

Module 4. Individual Observation of the Player

Introduction

This is the last module of the course. Now that we have covered how we make observations both in the training sessions and in competition games, we will delve into how the individual observation process of the player takes place in order to improve and enhance behaviours in the match.

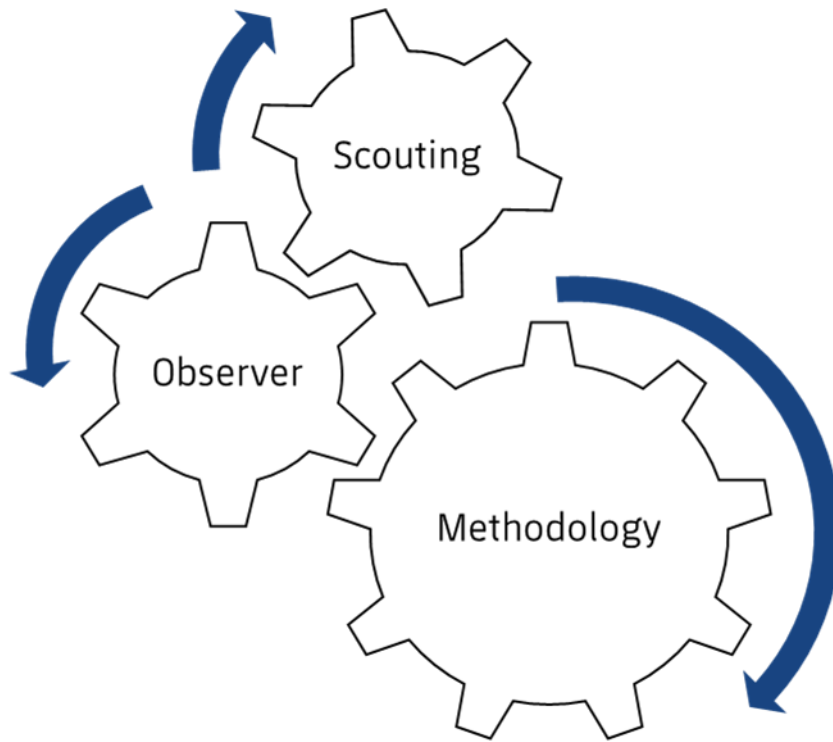
This means that, during the game, we will try to spot the behaviours or weaknesses that can be improved. Visual support is therefore used as a means to work on the specific and individual training for the gradual improvement of that behaviour and, as a consequence, of our players.

Specific and individual training is not usually performed with categories under U-16; on the contrary, it is generally performed with U-19 youth categories. This is because in lower categories, there are not enough resources, that is, time and analysts who can perform this task. However, in some youth categories, such as Professional Formative Football, the work that will be introduced in this module can certainly be done.

Also, a part of our Scouting Department will be presented, which is directly related to the player's profile we are interested in incorporating to the club, and to the way in which this whole process is carried out. As it has been mentioned in previous modules, interdepartmental connection is really important so that the different departments can work towards a common goal, which is our players' improvement.



Figure 1: Illustrative image of the cooperation between departments



Source: Author's production.



Unit 1.1 Training of individual player's behaviours

In order to understand the whole process behind making an individual observation to any player of our teams, two fundamental aspects have to be clear. First, we have to know the **objectives of our model** so as to apply different strategies in order to achieve those goals through specific and individual training. Second, it is essential to keep in mind that **the player is the most important part of the project**, since, according to any club's philosophy, the goal is to incorporate the maximum number of potential players into the first team. (Blanco, 2021.)

As it has been stated in the introduction, and like most of the times, the type of work we will look at below will focus on advanced age groups in formative football, such as U-19 youth categories, and, therefore, it will serve as a good example for those age groups.

Now that the two fundamental aspects to initiate the process have been stated, we will analyse them in more detail. The general aspects will be described in a way that can be useful for any club.

