

REPORT ON YOUTH ACADEMIES IN EUROPE

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
CENTRAL FOR THE
FUTURE OF
CLUB FOOTBALL



ECA
EUROPEAN CLUB ASSOCIATION

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*Karl-Heinz Rummenigge
ECA Chairman*



FOREWORD FROM THE ECA CHAIRMAN

It is a cliché to say that the future belongs to the youth, but few clichés ring as true as this one. Youth development is a key issue and will always remain so. Each football club has developed its own initiatives when it comes to youth development and there is a lot to learn from each other on this front.

The youth sector would certainly benefit from a more co-ordinated approach, in particular in the area of coaching. Following the work done by the ECA Youth Working Group, the need to issue a best-practices blueprint led to the birth of this Report on Youth Academies in Europe.

Competition among clubs has always existed to unearth the best youth players and the new talent, but two key changes in football have intensified this situation. The first of these changes has to do with the implementation of UEFA's Financial Fair Play (FFP) rules, which force all European clubs to live within their means. An efficient and productive youth academy will become a necessity, if it is not already the case, and clubs will have to pay even more attention to youth development. The second change, which is being implemented, is the squad-size limit. Already in place in European club competitions, more and more leagues throughout Europe have introduced or are considering

implementing the limit of 25 players, with unlimited players under the age of 21.

In the current economic climate and with FFP becoming increasingly important, clubs are right to think about how they can improve their own academies, no matter their size. Having a good youth academy will have an increased impact on a club's ability to compete in the league. I can tell you that at my own club, FC Bayern München, we recently restructured our youth academy in order to adopt the right vision for the future of our club.

As ECA, we would like to strongly promote grassroots football and point out the benefits of an established youth policy for a football club and its supporters. It is for this reason that I am particularly convinced that this Report on Youth Academies in Europe is necessary, not only as a source of information, but also as a tool to improve our academies.

I would like to thank the members of the Youth Task Force which includes Maarten Fonteijn (AZ Alkmaar), Bodo Menze (FC Schalke 04), Liam Brady (Arsenal FC), Konstantin Kornakov (Heart of Midlothian FC), Jan Skýpala (FK Teplice) and Olivier Jarosz (ECA) for their dedication and work to produce this Report. I trust you will find this Report on Youth Academies in Europe both useful and informative.

Karl-Heinz Rummenigge
ECA Chairman



WHY AN ECA REPORT ON YOUTH ACADEMIES?

In 2008, ECA was founded with the core mission of representing clubs as credible stakeholders in the football family. This has been the case so far and ECA has achieved a lot for clubs despite its relatively short history. During this time, we have also understood that ECA can do much more, including becoming a platform for expertise.

I am very pleased with this development and the ECA Report on Youth Academies in Europe is the best example: a guide designed and focused on youth development aiming to provide advice to the clubs and to offer a medium to share experiences on youth academies. Nowadays, developing professional football players is a clear priority and focus for all clubs, irrespective of their philosophy, country or size. Such urgency has partly been dictated by Financial Fair Play that is demanding more attention for youth investment policies and more significantly by successful stories of clubs who have achieved their sporting success out of their youth development philosophy.

In many countries, associations or leagues carry out detailed assessments of their national youth academies; we do not aim to replace these through this Report. The added value of an ECA Report on Youth Academies in Europe, the way we see it, is to

provide a comparable European perspective that currently does not exist. While such benchmark exercises usually include rankings, in this Report we chose to underline the different approaches and the systems of work of Youth Academies throughout Europe with no aim at classifications. Indeed, we believe that comprehensive research is important to guide the thinking that shapes future trends.

I have to say that at ECA we are extremely satisfied with the outcome; in particular, with the great interest and support shown by our members in the ECA Survey. I am convinced that this Report will become a reference for our members and a source of inspiration where they can find ideas to improve their own youth academies which will be of benefit to all ECA members.

