

STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH FOOTBALL

MODULE 2: SOUTH
AMERICA'S EDUCATIONAL
FOOTBALL



-EVOLUCIÓN-
ES CONMEBOL

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2.1 The concept of training in football

It is pertinent to make a brief reference to the use of the term training in this document; it is used to refer to the work carried out by the coaches, teachers and instructors with the boys and girls who are part of the grassroots club and the Youth Teams.

In this document, it has been stated that South American Football, while fun and passionate, also contributes to young people's education. Starting from this concept of what Football is in South America, it can be affirmed that, for CONMEBOL, the work done with the boys and girls of the youth clubs is not the result of physical training plus tactical formulas that should be put into practice with some words of encouragement in between.

Figure 1: Boys and Girls Paying Attention to the Coach's Explanation



Source: CONMEBOL and Associations Member of CONMEBOL, 2019. Own file, unpublished.

CONMEBOL proposes that high-performance football should be a training space, where youth clubs contribute to the process of growth and personal sociocultural autonomy of the players. Boys and girls should be able to balance their emotional environment with their ability to think, discern and make decisions typical of a high-performance athlete with great public exposure, with the help of adult coaching staff, both on and off the field.

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CONMEBOL's proposal that coaches, teachers and instructors should be trained is related to the idea of South American Football 2.0 and to the experience of working with football stars for decades and seeing how they are players who think fast, play the ball with creativity, are excited and make their team and the fans passionate, who are able to objectively and modestly analyse their victories or losses at the press conference. They are athletes capable of playing as a team and at the same time, developing their personal talent on the field.

**South American Football,
while fun and passionate,
also contributes to young
people's education.**

That idol is not of course just a machine that makes passes, runs and scores goals. That star is, as described in the previous paragraph, an educated person, a mature man or woman, autonomous, who balances their emotional world with their ability to

think, discern and make decisions that allow them to be in control of results, both in their individuality and as a football professional. This is the result of trainers who train young football players, it is not a simple result of fate.

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2.2 The training of young football players, the key to the 21st Century

Figure 2: Bases of training and sports performance



Source: self-made.

The first thing that is important to highlight here is that, currently, the most important leagues in the world, such as the European, Asian, American and Mexican Leagues, have in their teams in the different categories, a significant number of players born in South America,

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which makes CONMEBOL the Confederation that contributes the most footballers to other Federations in the world.

In the 21st century South America, according to experts, these contributions at the international level are not a minor fact, since they show the international assessment of highly competitive athletes, which is something extremely positive. Nevertheless, this also implies the need to seriously rethink some aspects of performing a macro-process of football training, especially in grassroots football for youth clubs for men and women. In this sense, CONMEBOL has seriously taken the challenge of optimising the study and constant training of the new generations of coaches, teachers and instructors so that the development of young athletes can be increasingly promoted, and so the technical teams can incorporate into their practice and identity the CONMEBOL vision and idea of training in high-performance football.

South American Football of the 21st Century is a broad and inclusive sport, since it is in its DNA to work with men and women of cultural, ethnic, social and economic differences. It is a human activity where psychological and emotional aspects play a significant role. To this reality of open doors, we must add the fact that South American Football focuses on learning from reality. Today, it is evident that the same theory is not replicable in other countries, even in the same country.

TODAY THE FIELD IS A PLAYGROUND WHERE BOYS, GIRLS AND YOUNG PEOPLE CAN BUILD THEIR SYMBOLIC WORLD, BOTH IN RELATION TO THEMSELVES AND IN RELATION TO THE WORLD IN WHICH THEY FIND THEMSELVES.

This principle of reality means that the coach's field experience is essential, which should be based, among other things, on a clear analysis of the environment where the activity will take place, so that it has the desired impact. Therefore, we have to resist the temptation to apply methods such as: select + copy + paste, because of course there is a lot to incorporate into the training of young football players, but that good practice, seen in this or that part of the world, must always be filtered, intertwining with the context of their own culture and the way football is experienced in each place where a League or Federation develops its activities.

Another principle of the South American identity consists in the manifestation of the playful side of human beings in football. Today the field is a playground where boys, girls and young people can build their symbolic world, both in relation to themselves and in relation to the world in which they find themselves.

In this sense, it is worth reaffirming the idea widely accepted and supported by experts that play - for boys, girls and young people - is the main constructive element of the schemes of socialisation and respect for the rules. In addition, the game involves the body, passion and decisions, components that are part of the educational approach towards citizens and football players.