Objectives of the model

1. Training quality players

- We should try to enhance and improve all of our players' abilities so that they become high quality players.

2. Accelerating the player's development processes

- Detecting the behaviours we want to enhance will improve the players' abilities and, consequently, accelerate their development as football players.

3. Having players who share our philosophy

- Several aspects of each club's game identity must be clearly defined and. Only after that may the whole training process begin. This process will bring the player as close as possible to the club's desired quality standard.

4. Incorporating potential players as soon as possible into the club

- Together with our Scouting Department, covering the needs to incorporate potential players to the club as soon as possible will allow us to work with them in the ideal style of play.

5. Incorporating the maximum number of potential players to the first team

- This is the ultimate goal of every club. It is quite difficult to achieve, but it is the final goal of each training process and it has great value, so it needs to be achieved whenever possible.



The player is the project

1. The club's identity

- The player must know the history of the club, its traditions, culture, philosophy, etc. Knowing as much as possible about the club allows for an understanding of the functioning of the whole process, training and working methods.

2. The player's identity

- Knowing the player, their culture, character, personality, family, beliefs, origin and religion will make our work easier.

3. The player as an asset to the club

- If, in the future, a player does not make a leap to the first team, he/she is an asset to the club in terms of transfer. In the best scenario, if the player does make the leap to the first team, this implies zero cost to the club and the work done during all the seasons of that player's formative stages acquires great value.

4. Fostering the player's learning in collective training sessions

- The player's main development must take place in collective training sessions. The player must try to make the most of these sessions to develop their skills, surrounded by teammates and experiencing the club's reality and style of play through different playing situations both in training sessions and competition games.

5. Enhancing the player's learning through individual training

- This is complementary to the player's training and improvement process. When we know what we want to enhance and what we want to improve, we can carry out a specific individualised training, which will boost the player's development.

Figure 2: The player is the project



- ★ Identity of the club
- ★ Identity of the player
- ★ The player is an asset to the club
- ★ Collective training as the main learning source
- ★ Individual training to enhance learning

Source: Author's production.

Players' abilities in relation to positions

In order to know which abilities we want our players to develop, there is a series of key points that need to be considered by the club as fundamental for their players. These points can be represented through the different playing positions.

In the illustrative example, we can observe the 1-4-3-3 system, commonly used by the club. We will try to show different desirable characteristics of our players according to the positions, which could be applied to other playing systems.



Figure 3: (1-4-3-3) Positions playing system.



Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

We will first describe the aspects of the defensive positions and move onto the offensive positions.

These characteristics should always be considered as ideal. In reality, it may be the case that not all of them are fulfilled. They must serve as a reference point to establish what traits we want the players occupying the different positions to have, and therefore, try to fulfil them as much as possible.

- **Goalkeeper**
 - Ability to offer support to the teammates with good footwork.
 - Attention and readiness to take action when necessary.
 - Good reflexes.
 - Perfect command of aerial play.
 - Good communication skills.

Figure 4: Goalkeeper Arnau Tenas's different behaviours



Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

- **Wingers**

- Possibility to play with the natural leg according to the side of the position.
- Ability to team up with players on the internal corridors.
- Good kick in crosses.
- Good aerial play.
- Speed to run behind.
- Good body orientation.
- Ability to identify the perfect moment to go to offensive finishing zones.
- Ability to identify the moment to give width and depth.
- Attentive to defensive vigilances.
- Attentive to coverages.
- Ability to win 1x1 defensive challenges.

Figure 5: Winger Sergi Roberto's different behaviours



Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

Figure 6: Winger Jordi Alba's different behaviours



Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

- **Centre backs**
 - Possibility to play with the natural leg according to the side of the position.
 - Ability to start a good build-up play.
 - Good positioning in build-up play.
 - Good aerial play.

- Ability to make long movements.
- Ability to filter passes crossing lines.
- Speed to run behind.
- Attentive to defensive vigilances.
- Good communication skills.
- Ability to win 1v1 defending challenges.

