



# **STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH FOOTBALL**

MODULE 3. ORGANIZATION FOR  
YOUTH CLUBS IN SOUTH AMERICA



**-EVOLUCIÓN-**  
ES CONMEBOL

## 3.1 Organisation as an Invisible Value

It is important to emphasize the meaning of the term organisation within the scope of sports and training work that is involved in Grassroots Football and, especially, in terms of working with young children who play football in the framework of a high-performance sport with immense worldwide popularity.

The first thing that must be understood is that the word organisation, in the field of football, should not be seen as a synonym for bureaucracy, routine, control or intellectualisation, highlighting that the organisation is opposed here with doing things “just like that”, that is to say, thinking that playing football today can be reduced even to that old idea of throwing the ball onto the field and that things happen spontaneously on their own.

In this sense, the experts made it clear that behind the art of playing football is the knowledge of football, an approach that includes fair play, interdisciplinary work, respect for the legal rights of children and young people, and the learning of South American players in the world and the provision of the resources and infrastructure necessary to have youth clubs with high-performance athletes.

Figure 1: Player showing off his art: football



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 Own file, unpublished.

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The experts learned in their debate in August 2018, both in Ezeiza and Luque, that improving the performance of youth clubs in South America requires an invisible value that focuses on Football Managers on achieving a common goal; to allow coaches, players, their families and interdisciplinary teams to communicate and work in coordination to achieve the goal of South American football practiced along the lines of South American Football 2.0 and the generation of athletes and citizens with high commitment to the sport, with society and with themselves.

This invisible value is the organisation understood as an order to do things that occur in a certain time well (present with a view to the future), a certain space (the world of football) and a culture (South America open to the world). All this, with an eye on specific objectives, which must be achieved at verifiable time points and, therefore, with expected consequences that can be verified if they occurred or not.

In short, organising football for children and young people means thinking, taking care of and being responsible for things going as they are expected to be, not only once but in general.

## **Organising football for children and young people means thinking, caring about and being responsible for things to go as expected.**

The invisible value of the organisation for youth clubs lies in the need to have the means, staff, financing and structures necessary to play quality South American Football, from its beginnings in grassroots football to professional football which is highly competitive in the major leagues of the region and the world.

In this same sense, it is important to say that the sociocultural, technical and economic demands of playing Football 2.0 are increasingly complex and require efficiently coordinated financing factors with training structures and the continuous training of the different actors involved in the development and daily sustainability of this passion of crowds.

Without organised work, it is unlikely, despite the natural talent of the South American footballer, that youth clubs can keep up with the increasing rate of effectiveness of results that young people from other Confederations around the world are having.

Behind the art of playing football is...	Football knowledge
Improving the performance of youth clubs in South America requires invisible value:	The organisation
The invisible value of the organisation lies in...	The need to have the means, personnel, financing and structures necessary to play quality football.

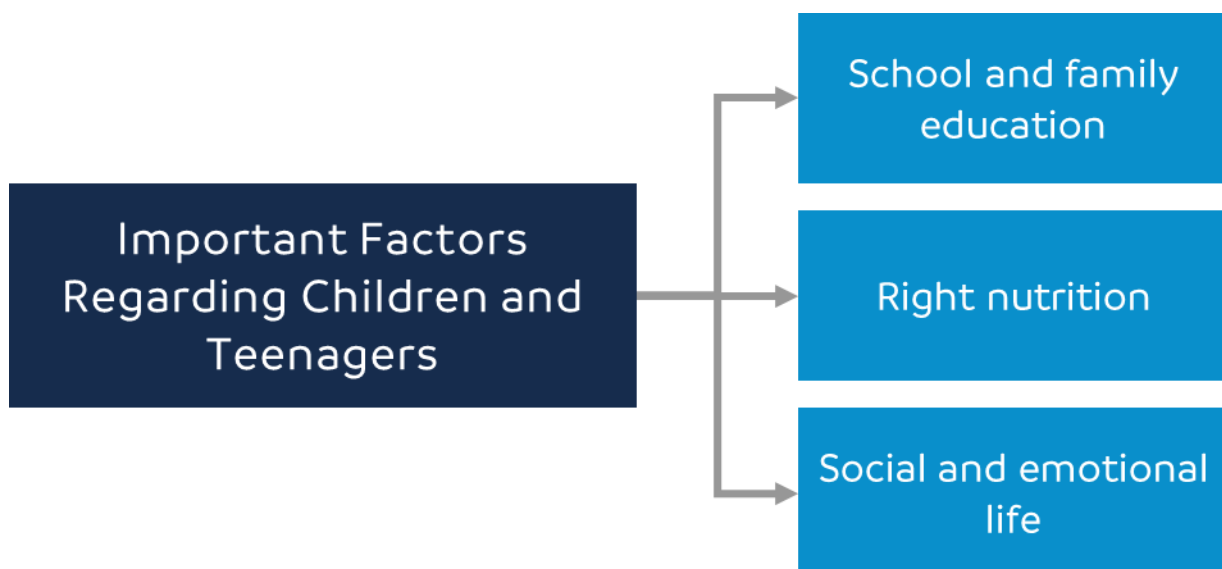
## 3.2 The Basis of Training and Sports Performance

