

# Module 4. Talent Detection



☰ Introduction

# Introduction

---

## **4.1. Talent Recruitment in Youth Soccer: Organization and Management**

Talent recruitment or the search for new talent has become a highly important area in recent years, evolving into a strategic component of the sports industry. The main goal of the scouting department is to identify and select these players.

Scouts work not only within clubs but also in other areas like player management companies, national teams, sports brands, and more. This section focuses specifically on the activities carried out within soccer clubs.

In the organizational structure of clubs, the scouting area is typically part of a department under the sporting director, the technical secretary, or both. Its main role is to provide information so that the technical secretary or sporting director can make decisions on whether to bring in certain players, based on defined criteria. These criteria may

include player type, position, age, physical attributes, technical and tactical abilities, and even contract terms. Depending on the club, the scouting department may also oversee player signings and releases, with decision-making authority.

The criteria must be clear; while evaluations are subjective, they must rely on data gathered through research and player tracking (observation).

The scouting department can range from basic to complex depending on the scope or scale of the talent search. Within this structure, scouts may be organized by geographic regions, age groups, categories, or other criteria.

Based on geographical area or action radius, scouts can be classified as local, regional, national, international, or global.

**Figure 1. Classification by geographical area**



Source: original work.

---

When classified by age, scouting is organized according to specific age ranges.

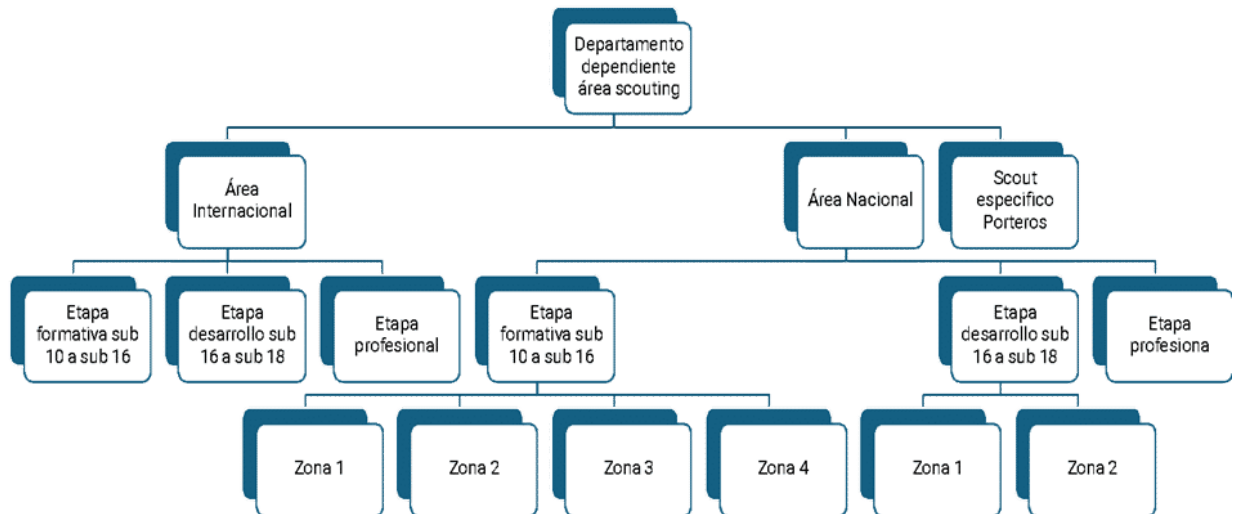
For category-based organization, a scout may be responsible for a particular category, such as the U-18 group. In this case, the scout would provide all relevant information on that category within their assigned geographic area.

Another way to organize scouts within an organizational chart could be by affinity, such as people with special connections to a club or

group of players, by specific clubs, or in other ways that define the scout's scope of work.

No matter how the scouting team is organized, each scout must clearly understand their responsibilities, limitations, and be accountable for covering their designated area.