Figure 7: Centre back Gerard Piqué's different behaviours

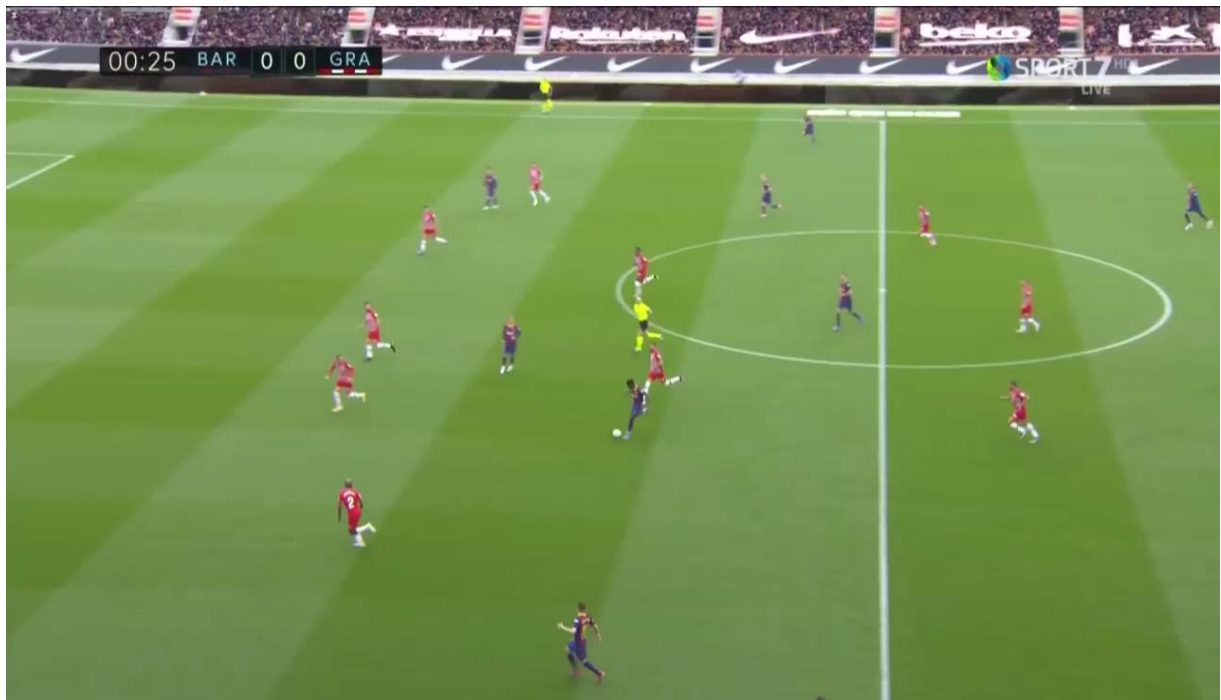


Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

- **Centre Mid-fielder**

- Great ability for build-up play, entering in the first starting line.
- Ability to constantly offer pass lines.
- Good coverage, shuffles over and transitions in the defensive phase.
- Attentive to defensive vigilances.
- Speed to run behind.
- Ability to offer offensive coverages.
- Ability to filter passes crossing lines.
- Ability to make one last pass to the forwards.
- Great ability to team up with teammates (in short passes, few contacts, give and go passes, repeating passes, etc.)
- Perfect command of aerial play.
- Ability to make good long movements.
- Good body orientation.
- Ability to win 1x1 defensive challenges.

Figure 8: Centre Mid-fielder Sergio Busquets's different behaviours



Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

- **Attacking midfielders**

- Ability to offer coverages and offensive shuffles over.
- Ability to offer defensive coverage, shuffles over and transitions.
- Ability to offer build-up play from behind the opponent's defensive line, crossing the line.
- Ability to team up with teammates in limited spaces (give and go passes, short passes, repeating passes, etc.)
- Good body orientation.
- Ability to get to the finishing area.
- Ability to win 1v1 offensive challenges.
- Ability to make the last pass to the forwards.
- Good kick from outside the box.
- Quality player's profile and skilled with the ball.