CONMEBOL has been developing, since 2016, a proposal for Grassroots Football that prioritises human quality and sports training for minors between the ages 6 and 20, in which the player is the core of the work done in youth clubs and grassroots teams.

This organisational stage must be very well structured and planned, since it will provide the athlete with an essential base on his way to elite football. In the event that this objective is not achieved, we will have made a positive contribution to the personal training of the young person.

Thus, the boy, the girl and the young player who is part of a club becomes the key element of a complex football training process that combines training and sports competitions with the professional attention of Football Managers to factors such as family and school education, proper nutrition starting at an early age and everything related to the social and emotional life of children and young people. These are realities of life that have an increasing influence on the training of a high-performance sports footballer, according to the demands that professional football and society in South America and the world have today.

Figure 2: Factors to be considered by Football Managers



Source: self-made

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The concept of the evolutionary stages that minors go through is of vital importance for today's football, since the base of Educational Football is the work that is done within the period that goes from ages 6 to 20.

This evolutionary period of the boy, the girl and the young person is intertwined with the sports seasons typical of football, forming a multi-annual process that has a duration of 14 or 15 years; years that are fundamental not only for the training of the professional football player, but also for the integral development of the person.

The training of a footballer on his way to high sports performance depends on the interaction of several factors. Although the training process and competencies are the most specific elements of training, we are convinced that factors such as family and school education (as mentioned above), proper nutrition starting at an early age and everything related to the social and emotional life of children and young people, have an increasing influence on the conformation of a high-performance sports athlete with the demands that professional football manifests today.

## **At the base of Educational Football is the work done within the period from 6 to 20 years old.**

Several of these aspects are related to personal life and the family's social and economic situation. We certainly know that from the clubs and youth teams it is often not easy to modify this general reality that surrounds the life of the little footballer since all this is part of a social, economic and cultural change in each country.

Improving those personal situations that are a product of social reality is generally not within the reach of coaches, technicians and physical trainers, but it is our duty to know it and to know the impact it has on the sports career of young people and, from there, implement strategies to be able to modify it from our place of trainers, with the support of the clubs and federations.

According to the recommendation of the experts and the learning derived from experience, this evolutionary-training stage must be structured and operational in a way that reduces chance, giving direction and probability of sports performance to the process; always ensuring that the work with the children who play football is endowed with elements that aim at providing the athlete with a human-football base that helps him or her take a constructive and enriching path towards elite football.

Children's Football and Youth Football are two processes that depend on each other, which - despite being interconnected - present different realities and objectives that must be addressed in the training and competitions of the Base Teams and youth clubs.

In this sense, the UNESCO document, education encloses a treasure, by Delors (Delors, 1996), shows some general guidelines that can be used by coaches, as a philosophical basis for their work, for example:

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- 1) The boy or girl is not a predestined or fully-developed human being, but can always be better and training is the means for him or her to achieve the best version of him or herself.
- 2) Play is the most appropriate way to train in childhood and adolescence.
- 3) Training, education centred on the boy, girl or young player and that respects human development, dignifies the person and educates him or her.