**Figure 2. Scouting Department Organization**



Departamento dependiente área scouting	Department reporting to scouting area
Área Internacional	International Department
Área Nacional	National Department
Scout específico Porteros	Specialized Goalkeeper Scout
Etapa formativa sub 10 a sub 16	Development Stage U-10 to U-16
Etapa desarrollo sub 16 a sub 18	Development Stage U-16 to U-18
Etapa profesional	Professional Stage
Etapa formativa sub 10 a sub 16	Development Stage U-10 to U-16
Zona 1	Zone 1
Zona 2	Zone 2
Zona 3	Zone 3

Zona 4	Zone 4
Etapa desarrollo sub 16 a sub 18	Development Stage U-16 to U-18
Etapa profesional	Professional Stage
Zona 1	Zone 1
Zona 2	Zone 2

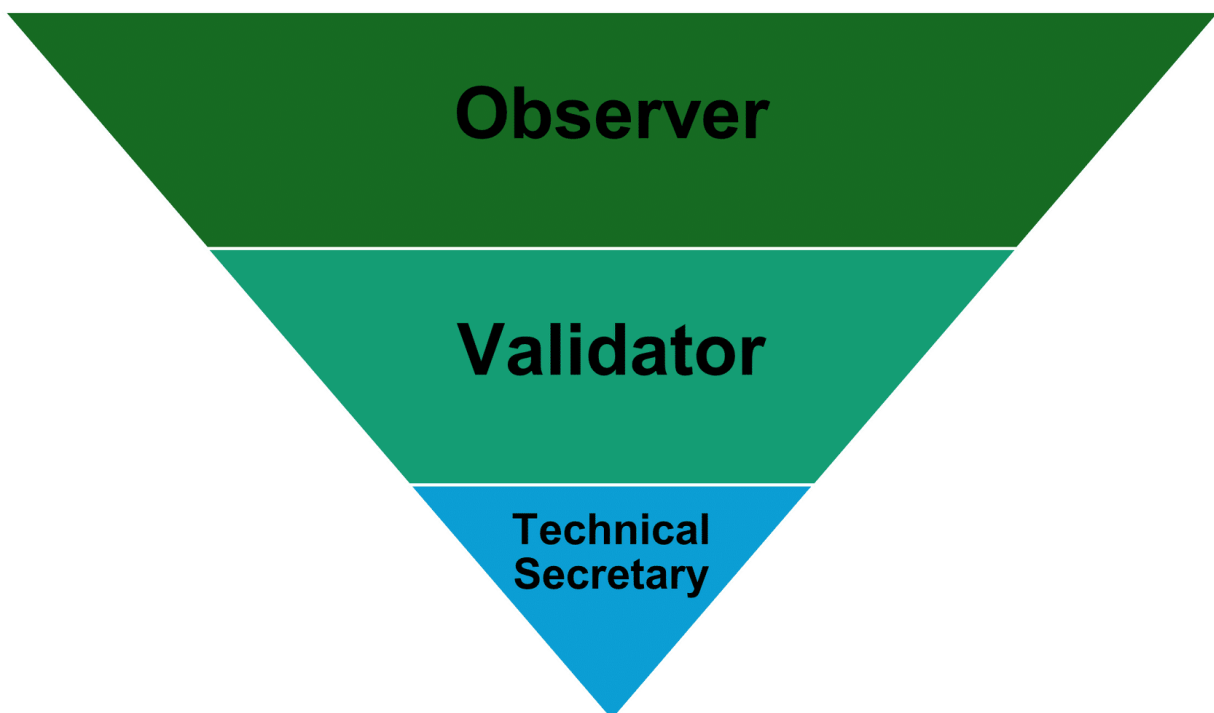
Source: original work.

---

In a simple structure where the scouting department consists of 1-5 people, information flows directly between departments within the club.

In a more complex structure with over five scouts, a clear organizational chart is needed to relay information through multiple filters. These filters gather all information and assess whether the data provided by the observer meets the club's needs or objectives.

**Figure 3. Information processing funnel in the scouting area**



Source: Original work

---

All collected information must be processed systematically, whether through a traditional, straightforward method or a more professional approach. From the time an observer identifies a player until the player is selected, the information goes through several channels. This information may be shared through meetings between different departments or by sending reports. The latter is the most traditional or straightforward approach. Information storage software or intranets can also be used to allow greater control, filtering, and access based on hierarchy. This method is primarily used in complex structures where large volumes of information must be efficiently identified and organized.

## **4.2. Stages of the talent detection process**

The scout's task of talent detection requires planning, analysis methods, and observation-based evaluation. Talent identification primarily relies on systematic methods. Additionally, the experience you gain will make your work more efficient.