Figure 9: Attacking midfielder Riqui Puig's different behaviours



Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

- **Forwards**

- Ability to identify the right moment to start pressing the opponent.
- Great ability to win 1v1 offensive challenges.
- Great ability to make crosses.
- Good aerial play (kicks, extensions).
- Ability to connect with teammates through internal corridors (front passes, holding the ball).
- Ability to make feints to the opponent.
- Fast.
- Quality player's profile and skilled with the ball.
- Great finishing ability and when scoring goals.
- Attentive to clearances and capable to occupy shot zones.

Figure 10: Forward Ansu Fati's different behaviours



Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

Observation of the player

All the players of the team are progressively evaluated during the season, al.

Evaluating little by little allows us to make up the player's profile and, consequently, shows us the areas to work on, regarding not only behaviours that can be enhanced but also those that can be improved. This will also allow us to spot the strengths and weaknesses of the player.

As it mentioned in previous modules, we will focus on two ways of observing the player. One is during training sessions and the other is during competitions.

As explained before, training sessions, and video recordings, will be of great help when creating tasks that have a contextualised goal, that is, tasks that allow the player to reproduce behaviours similar to those present in competition. That is to say, tasks such as the following:

- positional drills
- situational drills
- games
- Attack-defense waves,
- etc.

Figure 11: Positional drills (5x5 + 3)



Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

Figure 12: Situational drill with a mini-box



Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

Figure 13: Game in half of the field



Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

Figure 14: Attack-defense waves.



Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

Also, another way to develop the profile of the player is through competition games.

Figure 15: Competition game



Source: FC Barcelona Video Analysis Department.

This process, which aims at developing a personalised profile for each player, is not something that can be done quickly or effortlessly. It requires several months of observation, note-taking, possible conversations with the technical staff, etc.

In order to keep track of the players, an individual report for each player has to be made. Each report includes everything that we and the technical staff observe, which makes it a qualitative tool for all the parties involved.

Below there is an example of a typical report where you can see what things are interesting to record from each of the players.

The report can be divided in different parts according to the information compiled there: the first section includes the player's personal information (name, picture, age, etc.), the second section includes very general statistic data (matches, player, minutes, cards), the third section shows the position occupied by the player (centre right, centre mid-fielder, right attacking midfielder, etc.), and, lastly, the fourth section contains information on the

strengths, weaknesses, models of play and training plan. When referring to models of play, it is useful to write down how the player behaves and acquires our model of play. On this basis, we will write down the training plan, which will include the key points we want to focus on during training with that player. We will see later how this is organised.

The following report is an example of an individual player's report. It is open to changes according to the concerns and methodology of each club.



Figure 16: Individual Player's Report

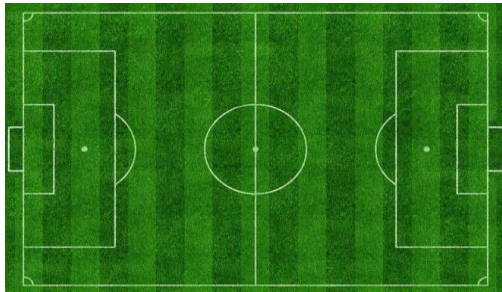


Name:
 Season:
 Team:
 Coaches:

Personal Information	
Date of birth	
Year of entry	
Nationality	
Side	

Season statistics			
Games played		Total games percentage	
Minutes played		Total minutes percentage	
Starting line-up		Starting line-up percentage	
Yellow cards		Red cards	

Position



Strengths
Weaknesses
Model of play
Training plan



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Types of training

In order to understand how to plan the players' specific and individual training for improvement or enhancement of different behaviours that we are concerned with, we will present and explain the logic behind different training blocks.