Figure 3: Development and performance of educational football



Source: self-made

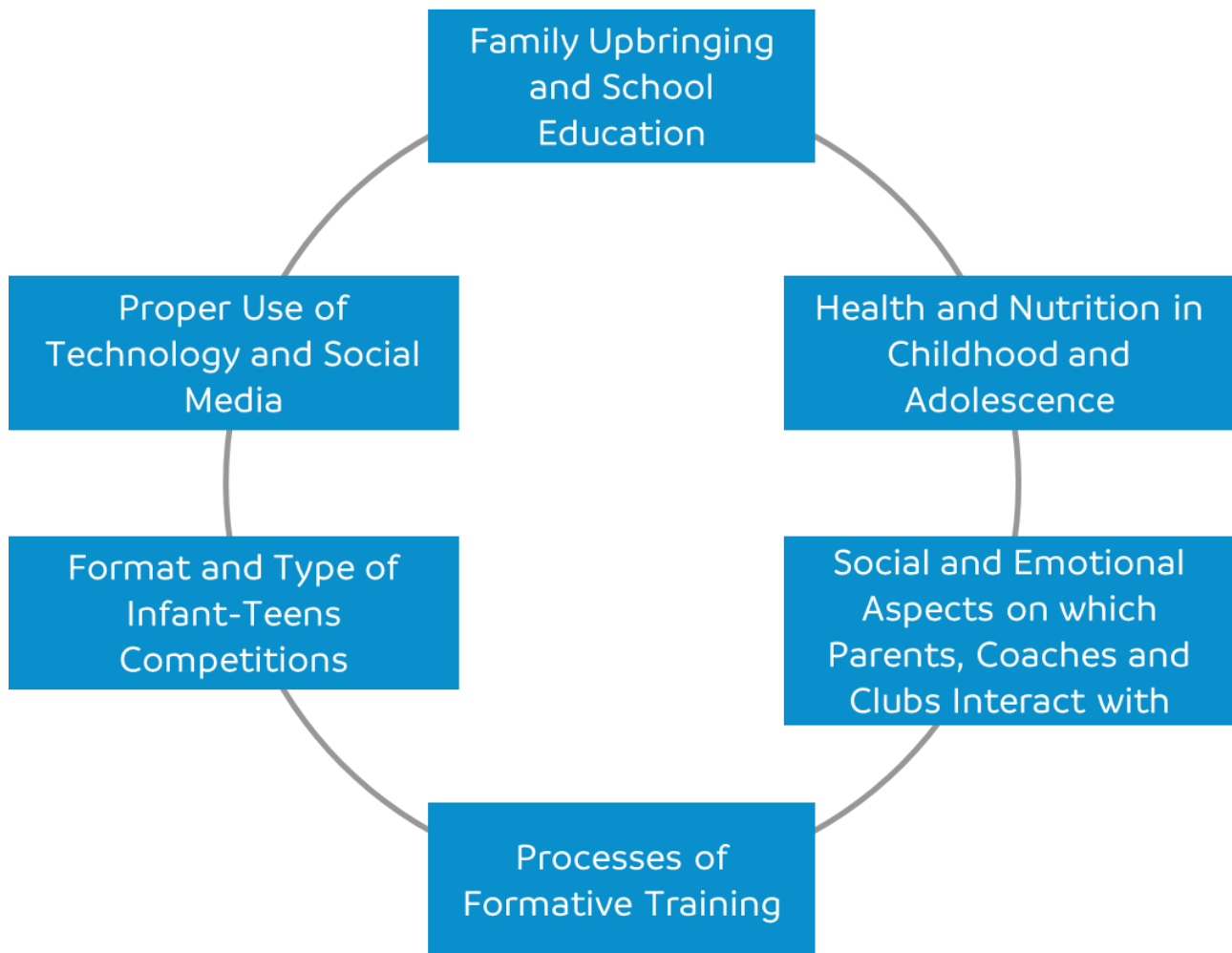
Before talking about any method of physical training, technical exercise or tactical systems it is important to know how to interpret the social and sports environment where the child and young person is.

Football is a singular sport, with cultural, ethnic, social, economic differences and where the psychological and emotional aspects play a transcendental role. Many times, the same theory or scientific foundation originating in a certain country or context does not adapt to other realities. It is there where practical field experience and a correct evaluation of the environment play a fundamental role. This concept seems fundamental to us in times where information is available to everyone and many times copying and pasting successful or fashionable models can be a wrong and harmful path.

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Francisco Pacho Maturana (2018) states that there are six fundamental aspects, based on training and sports performance, and towards what the world of youth clubs is:

Figure 4: Pillars of sports training and performance towards the world of youth clubs