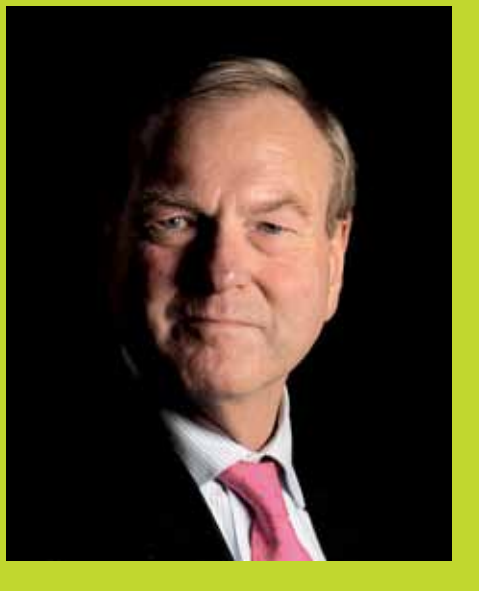
While there is no unique solution for success in this field, it is fair to say that as competitive friends we can all learn from each other resulting in more vibrant football.

My warm congratulations to the ECA Task Force for their work and a thank you to all ECA members who participated in this project, in particular the 96 clubs which shared their experience with us for the benefit of all.

Michele Centenaro
ECA General Secretary







INTRODUCTION

By better understanding the reality of youth development from across Europe, we can see which are the models and trends that operate best and better understand how clubs altogether through shared experiences can enhance the collective quality of youth development.

Past attempts to look at youth development have essentially focused on statistical evidence and data. This Report has widened the picture by adding new aspects to investigate such as the philosophies, visions, strategies and technical content, each club has in relation to their respective academies. Our analysis has focused on a dual approach, which includes a qualitative and quantitative angle. Details of this are outlined in the Background, Scope and Methodology section of the Report.

There is a certain nostalgic element to seeing a young talent develop through an academy and make it to the top of professional football. Most fans will tell you that they feel great pride and pleasure from seeing their team perform well based around a nucleus of home-grown talent. However, beside this emotional element lies some very informative and interesting information about how clubs can best approach the development of these future stars. As football tries to move away from an era of huge transfer fees and inflated player wages, youth development is seen as a key element to the development of the game. But how much do we really know about youth development and would not a better understanding of its current reality be beneficial to enhancing the overall game?

If we acknowledge that youth development is central to efforts to reduce financial risks in football it is fair to say that at present we lack a real detailed and coordinated mapping and understanding of the different models of youth development that exist from across Europe. The development of players via a youth system has always existed and is part of the DNA of a club, but a detailed understanding of the different models and their impact on the game remain largely unknown. What this Report aims to do is to gain a more detailed insight to the different approaches that exist in this field from across Europe by examining models from all four corners of the continent, but also from clubs which differ in culture, history, level of development, wealth and size.

It is important to note that ECA members are all natural opponents on the field of play, but all understand that they have a collective duty to work together and share best practice for the greater good of the game. Short-term attitudes are the norm in our industry. Clubs are under pressure to produce results on the field every three or four days. However, if we want to ensure that matches continue to be of relevance and of the highest quality we must also think of the long-term and sustainable well-being of club football. We have a responsibility to leave future generations with a game which is on a sound and sustainable footing. To achieve this, youth development is key and therefore, via this Report, we aim to better understand the current situation of youth football with the aim of optimising its quality in all its aspects and securing the future of our great game.