Block 1

Collective or team training

This is the typical group training of around ninety minutes that the coach organises with the aim of working on different concepts of our model of play, that is the one that identifies our team. The videos of training sessions shown in module 2 can be taken as examples.

Collective training is done four times a week and lasts around ninety minutes.

Block 2

Specific training

This type of training aims at expanding the workload on the contents that are least developed in the collective training as a result of the type of tasks that are generally performed. For example, we may take advantage of the specific training to work on aerial actions, since, due to the type of task that is performed during collective training, there are not many opportunities to practise aerial play.

Also, this type of training is useful to practice specific content related to the players' position. For instance, during a task in collective training, a forward and a defender may practice the same finishing situations. This is not logical since in a competition game the forward will likely encounter more attempts on goal than the defender.

To distribute those workloads correctly, specific finishing exercises are created so that the forwarders work more on those aspects.

The specific training is scheduled twice or three times a week and may last about fifteen to thirty minutes. It can be organised so as to work on one specific aspect with one part of the team and on a completely different one with the other part.



It can take place before or after the collective training, always taking into account the sports and competition context of the week because youth A, for example, may have two competitions in a week on the same microcycle while, youth B may have one competition in the microcycle.

Block 3

Individual training

Lastly, let us delve into individual training. In order to plan this type of training, a previous individual observation process and analysis of the players must have been carried out during training sessions and competition games.

This block is related to the previously explained individual player's report. In this report, we will take notes of strengths, weaknesses and training plan to enhance good behaviours and improve those that are not that good.

For instance, if a centre forward has difficulties when shooting on target, We will work on different finishing situations individually, so as to eventually improve this behaviour.

Individual training can be scheduled three times a week, always alternating players. In general, a player could have individual training sessions once or twice a week for ten or twenty minutes. We tend to avoid doing this in the last session before the game.

It is important to keep a record of all the individual sessions since this will show us the progress we have achieved with a specific player.

In this block it is essential to keep in mind that the player is vital for this process, which means that the player needs to be involved, since all the work is focused on their improvement and progress. To make sure they are involved, a specific video session could be prepared in order to show the player their progress

Table 1: Example of a typical week of scheduled training sessions

Monday 3 rd	Tuesday 4 th	Wednesday 5 th	Thursday 6 th	Friday 7 th	Saturday 8 th	Sunday 9 th
10:15 – 12:30 Youth A (U-18) – Collective training		10:15 – 12:30 Youth A (U- 18) – Collective training	10:00 – 10:15 Youth A (U- 18) – Specific training	10:15 – 12:30 Youth A (U-18) – Collective training	12:00 – 14:00 Youth A (U- 18) - CF. Damm – CE Field No. 7	



12:45 –		12:45 –	10:15 –	12:45 –		
13:00		13:00	12:30	13:00		
Youth A		Youth A (U-	Youth A (U-	Youth A		
(U-18) –		18) –	18) –	(U-18) –		
Specific		Individual	Collective	Individual		
training		training	training	training		

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In order to better understand the whole process of planning and performing an individual training session, Figure 17 summarises the steps in a chronological order.

Figure 17: Chronology of individual training



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Practical example

Next, a practical case will be shown as an example of the whole process we have been discussing, from the beginning of the observations in the training sessions and games up to what we write down on an individual player's report. Writing the individual report allows us to plan the content we want to work on in the individual training and the way in which we will monitor transmit it.

The written content shows the day-to-day life of an observer who is part of the technical staff of the Youth team. This section has been designed following the format of an

interview or talk in order to stimulate a qualitative observation and scheduled training process, specifically and individually tailored for the player.

Q: When is the player individually observed?

A: The player is observed during training sessions and competition games.

Q: When you observe a player and spot an interesting feature, do you use visual support?

A: Yes. We always have visual support either to detect or verify what has been observed live during the session or in the competition game.

In many opportunities during live observation, we focus on some aspects that do not look the same when they are watched in a video later on. Therefore, visual support is really important.