Source: own elaboration adapted from the Table of Experts, 2018

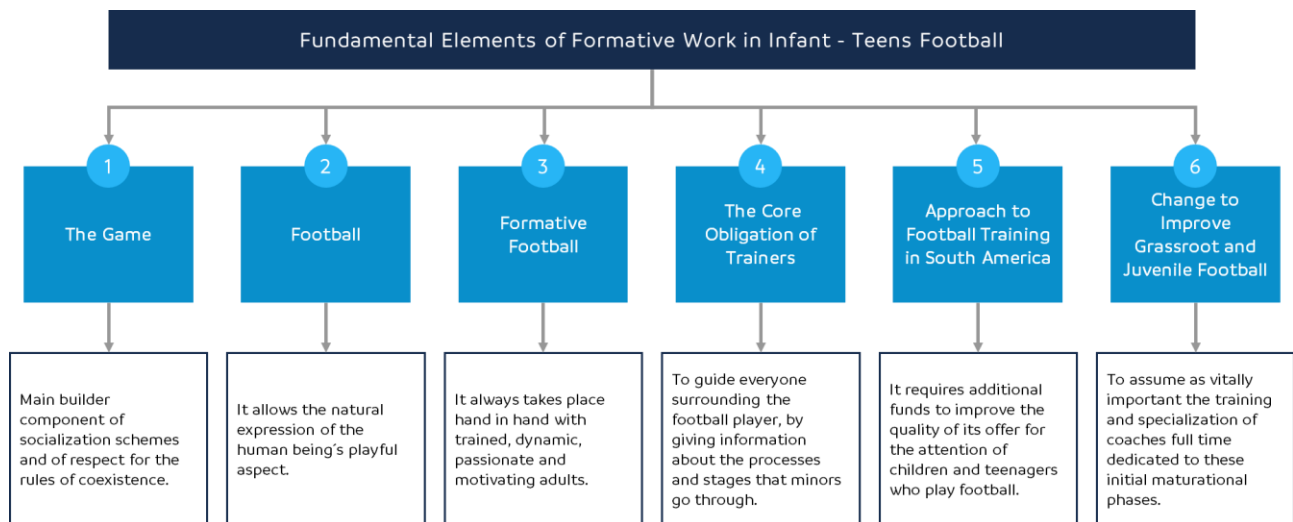
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## 3.3 Closing Ideas

Below is a brief list of what could be considered as fundamental elements or ideas of training work in Children and Youth Football:

1. According to the sciences of human development, play is the main constructive element of the schemes of socialisation and respect towards the norms of coexistence until 18 years of age. Furthermore, the game has a great evolutionary value because it includes in a specific activity (playing football) both the body and the passion, the ethical-cognitive operations linked to decision-making.
2. Football allows the natural manifestation of the playful facet of the human being, since children and young people can explore their symbolic world through their emotions, imagination and creativity.
3. Educational Football always goes hand in hand with trained, dynamic, passionate and motivating adults who create the sports and training conditions for boys, girls and young people to develop as people and football players, of both sexes, in a framework of respect of their physical, physiological and psychological characteristics of minors.

Figure 5: Fundamental elements of training work in Children and Youth Football



Source: self-made

4. It is a central obligation of all those who are part of Educational Football, to guide and help families and all those who make up the society that surrounds the boy, the girl or the young football player, understand and value the need for adequate information on

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the processes and stages that minors go through during the first two decades of their lives.

5. The approach proposed for training in the field of South American Football, since 2016, requires additional funds and, in this sense, the Experts refer to the Regulations of the CONMEBOL Evolution Program, which, for example, in its section 10: Specific projects and common objectives of the Member Associations, items 10.1 for the technical training of Football Managers; 10.2. For specific support to Youth Teams; 10.5. For the training in the scope of the topics developed in this document, they clearly and practically show available resources so that the Associations can improve the quality of their offer in terms of care for children and young people who play football.
6. One can only think of a change to improve Initial and Youth Football, if the training and specialisation of the coaches dedicated exclusively to these initial growth phases is assumed to be of vital importance. This occupation must be full-time since it is an extremely sensitive and essential stage in the integral education of the boy and the girl.

## 3.4 Children's Football (6 to 13 Years old)

South American Football is a field of learning from experience and from reflections of the past, present and future of a sport that is a passion for crowds. CONMEBOL assumes this as a way to give quality to the Football 2.0 that is played today. A learning path that allows us to clearly see that the success of a youth club and subsequently the objectives and achievements that the Senior National Team of a Federation can achieve do not begin in the selection process of players who will make up the squad list and headlines but it starts much earlier. It begins in the years that make up the base period of Children's Football.

Figure 6: Male Goalkeeper Catching the Ball



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

Thus, Children's Football or Initial Football is relevant for the integral training of the child. In other words, about seven or eight sports seasons where the boy and girl must be stimulated with specific information, appropriate to their biological growth, to their emotional experiences, to the cognitive and motor experiences; all variables that must be monitored by coaches and interdisciplinary teams, since this developmental phase of the minor is highly sensitive for their motor and psychological learning.

However, we must not lose sight of the fact that education is a role that belongs to the family firstly and to primary and secondary school secondly. Sports trainers, from their position, can

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support and promote that academic education and strengthen ethical values, but never be a fundamental part of the child's personal training process if the family first and the school second do not make their fundamental contribution.