Like any job, in addition to a structured approach, sometimes chance plays a role in scouting. Often, a scout's presence or absence at a specific match or tournament leads to observing a player unexpectedly.

In some rare and memorable cases, talent is discovered in the most unlikely situations, such as during vacation, watching a friendly game, or casual family matchups where an exceptional player is unexpectedly noticed. There are many anecdotes like these, but they are exceptions; scouting should not be left to improvisation or chance, but rather follow a clear, sensible, well-researched, and planned method.

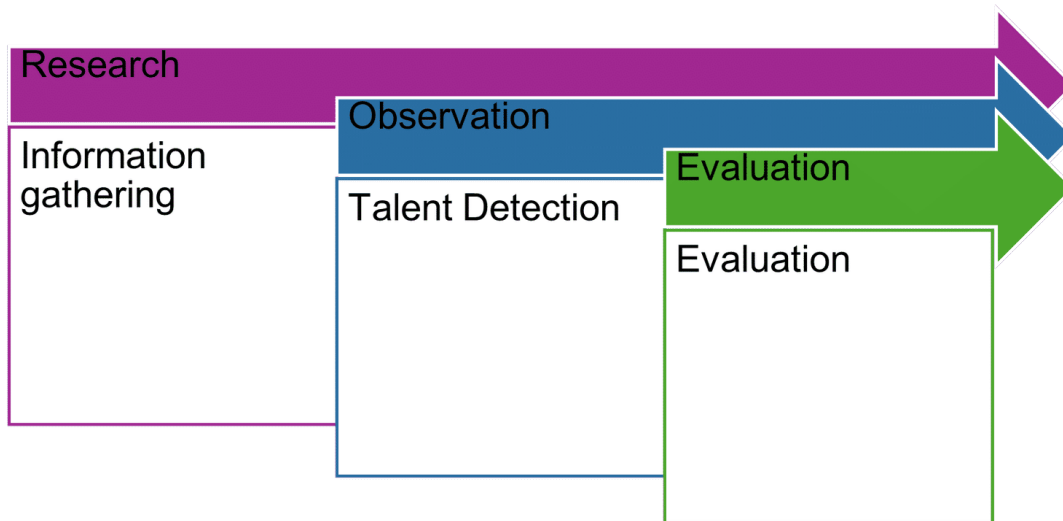
The three phases of the detection process are as follows:

1. Research, planning, and strategy for finding talent.
2. Observation, methods, or ways to detect the player's unique qualities.
3. Evaluation, assessment, and comparison of the observed athlete.

A scout must be methodical and organized, using intelligence to gather information, organize collected data, and assess it to form conclusions in a report that aids decision-making on the player.

This module will cover **research and preparation for observation**.

**Figure 4. Research, observation, and evaluation**



Source: original work.

---

#### 4.2.1 Research

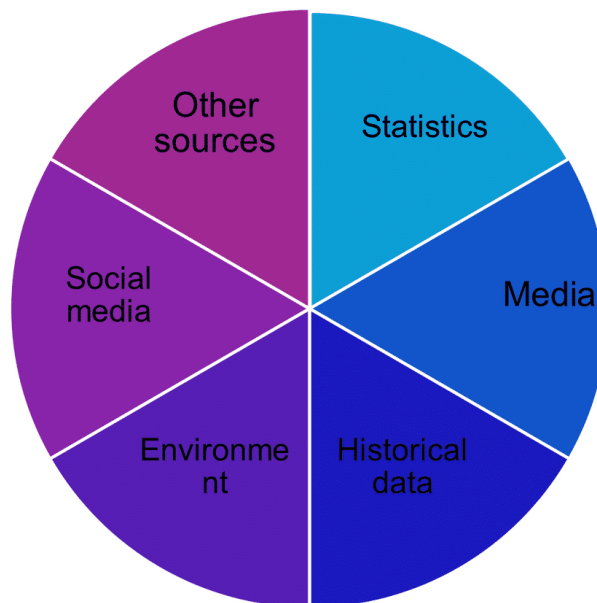
Information gathering or research is one of the most crucial parts of a scout's job. From the start of the season, the scout must collect extensive information that will aid in tracking and assessing the player throughout the season.