Q: How is an aspect that needs improvement or enhancement detected?

A: In general, we get a feeling. Since our identity of play is so strong, it is easily noticeable when a player does not respond or act well on specific situations.

Enhancing an aspect normally involves specific behaviours related to the position. For instance, it is important to enhance a centre forward's shoot on target from outside the box.

In a more difficult situation, such as when we do not have possession of the ball, space occupation, being in good shape and other related concepts can be identified when reviewing training sessions and competition games.

Q: What is the process followed once a player's feature is pointed out for improvement or strengthening?

A: The process is the following:

1. Identify the feature as shown in previous answers.
2. Take notes in an individual report throughout the weeks.
3. Check that the feature is not something sporadic. We do this when observing a specific player during training sessions and games, so as to notice if there is a repeated action during the season or if some feature only happened once.
4. Schedule the individual training with that particular player to improve or enhance these behaviours.
5. If necessary, show the video with the aspects that need improvement.

Q: Once a feature for improvement or strengthening has been identified and the individual training is done, is information transmitted directly to the player or to the technical staff?

A: The individual training is shared directly with the technical staff who are the ones who carry out the training with the player.



We can show the player the progress achieved or the exact moment when they perform correctly the action that needed improvement, if the technical staff considers this appropriate as a positive reinforcement strategy. If the player asks for the images, they can be shown as well.

Q: Is it possible to have a clip of a player's specific and individualised training?

A: Yes. Let us look at two types of training: specific and individualised, directed towards our forwards to work on the **movements without the ball** in the box.

We will show it together with the progression. First, it is done with dummy defender mannequins. After that, training is done with the real defenders.