## **To educate is a role that belongs to the family in the firstly and to primary and secondary school secondly.**

According to the Sciences of Human Development and to the same experience of CONMEBOL Football Managers, it is during this period of the footballer's life that the sociocultural aspects begin to determine their training process and it is at this stage that the contribution of Football Institutions like the team, the training sessions and the periodic competitions, make the field a space for socialisation and personal growth, added to sports.

This contribution is also very necessary nowadays, since what was once street football has been losing real presence in the daily lives of children, as a result of the progress of massive urbanisation of large cities, the elimination of green spaces and the growth of technology for daily use.

Certainly, the technology and culture offered by a city has a lot to contribute to the life of the boy or girl, but at the same time, the time that minors dedicate to motor activities and socialisation, (previously made possible by "potreros", the sidewalk of a neighbourhood or small plazas of the neighbourhood; places that today are increasingly scarce or unsafe) has been drastically reduced.

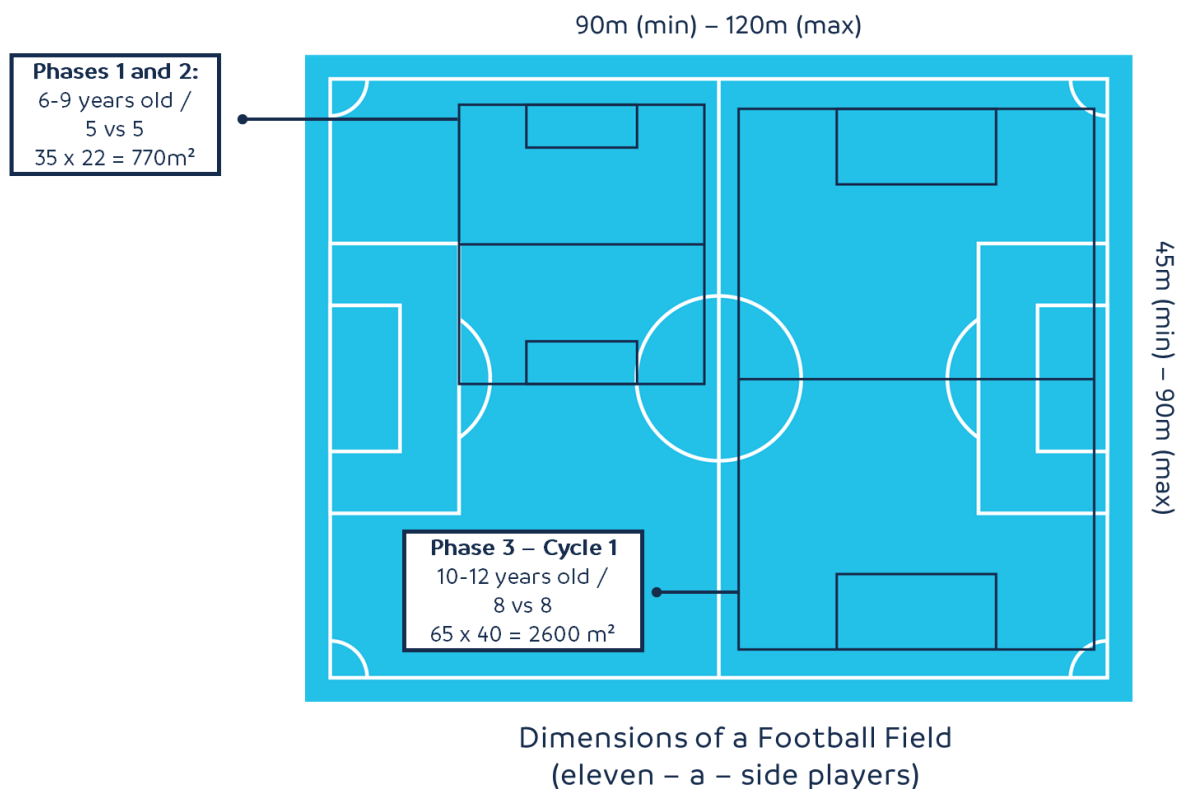
When we talk about Children's Football, we are referring to an initial sports process without gender differences or separations, especially in the growth phases 1 and 2 (six to ten years old), which are both clearly training stages where girls and boys can coexist both in the teaching-learning process that occurs in training, as well as in these stages that have a purely recreational, and social aspect. In other words, in this pre-puberty developmental period, it is possible to form: groups of only boys, teams of only girls, and the possibility of having mixed groups is also compatible.

As of ages ten, eleven and twelve, differences in the biological growth of both sexes begin to appear (girls mature earlier than boys) and this reality makes the levels of development and growth more uneven. This is definitely accentuated at the time of puberty for males, where the differences become increasingly noticeable as a result of the production of the hormone testosterone in males, which causes important differences in the levels of strength and speed between the sexes.