Maarten Fontein
ECA Youth Working Group Chairman
on behalf of the ECA Task Force

BACKGROUND, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The manner in which this Report has been produced is based around three core pillars with the aim of gathering the required information and using this information to develop a comprehensive mapping exercise able to offer a true picture of the reality of youth development across the whole of Europe. These pillars include:

1. The composition and structural set up of the team undertaking the work
2. Qualitative Analysis
3. Quantitative Analysis

PILLAR 1: CREATION OF TASK FORCE

On the 7th of February 2011, the Youth Working Group (YWG) set up a Task Force, tasked with “developing a Report aimed at highlighting the reality of youth development across Europe”. Members of the Working Group appointed to the Task Force included:

- Maarten Fontein, AZ Alkmaar (NED), ECA Executive Board member and Youth Working Group Chairman
- Bodo Menze, FC Schalke 04 (GER), Head of Youth Academy (Administration)
- Liam Brady, Arsenal FC (ENG), Head of Youth Development
- Konstantin Kornakov, Heart of Midlothian FC (SCO), Head of Football Administration
- Jan Skýpala, FK Teplice (CZE), General Secretary, former Youth Coach
- Olivier Jarosz, ECA Administration

Having decided on the team to undertake the project, it was agreed that there was a need for a twin-track approach to undertake the research. The Task Force agreed to undertake both qualitative and quantitative research as a complementary approach to obtain the required information.

PILLAR 2: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Qualitative research is a form of research focusing on the experience of meaning through close field observation. In this Report, this qualitative analysis was based around site visits and case studies of ECA members’ Youth Academies, which included detailed presentations made at meetings of the YWG. A selection of Youth Academies was made based on a number of criteria, which included:

- clubs’ training centres and infrastructure
- the number of players making the transition from academy to professional players
- the history, specific culture and prestige of a club’s academy
- recent sporting results in youth football
- the categorisation of a club within FIFA’s Training and Compensation schemes
- a club’s youth development budget

Site visits and case studies were limited to ECA members given that these represent some of the most successful clubs from across Europe. The selections also took into account club size and location so as to ensure a truly representative sample.

In terms of the areas on which the qualitative research would focus, the Task Force agreed to limit the scope to the following areas of each youth academy that was observed:

- 1) Vision & Philosophy
- 2) Infrastructure
- 3) Technical Approach
- 4) Education

PILLAR 3: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The quantitative analysis focused on obtaining data and statistical evidence of various components that

make up a youth academy. An external partner called Double PASS¹ was selected to develop a questionnaire in the form of a user-friendly software package which also included a helpdesk toolkit which allowed clubs to undertake a self-analysis of their own academies. Double PASS was on hand to provide assistance and share its experience in youth development with ECA members. They also set up an explanatory study detailing the critical success factors of Youth Academies. The questionnaire included sections previously neglected in past studies on youth development such as a club's vision and philosophy in relation to youth development. The survey was wide ranging and covered areas including: identification, management, football development, academy & staff, support,

relations, infrastructure, productivity, football in your country and success & constraint factors.

Given that the Task Force was working within tight time constraints, this twin-track approach used as methodology for the study was seen as the best one available to obtain the most wide-ranging and comprehensive information required to meet the aims of developing a true mapping of the reality of youth development across Europe.

96 clubs from 41 countries participated in the ECA Youth Survey. ECA members can download the full Report of the quantitative part on the ECA Website 'Private part' www.ecaeurope.com

¹ Double PASS is a spin-off of the University of Brussels. It has more than 10 years of experience in auditing and consultancy of Youth Academies in football and other sports. Double PASS is a neutral and independent body, guaranteeing objectivity, reliability and discretion.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Executive Summary provides an overview and snapshot of the main trends and realities both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective that arise from the different areas of each youth academy that have been examined. They can be detected in the case studies and the Youth Survey which make up the rest of the Report.