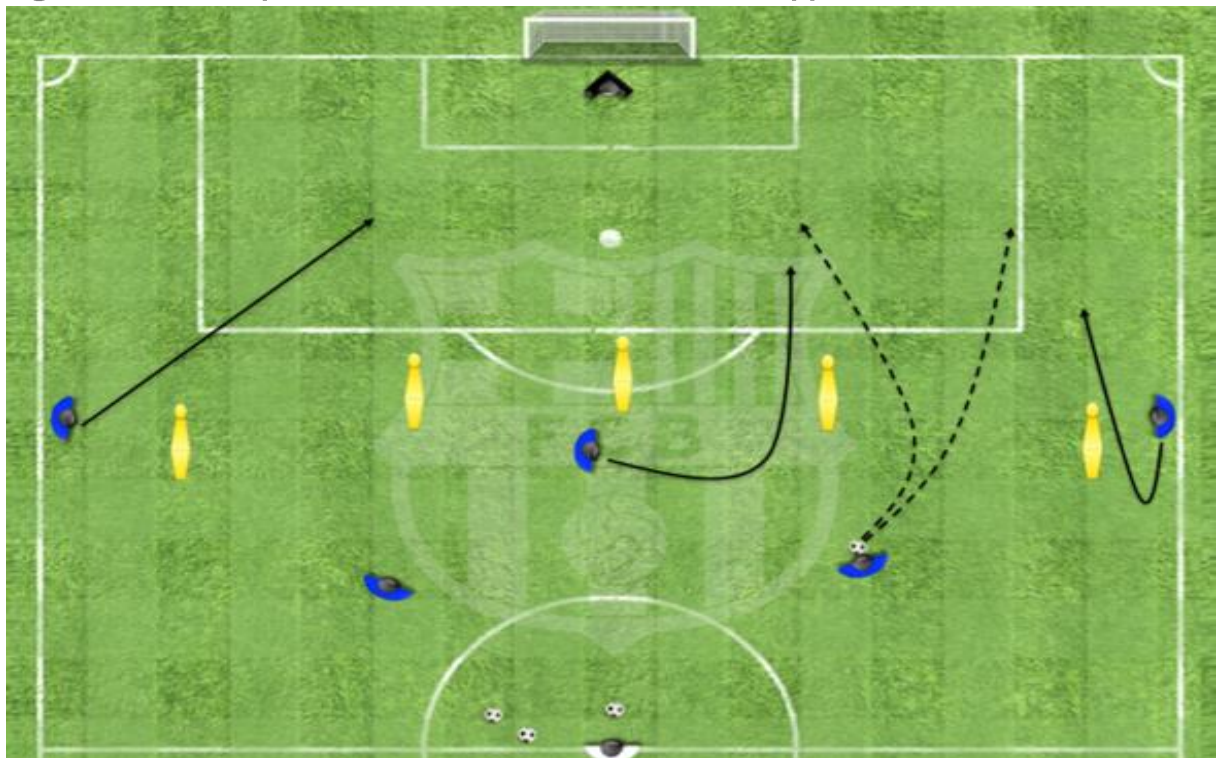


Figure 18: Graphic representation of the exercise with no opposition.



Source: FC Barcelona Youth Team's Technical Staff.

Figure 19: Video representation of the exercise with no opposition.



Source: FC Barcelona Youth Team's Technical Staff.

Figure 20: Graphic representation of the exercise (3v2) with opposition.



Source: FC Barcelona Youth Team's Technical Staff.

Figure 21: Video representation of the exercise (3v2) with opposition.



Source: FC Barcelona Youth Team's Technical Staff.

Unit 1.2: *Scouting*

When we talk about the player individually, it is necessary to bear in mind that not all players in the club start their formative phase from the younger age categories. In fact, many players join the club at a more advanced age. For this reason, it is worth highlighting the work done in other areas related to the process of incorporating players with a determined profile into the club. The Scouting Department and its scouts are responsible for carrying out this task.

Talent identification in football is a complex process of recognising and selecting players with the greatest potential. Scouts watch and evaluate, mainly, the players that have not yet been incorporated by elite football academies in tests or football matches. Based on the observations of present football performance, they make predictions of the players' future performance to give advice as regards this selection process (Bergkamp, Frencken, Niessen, Meijer and Den Hartigh, 2021).

In order to make correct and accurate predictions and to ultimately decide if a player has potential to exploit, scouts have to go through a process of tackling different issues.

1. Defining the age of the players whose performance they are trying to predict.
2. Considering what specific football skills can be indicators of the player's performance and how these skills can be tested.
3. Making general predictions about the players' future performance based on these indicator tests.

The scout's task of predicting the future performance of young players is not an easy one. In this regard, evidence shows that accurate and valid predictions improve when the prediction process is more structured. Strategies such as explicitly defining the criteria, rating information systematically and combining the rating according to decision rules are all valid ways of making the predictions more precise (Bergkamp, Frencken, Niessen, Meijer and Den Hartigh, 2021).

In the following section, we will show how our Scouting Department works and organises in order to sign talented players to the club.

Structure of the Scouting Department

Figure 22 below displays how the club's Scouting Department is organised. Three blocks can be differentiated: the professional team, the formative football team and the women's football team. Each team has its corresponding scouter.

Figure 22: FC Barcelona Scouting Department Organisation Chart



Source: FC Barcelona Scouting Department.

DEPARTAMENTO DE SCOUTING	Scouting Department
RESPONSABLE DEL DEPARTAMENTO	Head of the Department
PROFESIONAL (desde 17 años)	PROFESSIONAL (from the age of 17)
Competiciones profesionales	Professional competitions
Especialista en porteros	Goalkeeping Specialist
FORMATIVO (8-19 años)	FORMATIVE (from the age of 8 to 19)
Benjamines a Juveniles	U-9 to U-18
20 SCOUTS ZONA DE ESPAÑA	20 Scouts Zona in Spain

ENTRENADORES	Coaches
FEMENINO	WOMEN'S
Formativo y Profesional	Formative and Professional

As it can be seen, in the formative football team, the coaches are also present. They are well distributed and organised and they perform recruitment tasks in the different areas of our autonomous community, such as Catalonia.