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Figure 7: Proposal-Methodological Progression (6 to 13 years old)

## Approach of Methodological Progression (6 to 13 years old) 5 vs 5 – 8 vs 8 – 11 vs 11



Source: self-made.

Table 1: adaptability and flexibility according to the realities of each member association

The adaptability and flexibility according to the realities of each member association
The measurements of the playing fields may have oscillations in the range of +5 to -5 meters according to the model presented
The number of football players can vary +1 player / - 1 player
Example: for the game model 8 vs. 8 presented can be applied 7 vs. 7/9 vs. 9

Source: self-made.

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Table 2: Proposal-Methodological Progression (6 to 13 years old) - 5 vs. 5 | 8 vs. 8 | 11 vs. 11

GROWTH PHASE (YEARS-AGE)	NUMBER OF PLAYERS	PLAYING FIELD DIMENSIONS	DIMENSIONS OF THE AREA	DIMENSIONS OF THE GOAL	DIMENSIONS OF THE BALL	PLAYING TIMES
Children's Phase 1 and 2 6-9 years old	5 vs. 5	35 x 22 m	10 x 7 m	4,50 x 1,60 m	FASE 1: N° 3 FASE 2: N° 4	F1: 3 x 12' x 5' F2: 3 x 15' x 5'
Children's Phase 3 y 4 10-12 years old	8 vs. 8	65 x 40 m	24 x 11 m	5,00 x 1,80 m	N° 4	3 x 20' x 5'
Children's Phase 5 13 years old	11 vs. 11	100-90 x 65-45 m (Professional Measurements)	40,32 x 16,5 m (Professional Measurements)	7,32 x 2,44 m (Professional Measurements)	N° 5	2 x 30' x 10'

Source: self-made.

## The Football Player's Training Process

The training process of the child and young person must take place in environmental and socio-affective conditions appropriate for their growth levels, both in the context of training and competition- both essential factors for their growth and harmonious psycho-physical development.

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Figure 8: Children's area 6 to 13 years old



Source: self-made

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Table 3: The sports teacher's profile in the children's area (6 to 13 years old)

The Profile of the Sports Teacher of the Children's Area (6 to 13 years old)
The sports teacher (DTF or PEF) must be a guide of the formative stage.
A "companion" in the process of teaching / learning of the children, understanding that the true figure of this learning journey is precisely the child.
To value the initiative of the children, favouring their creativity and not inhibiting it.
To know about the comprehensive profile of each maturational stage in childhood as well as the socio-cultural context of the child he/she is teaching.
To present problems and stimulate solutions for the teaching approach of games and activities in each stage: deductive situational method.
To stimulate training of a young, autonomus, confident footballer.
To accept the result as another part of the formative process, without external pressures towards the children.
To promote fairly measured competition as an essential formative tool used by the sportsman and the person.
To take advantage of football as an element for social integration and for the strengthening of family integration as well.
To stimulate FAIR PLAY rules as a part of the educational sports process.



Source: self-made.

In Children's Football, the term coach must be replaced by that of sports teacher, we mean that the coach must be called the Technical Director-Trainer (DTF) and the Physical Trainer must play the role of Professor of Physical-Motor Education (PEF).

Both functions must be carried out with the profile of sports trainers and educators, since they will have the enormous responsibility of guiding and orienting the children's training process during seven or eight years of teaching and learning.

Along these lines, it should be said that CONMEBOL does not position itself in the face of this new reality with a nostalgic stance of those good times. Quite the contrary, in the current reality of South American children, there is an opportunity for Federations and Clubs to become more and more involved in their education, from the game and the proximity and professional support that football makes possible. But the opportunities can be seized or lost

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and, in this sense, it is the presence of the pedagogue (specialist in human education), added to that of psychologists, doctors, sociologists that today is of vital importance, so that the coach and team can count on a person, specialised in human education and training, to guide, accompany and evaluate the plans and actions aimed at generating the sports and human conditions that allow footballers to train at the school of life and football, for a quality life and for high-performance football.

**The Federations and Clubs must become increasingly involved in the training of boys and girls, from the game and proximity and professional support that football makes possible.**

**In order for a youth team and, later, a larger one to be successful, it is necessary to start working with these players during childhood, starting at the age of 5, using children's or initial football for their stimulation.**

**Between the ages of five and thirteen, seven or eight seasons of development of the sensitive phases of the child's motor and psychological learning stage which should be used to incorporate into the teaching-learning process of programmed children's football.**

**However, many federations and clubs do not have these categories within their sports structures and, therefore, young people reach the youth team without adequate training.**

Children's Football, in the period of 6 to 13 years of age, has the particularity of being the period of human life where the boy and the girl begin to consolidate their personality, through socialisation and the discovery of their own inner world.