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This positive reality mentioned in terms of the contribution of football players does not imply that there are not things that need to improve or that sports leaders and those in charge of training football players should not correct and modify aspects of their way of carrying out the macro-process infant-childhood training.

On the contrary, we must always continue to grow, work and evolve in primary training centres and in affiliated clubs in order to train coaches in two main areas: Children's Football, period from six to thirteen years old, and Adolescent Football, period from fourteen to twenty years old.

The path is the study and constant training of the new generations of coaches-trainers, in order to optimise and further enhance the development process of young football players. But to be able to retrace that growth path successfully, we first had to know the current situation of our grassroots football, with its strengths and weaknesses; that was the starting point.

In addition to training and updating, the ideal situation would be to make contact and approach the coaches and trainers of the clubs of the different countries and places in South America and through this exchange, draw solid conclusions about the different realities that educational football has in each federation and region that compose it because we must not forget that within the same country, the social and sports context can be different.

Two great pillars of South American football training

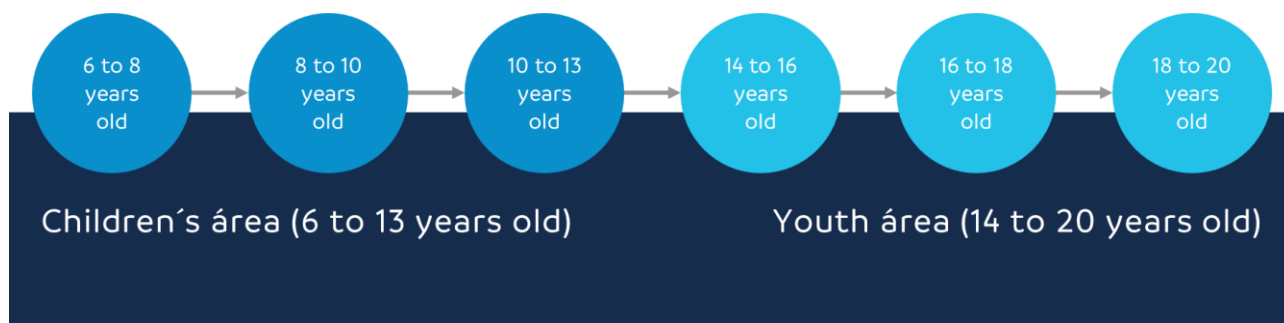
The great stage of educational football comprises young people of six to twenty years of age. This set of sports years and seasons, a multiannual process of fourteen- or fifteen-years' duration, will be essential, not only for the training of the footballer, but for the person's comprehensive education.

This mega organisational stage should be very well structured and planned, since it will represent the athlete's basis of their way into elite football. In the event that this objective is not achieved, we will have made a positive contribution to the education of the young person.

We must observe children's football and adolescent football as two processes dependent on each other, although both have different realities and objectives.

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Figure 3: Evolution of Football from Children to Adolescents



Source: self-made

Children's football (six to thirteen years old) must be valued with great attention. The success of a youth club and subsequently the objectives that the first or absolute team of a federation can achieve does not begin in the process of youth clubs, but much earlier.

During the Evolution Programme tour in different South American countries, we have detected that the period from six to thirteen years of age is a stage that is not as important as it should be, considering that during this period the footballer of the future starts to grow.

Children's football or initial football is relevant for the child's comprehensive education. We are talking about seven or eight sports seasons where the child must be stimulated with specific information appropriate to his or her biological growth, emotional experiences, cognitive and motor experiences that cannot be compensated in the future, but must be experienced in that moment known as sensitive phases of the child's motor and psychological learning.

However, in some federations the importance of this part of the player training process is not considered, since official competitions start at thirteen or fourteen years old and many clubs do not have categories of children within their sports structures (between six and thirteen years old) nor do they have coaches who specialise in the area.

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Figure 4: Children's Football Match



Source: CONMEBOL and Associations Member of CONMEBOL, 2019. Own file, unpublished.

As a consequence of this reality, in many cases, young people arrive at clubs only at the age of thirteen without the adequate sports training provided by a teaching-learning process of programmed children's football.

We believe that the sports journey that in most cases South American football players make towards professional football generally originates from the first bond made with social football. We refer to social football as school football, neighbourhood clubs and street or rural football; which is becoming less and less frequent due to the urban and technological advances.