During this research phase, numerous channels for finding relevant information can be identified and categorized as follows:

- **Historical data.** Information about the player from previous seasons.
- **Statistics.** Objective data about the player.

- **Media.** Related news.
- **Player's social circle.** Family, friends, teammates who may provide more personal information.
- **Clubs.** Provide specific data on the player's skills and behavior.
- **Social media.** Comments made by the player or others about the player.
- **Other sources.** Additional aspects that may provide a comprehensive view of the athlete.

**Figure 5. Information sources**



Source: original work.

---

The first step is knowing what to look for: the objective. The objective will determine where, how, and the best methods to gather all relevant information.

For instance, if your goal is to find a forward born in 2005, start by checking the history of all forwards in that age group, then evaluate their stats: games played, goals scored, cautions, assists, etc. Additionally, you should consider injuries, club changes, consistency over the seasons, and the competition level they've played in.

The media will provide insight into relevant news on the player, with subjective comments on their gameplay and development.

Information about the player's social circle is essential, as teammates, coaches, opponents, or acquaintances may provide insights not found in stats or game observations. This information allows you to understand the player's background, family environment, behavior outside of soccer, interests, study capabilities, values, and even genetic factors. This last factor can give insights, especially during developmental stages, into potential physical growth.

Clubs can provide additional information on the player, including both current and rival clubs. Behavior, commitment to the club, engagement with the team, and reputation among teammates are key aspects when gathering information.

Social media offers both subjective and objective information that should always be verified. Here, you will find data and opinions about players, as well as their way of expressing themselves, hobbies, and interests relevant to scouting.

These are some of the channels for obtaining data, but there are many others — from comments in the stands to insights you may gather that reveal how players interact in their environment.

## **4.2 Observation**

Observing players during competition provides essential information for evaluation. Comparing what you observe with the specific objectives or criteria set for a player profile will help you form an up-to-date and realistic assessment.

Visualization and observation allow you to gather data on the player and create a report outlining their strengths and weaknesses, helping you decide if the assessment is favorable.

### **4.2.1. Game Selection**

An observer's core responsibility is planning which games to watch, as finding talent can be like searching for a needle in a haystack. To do this, you need to define your objective and align the games you watch with the skill level of the player you're looking for.

If you're scouting top players in a specific age group, identify the most competitive leagues for that age within your assigned area. Conversely, if you're seeking a specific player profile, like a central forward, look for games featuring top scorers in that category.

Game selection and planning are determined by the specific scouting goal. You can categorize game selection into the following types based on objectives:

- By category and age.
- By position.
- By competitiveness level.

**Table 1. Category and Age**

Category and Age	
Category and Age	- Based on the player's age and competition category.
Position	- Goalkeepers and defenders. Focus on teams that allow the fewest goals. - Forwards. Focus on teams that score the most goals.
Competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Games between teams close in the standings.</li> <li>● Playoff games.</li> <li>● Tournaments.</li> </ul>

Source: original work.

---

When planning game observations, consider other aspects that may seem secondary but are important. For example, weather conditions (extreme cold or heat, rain, or wind) can impact the player's performance and the scout's perception.

Another important factor is the playing surface. Different field dimensions and surface types can also influence the player. For instance, a fast or powerful player is best observed on a larger field with open spaces, while a defender's individual skills may be better assessed on a smaller field with more physical contact.