At this stage, the general motor learning of the individual is also important, which is the basis of the construction of a technique appropriate to the later demands of high-performance football, a technique that is developed through learning by playing. This principle must be at the base of all Football Manager training programmes that work with Grassroots Football.

As an epilogue to this section on Children's Football (6 to 13 years old), it is appropriate to remember, once again, the importance of adapting the proposed work plan for a team of boys or girls who play football in the specific growth phase that they are in. This is so that, in CONMEBOL's thinking, the boy and girl go through an optimal football-life teaching-learning process: "The Football Game must be adapted to the child and not the child to the forms of Professional Football." (Anselmi, Juan Cruz, 2018)

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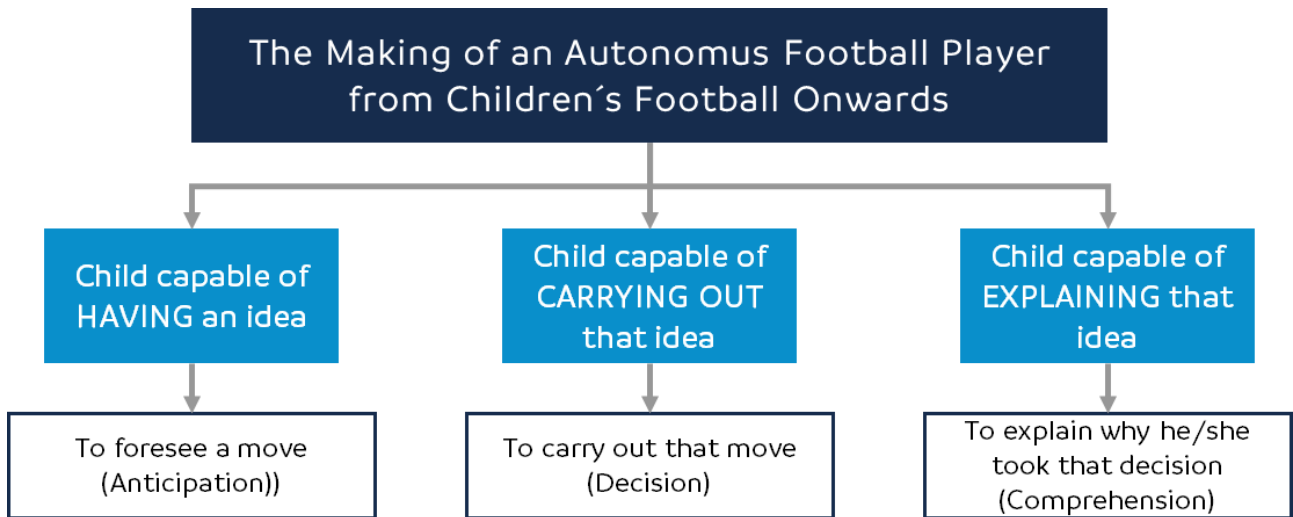
Table 4: Fundamentals and statistics of the adapted model

Fundamentals and statistics of the adapted model	
Neuro-cognitive and socio-affective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The adapted game produces pleasure, satisfaction, joy.</li> <li>• Better conditions for socializing. Participate, enjoy and play.</li> <li>• Optimizes processes of coordinative and sensory-prescriptive capacities = better resolution technique.</li> <li>• Ideal context for stimulation mental process: perception-anticipation- decision</li> </ul>
Physical-motor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of physical abilities in a natural way.</li> <li>• Levels of strength, endurance and speed in normal times and spaces.</li> <li>• Achievable physical efforts. Normal physical adaptations.</li> </ul>
Technical-coordinative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In adapted model there is 500 to 600% more technical stimulus.</li> <li>• We go from 200 minutes to over 1,100 minutes of ball contact per year in competition.</li> <li>• Match 11 vs. 11 = 7 - 8 passes- control / match 5 vs. 5 = +40 passes.</li> <li>• The gesture of the shot is stimulated more, greater amount of goals.</li> <li>• Matches 11 vs. 11 finished: 0 - 2 goals / matches 7 vs. 7: +6 - 7 goals / matches: 5 vs. 5: +8 - 9 goals.</li> </ul>
Tactical understanding - game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child lives 7 to 8 years of situational experiences in enriching quantity and quality</li> <li>• The child experiences a progressive learning process of understanding the game with this model</li> <li>• At 13 years of age, the child has internalized a higher cognitive level to solve game situations.</li> </ul>

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Source: self-made.