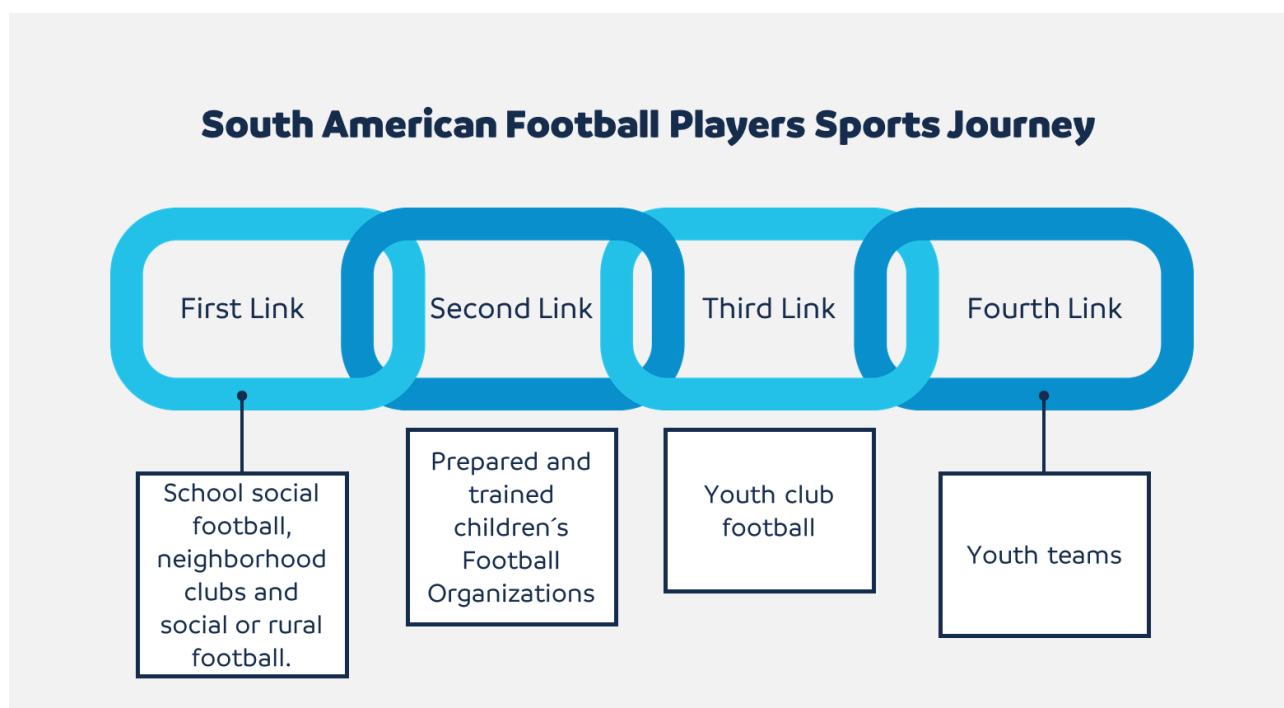
It is there where the sociocultural factors begin to determine an educational process. What once was street football or pasture football has been lost as a result of the development of large cities, the loss of green spaces and in many cities, the scourge of unsafety. Moreover, technology has taken time away from recreational activities, motor and socialising experiences, making it dominant and very necessary today for federations and clubs to organise this lost training process.

In this age group of six to thirteen years old, where South American football lacks development structures, clubs should be ready to receive children from early ages with infrastructure for children's football (second training link) prepared for the child to spend

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seven years in this learning stage. This much-needed second stage is where South America must still optimise its sports infrastructure and professional staff.

Figure 5: Sports Tour of South American Football Players



Source: self-made

The third link in this educational journey consists in adolescent football, period from fourteen to twenty years old, and it is from there that the youth clubs select the best values for the different categories.

Understanding that the protocol work of youth clubs aims precisely at this fourth link, we must not omit in any way the importance that social football and children's football organised in the clubs of the different federations, have two important stages in the initiation of the "child-player".

We conclude that the federations and clubs should place special importance on links 2 and 3 of the sports pyramid. We consider Children's Football and Adolescent Football to be the introductory stages to national youth clubs. The young football player must reach youth club stage with quality training and competition process experienced in their clubs.