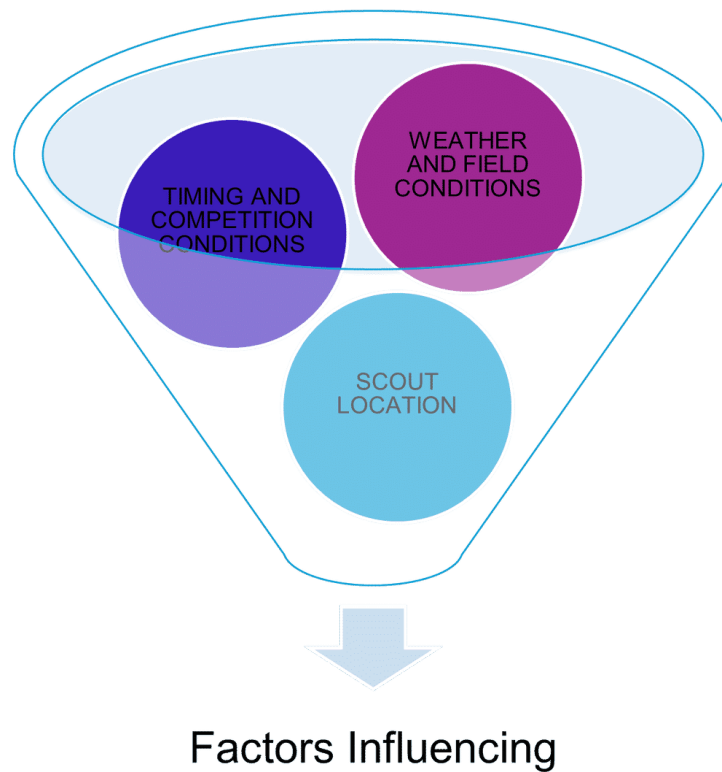
Where you observe from is also critical. Observing from a stadium's stands is not the same as standing behind a net on a smaller field. For these and other reasons, carefully choose when and where to observe to collect data as effectively as possible.

Planning and strategy are essential in this part of the talent detection process.

When watching games, planning differs depending on the current stage of the process. It's important to distinguish between gathering general information in the first phase, which focuses on a larger pool of talent, and specific information in the second phase, which focuses on quality.

You will look for talent quality only after identifying specific players in the first phase. At this initial stage, you'll need to watch many games to identify players with the desired characteristics. In the second phase, you'll rewatch selected players, making comparisons and evaluations between similar profiles. Here, in the second phase, you should focus on competitive games where the player is challenged and can fully showcase their abilities.

### **Figure 6. Factors Influencing Observation**



Source: original work.

---

At this stage, consider a critical question when observing games. Should you observe games alone or with others? Watching a game alone allows for deeper focus and personal assessment based on your own perception and judgment. When observing with others, your perception and judgment may vary depending on whether it's another scout, a coach, a fan, or a family member. A fellow scout or coach may provide a fresh perspective and highlight details you may have overlooked. This collaborative approach can be enriching. If you're joined by a fan or family member, their perspective may be biased, potentially influencing your evaluation as a scout in a less objective way.

Numerous factors affect game selection, planning, and observation, but the most important is tailoring it to the type of scout and specific objective.

#### **4.2.2. Observation Criteria**

The scout's characteristics also affect how they evaluate a player. There are different types of scouts, and their training and experience can give them either a more objective or subjective view of the player. Key types of scouts include:

- Coach-Scout
- Analyst-Scout
- Information-Scout

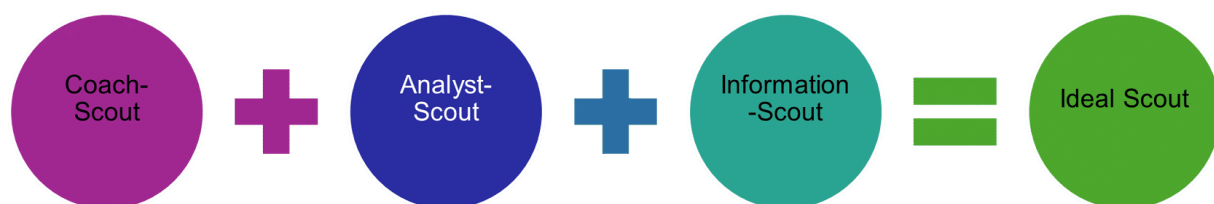
The Coach-Scout has knowledge and experience as a coach. This type of scout offers a technical perspective, especially in understanding how a player might adapt to a system, position, or playing style. They also evaluate how a player can develop and progress in their abilities. Many clubs use coaches to scout players in various age groups. It can also be beneficial to send a club coach to assess a previously validated player to get an age-specific opinion, comparing the player with others of the same age in their training.

Another observer type is the Analyst-Scout, who has skills in data collection, analysis, and information assessment. This profile is highly objective and methodical, using data to back up their evaluations.

The Information-Scout is someone who can gather information without necessarily observing the player. They can provide a player profile based solely on information from their sources, even if they haven't seen the player in action.