Scouts Distribution

In order to get a better grip on the market, scouts are scattered all around the world. Leagues and areas are classified so as to distribute and organise the scouts, allowing us to have a good monitoring of the players.

This classifications per areas and leagues are directly related to the blocks shown in Figure 22. Some scouts devote themselves to looking at the professional players and others will look at players in formative phases.

In the **professional** leagues block, our scouts are divided as follows:

- **Leagues A:** comprised of the top European leagues.
 - La Liga Santander (Spain)
 - Premier League (England)
 - Ligue 1 (France)
 - Serie A (Italy)
 - Bundesliga (German)

- **Leagues B:** comprised of lower leagues in Europe and leagues in America.
 - Jupiler Pro League (Belgium)
 - Eredivise (Holland)
 - Leagues in America,
 - etc.

When we refer to recruitment in formative football, scouts are distributed in the following way:



- **Spain:** scouts are distributed in different autonomous communities in Spain. More or less scouts are needed depending on the importance of the area of recruitment. That means that if there is large-scale recruitment of players in an autonomous community, there will be more scouts in that area.
- **Catalonia:** since this autonomous community is an important recruitment area, the greatest number of scouts and distributed areas are found there. Not only scouts but also coaches are located there, which is why there is also a lot of monitoring across this region.

It is important to mention **women's** football. As Figure 22 shows, the scouts in this block are concerned not only with professional football but with formative football as well. Therefore, women's football scouts are present in each of the groups mentioned before (professional and formative).

Player's profile

The Scouting Department of each club works on the incorporation of a series of players with a specific profile according to the club's interests and philosophy.

Larkin and O'Connor (2017) discovered that Australian scouts and coaches (n = 20,) perceived technical characteristics (for instance, the first touch, 1v1), psychological characteristics (for example, positive attitude, personality) and others (such as the X factor) as the most important ones when it comes to identifying players under the age of thirteen. Instead, they considered that motor skills (such as speed), physical attributes (such as strength), and defensive capacities were less important in the talent identification process.

In our case, we choose the players we want to sign to the club based on our model of play. This is so because we want to play in a way that signals our identity as a club. This is the reason why the scouts try to sign players who can favour the development of our game. Therefore, a FBC player's profile has been established so that the scouts have a starting point and certain characteristics that must be observed when assessing possible interesting players for the club.

Scouts' Work

As mentioned before, the Scouting Department is organized in a structured way so that scouts are distributed in different countries and areas. The objective is to have a thorough knowledge of the whole market and the most interesting players for the club.



The work of scouts on the signing of new players can be divided into two:

1. On the one hand, they try to sign the best players, the ones considered the top players in the market. Regardless of the team's needs, top-ranked players are signed to the club when possible.
2. On the other hand, the needs of each team are analysed. The aim is to incorporate new players who can contribute to certain positions.

The best possible scenario for scouts would be that teams were improved every year.

Player's follow-up

Once the club is interested in a player, scouts begin the follow-up process following two methods:

1. **Descriptive Report** It is a report scouts use to have all the player's information together once they have started the follow-up process. Here, they write down all the information they find relevant. Below, we will show an example of a descriptive report we have used.
2. **Video Reports, if possible.** This report is made when observing the talented player that is going to be signed to the club. The idea is to make recordings during competition games in order to observe again their behaviours when needed or to show them to other interested parties in the club. In general, this follow-up is conducted with highly interesting players.



Figure 23: Descriptive Report



Team:

Nationality:

Category:

Side:

Height:

End of the contract:

Agent:



- Preferred position
- Second position
- Third position

Type: Formative Professional Future

Position:

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Conditional Structure (physical aspects)		
Coordinative Structure (technical aspects)		
Cognitive Structure (tactical aspects)		
Mental and Evolutionary Structure (psychological aspects)		
Other aspects		

Conclusions	
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Source: Prepared by the authors.



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