As a comparative example imagine that a child starts secondary school without having gone through primary school, undoubtedly the tools that this child has to continue with their process of sports improvement are reduced since they missed seven years of technical

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learning, motor experiences and skills which will be necessary and fundamental to continue training in the following youth period.

Based on the above mentioned, we consider that children's football is the basis of the training process and for this reason, a childhood with partial or total absence of it will limit the evolution of the little football player later on.

Children's football is a period that can have a duration of seven or eight years, where the child begins to consolidate his personality, and where general motor learning that triggers the development of an optimal technique is also important, which should be developed preferably through play.

The concept that the child must learn by playing should be present in all the training programmes of sports trainers and teachers.

We are convinced that it is extremely necessary that the federations and clubs put their efforts into training professional specialists in these areas. We are referring to trained and specialised trainers in children's football. Otherwise, we will be missing seven fundamental years in the training process, seven years that will be unrecoverable in the sports training of our young people.

THE PHASES OF CHILDREN'S FOOTBALL MUST BE SEEN AS THE BASE OF A PYRAMID WHERE KEY ASPECTS THAT WILL SERVE AS A PLATFORM FOR EVERYTHING THAT WILL COME IN THE GREAT YOUTH PERIOD BEGIN TO BE CEMENTED.

As we mentioned before, in such a long process and with so many differences, it is important to know how to distinguish three main areas: children's football, adolescent football and professional football, three different worlds within the same sport that must coexist in a cohesive way.

But this division is not enough to be able to plan an optimal and adequate work: it is necessary that all the members responsible for the training process of the child, first, and the young person, later (trainers, coordinators, doctors, leaders and other specialists), become aware of how delicate and serious this path is and that, when taking the responsibility of teaching and training a group of children, a specialisation is essential in each phase of child and youth growth.

In effect, the phases of children's football must be seen as the basis of a pyramid where key aspects begin to be developed, which will serve as a platform for everything that will come in the great youth period, where specific learning is acquired and perfected.

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Figure 6: Adolescent Team Player



Source: CONMEBOL and Associations Member of CONMEBOL, 2019. Own file, unpublished.

A six-year-old and a thirteen-year-old child must have two completely different training experiences. Throughout the childhood stage we find remarkable physical, motor and cognitive differences due to the constant changes that children experience in their development and growth.

Physical education coaches and teachers (both trainers and with a teaching background) specialised in football must understand the mental, sensorial-motor profile of the child, study and understand the psychological and physical reality of each stage of growth in the great period of childhood.

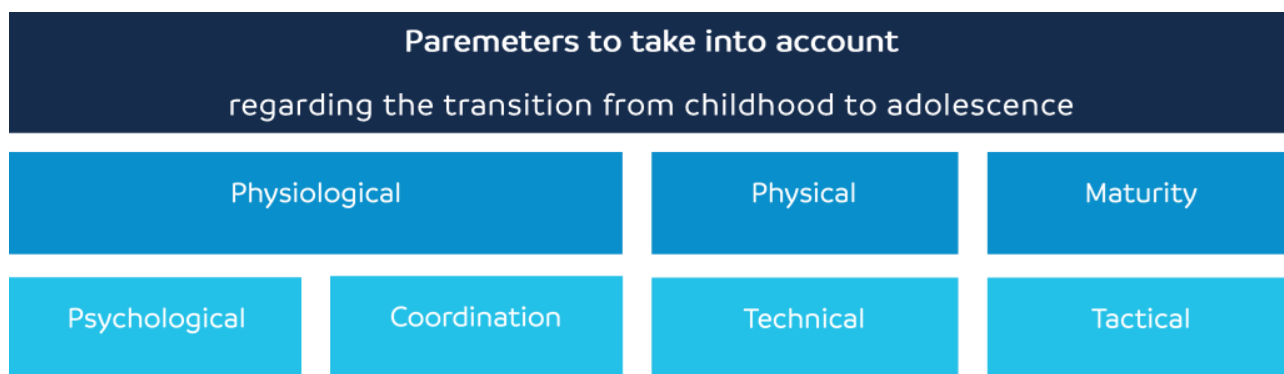
During seven years of growth (six to thirteen years), the child goes through different evolutionary moments that modify the mental, physical, sensory-perceptive and coordinative aspects. For this reason, we must organise children's football into three different phases.

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Each of these will have different training contents and programming percentages considering the different realities in the three growth stages. These differences emerge from the detailed study of the comprehensive profile of each age.