The ideal scout combines the abilities of all three types, being technical, objective, and informative. Each of these perspectives provides valuable insights, and if balanced properly, none should be overlooked.

### Figure 7. Ideal Scout



Source: original work.

---

After reviewing observer types, let's consider the criteria for observation. Define key observation aspects from the most general to the most specific.

The first thing to consider is the stage at which you're observing, as the evaluation criteria differ greatly between introductory and competitive levels.

Next, understand the situation of the team the player is part of. Consider the type of club (professional or amateur), the league level, and the coach or manager's background. Other crucial factors include the team's ranking, the importance of team goals in the match, and additional context that provides a well-rounded view of the player's environment.

The player's current situation also plays a key role in forming an objective assessment. Recent injuries, playing in an unfamiliar position, or similar circumstances can affect the evaluation.

These and other factors help create context for developing a report and making comparisons with other players in a similar way.

#### **4.2.3. Quantitative and Qualitative Aspects**

After establishing an objective criterion for observation based on the aspects discussed earlier, you need to evaluate the player using common items applicable to all observations.

In the reports written by the scout, you will find different evaluations: some are more objective and based on quantitative aspects, while others are more subjective and rely on qualitative aspects.

**Quantitative aspects** refer to data that can be measured, such as goals, saves, assists, fouls, etc. Physical data about the player, like height and weight, also fit this definition.

**Qualitative aspects** encompass skills and attributes that cannot be quantified, such as a player's ability to control the ball well, speed, or effective off-the-ball movements. To illustrate the difference, consider this comparison: making 20 passes is not the same as making quality passes. However, if out of those 20 passes, 15 lacked any intention, what should be valued more: making 20 passes, making quality passes, or making 5 quality passes?

**Figure 8. Quantitative and Qualitative Aspects in Football**

Quantitative Aspects	Qualitative aspects
Height	Speed
Weight	Strength
Goalkeeper Saves	Endurance
Goals	Technical Quality
Assists	Touches
Cards	Passes
Fouls	Off-the-ball movement

Source: original work.

---

Qualitative aspects help to contextualize technical and tactical actions within the game and evaluate their performance in a competitive setting. They also allow you to assess the athlete's attitude toward specific challenges faced during the match. Most importantly, the scout must focus on qualitative aspects to identify talent, which goes beyond mere statistics and databases.

By integrating both quantitative and qualitative aspects, you can achieve a thorough and realistic assessment of the athlete.

#### **4.2.4. The scout's intuition and the influence of their tactical culture on player detection**

The qualitative aspect mentioned earlier is one of the most significant values a scout has. Intuition based on past experiences, along with qualitative evaluations that emerge from it, plays a crucial role in the scout's ability to identify talent.

The "eye of the scout" is often discussed when recalling the early days of successful professional players. These players often remember when someone observing football matches noticed them before they became known. The scout recognized distinct characteristics that set them apart from others and labeled them as a player with high potential to turn professional. This indescribable feeling for those who have spent many years in professional football gives the scout a unique value.

What sets scouts apart? Scouts have the skill, knowledge, and experience needed to identify abilities in players that can propel them into professional football.

A scout's intuition is often triggered by specific details they observe in players, such as speed, controlled touches, and natural movement without the ball—these countless aspects are closely guarded by each scout as their most prized insights. The intuitive process is a faster cognitive process compared to others, where learned and experienced information intersect to create a final outcome. This

cognitive processing involves correlating your observations with existing knowledge in your repertoire.

Comparing the qualities of a specific player to those of players who have reached professional status is highly beneficial. Initially, this comparison can be made consciously, but as you observe more matches and players, you will start making these comparisons almost automatically, identifying similarities or differences as you go, which aids in your analysis. This perspective develops when scouts gather information about many players over several years, enabling them to compare the attributes of an emerging professional with those of novice players. This way, you can use this comparison to measure the potential success of a new prospect.

The scout is human, and their method of work always includes a margin of error that cannot be completely eliminated. Furthermore, evaluating a footballer is not an exact science. Infallibility is non-existent, neither in this job nor in any other. Training and experience help to reduce this margin of error, but it will rarely disappear entirely. It is important to accept this reality without resigning to it, remaining aware that the more you train and the more players you observe, the better prepared you will be, gaining more skills to enhance your success in this role.

CONTINUE