>	
Indoctrination	<p>Interviewer: Do you think it was more of a statement to the players?</p>	Understanding of being treated negatively
	<p>Participant: No, I think it was just purely towards me. I didn't take it personal, but I accepted what he said because I thought I was out of order.</p>	
	<p>Interviewer: In terms of feedback then England coaches are quite positive really but maybe they're quite critical at the club, is that fair to say?</p>	Didn't take it personally but felt it was all aimed at him
	<p>Participant: I don't know, I think even the feedback they gave to the club is similar to what they gave me and when you do get left out you think why. Because one of the coaches here, before this international break, was on the phone to the England manager and the manager was like 'yeah we really like [player] he should be coming away With us, what is he like as a person</p>	

<p>Negative perception of the setup</p> <p>Frustration at deselection</p>	<p>and a player?’ and then he was like ‘yeah that’s exactly what we think as well’ so they were positive and then the email come out and I wasn’t going and it was a bit like, do they just tell you what you wanna hear to keep you sweet?</p> <p>Interviewer: Does that change your opinion then? Because you said they’re honest but actually...</p> <p>Participant: Yeah I don’t trust England, I’ve had a few, like when we were under 17s there were eight camps leading up to the Euros and I was the only defender that went every one, started every game which was like 16 games and it came to the Euros and he rang me and said I’m not going because ‘I’m not versatile enough’. I think that was just a little cheap excuse, I don’t know what his real opinion was, obviously he didn’t like me for some reason, but he didn’t want to tell me that, I don’t know why. It was the manager who is manager of Swansea now, Steve Cooper.</p> <p>Interviewer: That affected your trust, did it affect whether you’re bothered if you get a call up in the future or not?</p> <p>Participant: Yeah, I’d say before I’ll always be wanting...well I still wanna go now, but you’re always waiting for that email but now if I get one brilliant, if I don’t alright.</p>	<p>Questions the integrity of the England coaches. Seems frustrated by lack of opportunities.</p> <p>Strong opinions on a lack of trust towards England. Appears despondent at lack of communication and honesty.</p>
<p>Superordinate Themes</p>	<p>Subordinate Themes</p>	<p>Examples from text</p>
<p>First-team transition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • England supports the youth-to-senior transition, willingness to impress, 	
<p>Means of correct training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normalising judgement, lack of hierarchical observation, disciplinary coaching – values honesty and integrity, indoctrination 	
<p>Perceptions of International environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of trust, frustration of deselection, highly experienced and enjoys Int. football, negative perception due to miscommunication, 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong game understanding • Strong support network • Formal coach support 	

Appendix G - Thematic Map