Physical, physiological, developmental, mental, coordinative, technical and tactical parameters are different in the years that the child develops into adolescence and that must be considered in the programming process.

Figure 7: Parameters to consider in the transition from childhood to adolescence



Source: self-made

We must consider that this is a vital point in the child's training process. For this purpose, each coach of the three periods must have an extensive knowledge about the developmental stage of each phase.

Something similar happens with the youth period in terms of the noticeable changes that occur in each of its three phases. Modifications that are related to psychological, physical, physiological (hormonal) aspects make the fine diagramming of the contents to be developed essential, as well as the qualitative and quantitative parameters of the training. Moreover, we must not forget the importance of the socio-cultural aspects of children and young football players.

- Children's Football: 6 to 13 years old.
- Adolescent Football: 14 to 20 years old.

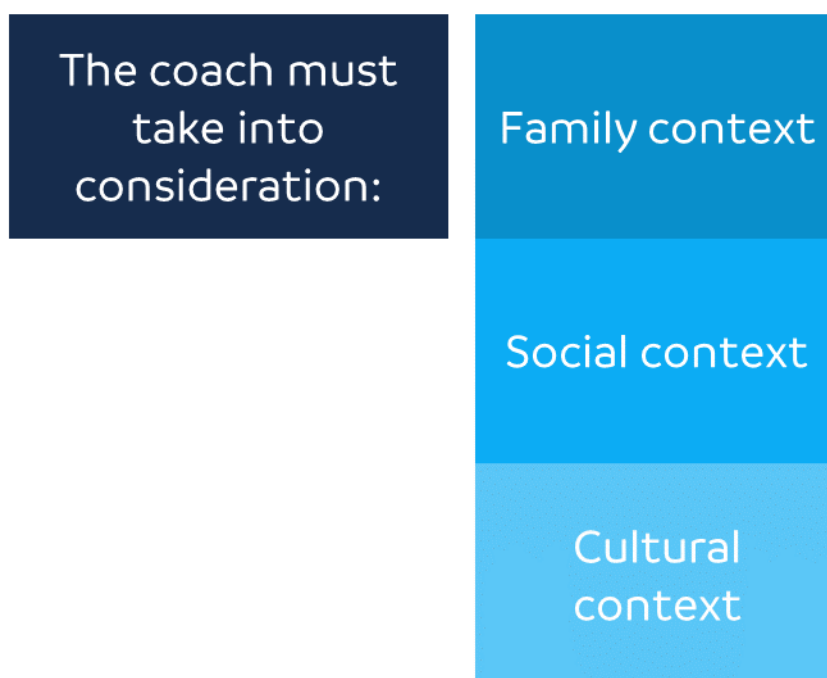
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2.3 Football that shapes the player and his or her environment

In this section, we must add the fact that the footballer and coaches, in South America, come, in general, from a social area of scarce economic and cultural resources -as seen in the diagnosis of the Table of Experts of Youth Teams of August 2018. This makes it difficult for children and young people from tough sociocultural conditions to access football (for example, they need help supporting their home or family needs).

These limitations generate consequences that are directly related to the quality of training and the possibility of development of the child, both on and off the football field. For this reason, it is essential that the coach, as the first action in his training work, evaluates the family, social and cultural context in which the children develop, the young people who are with them in grassroots football or in the National Team / Youth Club.

Figure 8: Considerations that the child's and adolescent's coach must keep in mind



Source: self-made

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The studies performed by CONMEBOL show that, at present, most children and young people who participate in Children's and Youth Football, in a South American club, come from families that see the child's and young people's career as a guarantee for the future of the entire family group, as a form of social advancement and honest means of economic sustenance.

This leads parents to put pressure on their sons and daughters and on the trainers themselves, becoming a negative aspect in the sports life of the minor who begins to play football from a very early evolutionary stage, forgetting his or her condition as a child with the right to play and go to school, and begin to treat them as a small professional adult, which shows ignorance about their developmental stages.

A very special point here has to do with the representatives and their influence in the families' and young players' lives. They must understand that comprehensive training and development as people are the most important aspects to achieve better results. Many times, their vision contradicts the educational processes and negatively influences it since they end up making decisions that add little value to the present and future life of the player.

Given this situation, CONMEBOL affirms that it is an obligation of all those who are part of educational football to guide and help families and all the people who surrounds the football athlete to understand the need for adequate information on the processes and stages through which the young person / child in training undergoes, since the same approach cannot be taken with a 9-year-old boy or girl and a 16-year-old teenager in football.