Figure 9: The building up of a football player with autonomy from children's football



Source: self-made.

It is essential that the sports teacher understand the importance of training autonomous and non-autonomous football players starting at an early age. To achieve this, the trainer must understand that the main character of the learning process in Children's Football is the child, through the richest pedagogical teaching tool.

CHILDREN'S PHASE 1 AND 2	6-9 years old
CHILDREN'S PHASE 3 AND 4	10-12 years old
CHILDREN'S PHASE 5	13 years old

### 3.5 Adolescent Football (14 to 20 years old)

For CONMEBOL, adolescents and young athletes -men and women- who play football during 14 to 20 years old are a priority in the consolidation of Football 2.0 with a South American identity both in clubs and in leagues and national teams. This institutional prioritisation entails concrete actions such as, for example, the implementation of the CONMEBOL Evolution Programme, the training of the Expert Table of Youth Teams or the elaboration of these Strategies for the development of CONMEBOL youth football.

This prioritisation responds to a reality typical of South America, where the average debut of a footballer -with high professional potential-, in South American clubs, happens very early, generally between 17 and 18 years of age and, in some cases, even before. This early foray into professional club football means an interruption of the training stage corresponding to the age of the player; a situation that makes the young South American footballer be exposed, in many cases, to participate in very demanding and inadvisable sports competitions for their still incomplete psychological and physical development. Also, this haste almost forced by the urgencies of our football, makes the young man or woman experience public exposures and stressful internal pressures for which he or she is not yet prepared.

Figure 10: Women's Youth Competition



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

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This early debut occurs for two basic reasons: on the one hand, the clubs have the need to shape their professional rosters with super stars and, on the other hand, it is a reality that South America is a very strong place in sales for other football markets, which makes talent scouts try to secure talent as soon as possible. Both practices, as already mentioned, prevent the young football player from completing the training process offered by Youth Football.

It could be said, in this sense, that the particular urgencies of the clubs and leagues continue to mark the field when working with players from 14 to 20 years old, which is why it is a priority to make the most of each year that these young people can be involved in the natural training process of football at the ages mentioned above.

## **CONMEBOL proposes and develops a calendar of competencies appropriate to the conditions of each evolutionary phase.**

For this reason, CONMEBOL proposes and develops a calendar of competitions appropriate to the conditions of each evolutionary phase, so that the children who play football can experience the essential foundations on which the footballer and the professional adult football player will be built.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that it is a reality that young football players, men and women between 14 and 20 years old, are exposed to professional level competitions and that they have experienced the change of their natural football training process. But, in the world of South American Youth Football, this reality is being worked on and it is sought that both the boy or the girl who follow a journey according to his or her age, as well as those who venture into the titles of the First-class clubs, always find an offer adapted to their evolutionary processes, hand in hand with coaches and interdisciplinary teams.

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Figure 11: Youth Players Football Match



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

In this way it can be said that it is true that the footballer grows and develops in training and competition, but this must contemplate the reality of the teenager and young player who is playing ball, as a game, passion and future field of professional and personal achievement.

“I always asked that the U17 and U20 Youth Teams play many international matches. We saw very important growth in children and we also looked at their behaviour on and off the field”, said Professor Hugo Tocalli (Tocalli, H., 2018).

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## To Summarise

### Organization

It is not synonymous of:

- Bureaucracy
- Routine
- Control

### Organization

It means:

- To think
- To take care
- To be responsible

### Formative football

It coincides with the evolutionary period of the boy, the girl and the young man who goes from 6 to 20 years

### Children's and youth football

Dependent on each other, but with different realities and objectives.

### Fundamental concepts of formative work:

- The game as the main building element of socialization schemes and respect for rules of coexistence.
- Football as a channel of emotions, imagination and creativity.
- Sports and training conditions created by trained, passionate and motivating adults.
- Guidance and help to families and the society that surrounds the boy, girl and young football player.
- Accompaniment to boys, girls and young football players.
- Formalization and specialization of coaches.

### Bases of training and sports performance:

- Family and school education.
- Health and nutrition.
- The socio-affective aspect.
- The formative training process.
- The format and type of competition.
- The appropriate use of technology and social networks.

### Educating is a role that belongs to:

- first, to the family.
- second, to primary and secondary school.

Sports trainers can support and promote such academic education and strengthen ethical values.

The game of football just adapt to the child and not the child to the forms of professional football

I always asked the Youth Teams Under 17 and Youth Teams Under 20 to play international matches. We saw a very important growth in boys and girls and we also looked at their behavior on and off the court.  
Hugo Tocalli



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