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2.4 Multi-disciplinary Training

Experience on an academic field, as explained in the 2018 Youth Teams Experts Table, shows that, in order to achieve the objectives proposed by CONMEBOL for the training of young people in youth clubs, it is important that the clubs have interdisciplinary teams (coaches, teachers, doctors, psychologists, social workers, etc.) in order to provide comprehensive care and training to the players, and their families. No coach or teacher needs or has to know everything, especially in a world as complex and broad as that of grassroots and professional football today.

Thus, it is important to keep in mind that training is a responsibility shared by all; a task that firstly belongs to the family and secondly to formal schooling. Sports trainers promote the schooling of boys and girls as an inalienable right and as one of the main aspects in the development of every human being that contributes to the strengthening of values, especially those related to sports and citizen ethics. In this sense, it is worth quoting Reinaldo Rueda in the Table of -Experts of 2018: "School will be the second home again when the family becomes the first school again". This reflection highlights the current challenge faced by everyone who works in the educational field of boys, girls and young athletes.

TRAINING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IS A RESPONSIBILITY SHARED BY ALL: FAMILY, SCHOOL, SPORTS TRAINERS, COACHES AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS WITH WHOM THEY RELATE.

We must not lose sight of the fact that education is a role that belongs to the family in the first place and to primary and secondary school in second place. We, sports trainers, can support and promote academic education and strengthen ethical values, but we could never be a fundamental part of the child's educational process if the family first, and the school, second, do not make their essential contribution.

A common denominator within the general diagnosis of South American educational football refers to the current situation of children's football, that golden stage of motor and sports learning between the ages of six and thirteen, which, in various parts of South America, is a poorly developed sector. We believe that training structures and processes must be optimised in this childhood phase.

In order to begin to change the reality of children's football, it is vital to train and evaluate specialised coaches in those early stages of growth that are so sensitive in the comprehensive training of the child. All this must come together in the child's learning journey between the ages of six and thirteen.

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2.5 Training as strengthening and promoting the person

The football experience is very diverse and rich in different contexts, many of them without resources. The most adverse or problematic reality is, for educational football, a setting where creativity can be fostered and can be seen as an emotional and sporting opportunity that helps the boy or girl find the mechanisms to develop a permanent and resilient ability to proactively experience the new and the adverse. In other words, he or she is a professional adolescent athlete and a human being who does not allow him or herself to be overcome or depressed because of personal or socio-economic setbacks.

The most important stage for learning skills and abilities is between the ages of six and thirteen. In many regions of the world, especially in South America, it is the stage where spontaneity, freedom of play and creative overcoming contextual obstacles prevail; this contributes to develop and strengthen the creative, passionate and high-performance skills of the South American athlete. These internationally recognised skills are proof that South American players are found in the world's major football leagues.

In the CONMEBOL world, it is evident that transforming and improving the Children's Football, which is the foundation and success at a youth and professional level, is vital to train and specialise coaches dedicated exclusively to these sensitive early developmental stages. It is also essential for the child's comprehensive education, as well as the commitment to comprehensive work along with the clubs and national teams.

What is needed to continue transforming and improving Children's Football?	Training and specialisation of coaches
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2.6 Inter-disciplinary Training

In this last section of the module, it is important to address one of the recommendations that emerged from the Expert Table for Youth Teams of August 2018 that has to do with the need to have an interdisciplinary approach and sports action in CONMEBOL youth clubs.

At this point and before proceeding any further, it is necessary to make a conceptual clarification and understand what we refer to when talking about the interdisciplinary action-approach in working with CONMEBOL youth clubs.

In simple words, it can be said that, in the interdisciplinary approach, knowledge about high-performance professional football comes from different fields of science (medicine, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, economics, law, philosophy, neuroscience, etc.) and is based on concepts, principles and general sports interventions. This approach is especially important in understanding and solving the challenges of working with children in youth clubs today.

Figure 9: Interdisciplinary approach to high-performance professional football



Source: self-made

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Football managers, who belong in CONMEBOL youth clubs, develop a new way of working in an interdisciplinary way with young players; that is, they approach training or the game as the result of a whole that is beyond the result of individualities, game strategies or fitness. This is all defining for a correct implementation of the interdisciplinary action-approach, since many may think of this as simply having a doctor, a psychologist and a pedagogue on campus, but that is not so. If that pedagogue or that doctor does not meet regularly with the coaches or physical trainers to discuss how the team is doing, or what the goals are and what is being required from the players to achieve success, if that dialogue and cooperative work does not occur in practice, it does not have the interdisciplinary whole that South American Football of the 21st Century requires.

Thus, in practice, the interdisciplinary nature of Youth Football allows Football Managers to understand and take a comprehensive action in everything that is related to the processes that take place simultaneously within the personal and relational field of the young players of the CONMEBOL youth clubs; sports spaces where these athletes, at the same time that they develop as high-performance professionals, do so as public celebrities who are showcases of the new successful models of the 21st century.

Considering the advances in scientific knowledge on the interdisciplinary action-approach when working in youth clubs, CONMEBOL affirms there is a need for coaches and the interdisciplinary team to accompany them to understand the fact that children and young men and women, during their development, go through different phases. This means they do not have the same demands or the same behaviours, and their growth is not always equivalent to a pattern of doing, thinking or feeling nor is it possible to sustain the idea of treating them or shaping them as small adults, especially when today the presence of women on the field is a reality and that men and women have their particular and original phases of physical and psychological development.

Thus, today, it is essential to know the specific characteristics and priorities of each of the stages of childhood and adolescence, for men and women, focusing on the evolutionary aspects of boys and girls who play football with the philosophy of being high-performance athletes, both on and off the field.

Coaches and the interdisciplinary team must understand that children and the young go through different phases and their growth is not always equivalent to a pattern of doing, thinking or feeling.

The interdisciplinary approach and work allows those responsible for CONMEBOL youth clubs to perfectly know the crucial aspects of the development of boys, girls and young athletes who play football, enabling football managers to implement a training practice that respects the level of growth of the child, showing a positive attitude that favours both the learning of the South American game, as well as the fundamental human principles that should guide the person in their private and professional lives.

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The coach and the psychologist, the doctor or the pedagogue -to cite an example of interdisciplinary- have the task of creating the proper conditions for the boys, girls and young people to train, so that they can appropriately encourage the neuro-motor development of each evolutionary stage of the player.

All of this should be within the framework proposed by CONMEBOL for South American Football, which implies that the Interdisciplinary Coaching Staff should develop training plans, didactic means, motivational tools and behavioural guidelines for boys and girls, according to their specific evolutionary stage, so that they can develop an attitude towards life and football based on fair play, team spirit and camaraderie. Furthermore, we must add the fact that football, especially at this age, is fun and that children and young people have the right to play football to have fun as children and young people. For this reason, although youth clubs are geared towards high performance, grassroots South American Football must be essentially simple, exciting and rewarding for the young player.

Figure 10: Coach Directing his Footballers



Source: CONMEBOL and Associations Member of CONMEBOL, 2019. Own file, unpublished.

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To summarise, it can be affirmed with theoretical and practical certainty, with the passion of South American football at heart, that everything proposed by CONMEBOL, from the Table of Experts, in this section, is not a dream or an intellectualisation of football, but rather the expected and real result of a way of working in today's football.

Therefore, today, the interdisciplinary action-approach is assumed as a competitive advantage, since it allows grassroots football and youth clubs to have different views and knowledge, united in respect for children's rights, with a clear South American stress and with the determination to make the football field a school of life where quality, creative and fair football is played.

To achieve this goal, without a doubt, both the coach and the physical trainer or the pedagogue who are part of the interdisciplinary teams of youth clubs are key members of the coaching staff of South American Educational Football of the 21st Century.

What is essential for professionals linked to the training process for children and young people to know today?

The specific characteristics and priorities of each of the stages of childhood and adolescence, for both men and women.



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To summarise:

Concept of training in the field of football

The areas of the Youth Teams must contribute to the maturation process of the players. It also must contribute to the personal and sociocultural autonomy of the players.

South American Football Coaches of the XXI Century

They must build their field experience based on a clear understanding of the environment where the activity is going to take place, so that it has the desired impact.

First action of the training work of the coach

Evaluate the family, social and cultural context where boys, girls and young football players develop.

Multidisciplinary training

The training process in the youth teams must be in charge of multidisciplinary teams (teachers, doctors, psychologists, etc.) in order to provide the players and their families, comprehensive care

Training as an instrument to strengthen and promote the person

The most important stage for learning skills and abilities is between the ages of six and thirteen.



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