VISION & OBJECTIVES

- Over 75% of the academies have a well-defined youth development vision, mostly based on the football vision of the club
- 50% of the clubs define as an objective for the youth academy, “to create economic added value” and 60% of the clubs consider their youth academy as a source of income, rather than a cost
- The goal for most clubs regarding their youth academy is to develop players for professional football, in particular for their own first team
- 50% of the clubs work with satellite clubs (mostly amateur clubs)

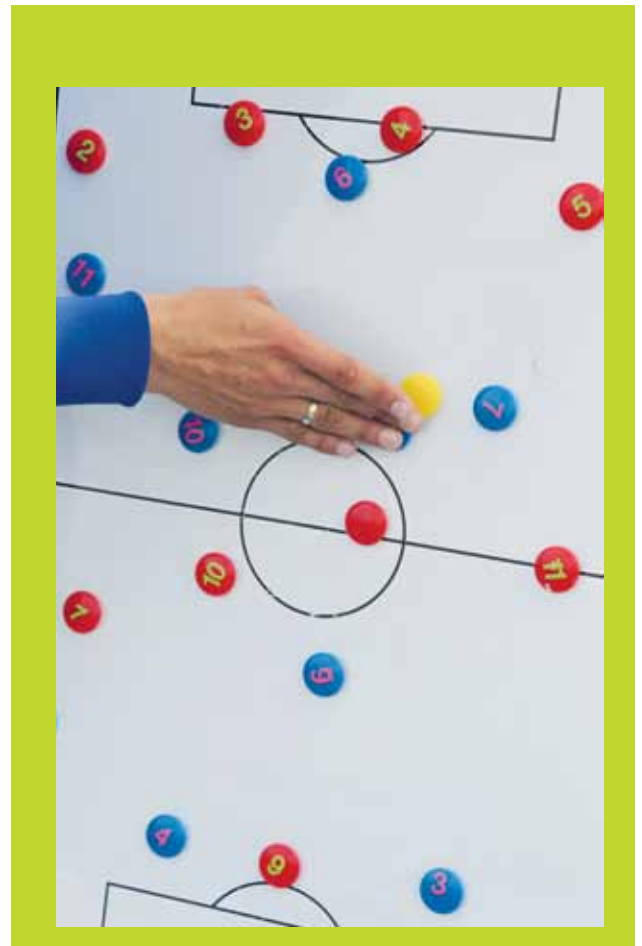
The clubs’ philosophy, vision and mission are key for successful solutions.

Nurturing talent and future players should be the main role of a club. If each club has its own traditions and if there is no single recipe for success, the case studies clearly show that the most effective Youth Academies are those which pursue their vision and their objective with perseverance. It is not only a question of size; it is a question of spirit and belief.

ORGANISATION

- 50% of the clubs have the youth academy represented in the executive board
- 66% of the clubs have the youth academy represented in the technical heart/board by the youth director
- 40% of the clubs have the first team coach represented in the technical heart/board

- The transition of academy players is decided by the technical heart/board (66% of the clubs)
- 80% of the clubs consider the club manager/first team coach and the youth academy director as the most important members of the technical heart and responsible for the transition of players



The key challenge and ultimate success for the academy is how to organise the optimal transition of youth players to the first team. This is amongst others determined by the organisational linkage between the youth academy and the first team and the role of the reserve teams.

Regarding the linkage to the first team, clubs that were visited have different philosophies in this respect. Some have totally standalone Youth Academies, but most have a linkage to the first team management through a technical heart. Only 50% of the clubs have the academy director represented in the board of the club.

Many clubs struggle with the role of the 2nd team, the balance of players who are not (yet) good enough for the 1st team, excessive contracted players from the 1st teams or players coming from the youth academy. This is why, for the “transition potentials” (too good for the youth academy but not ready for the first team selection), there is a need for international competition (for example an European Youth Club Competition), which will contribute to a more successful transition of players (experience).

EDUCATION & SCOUTING

- The majority of clubs have around 220 players in the youth academy
- The majority of clubs work with 3–4 age groups
- 75% of the academy players come from the region (less than a 1-hour drive)
- 60% of the clubs have academy players from abroad (in the oldest age groups 3% of the players are from another country)
- 75% of the youth academies have relations with schools, whereas 50% have relations with a university. 50% of the clubs have study opportunities at the club
- 66% of the academies have a clearly defined recruitment policy
- 75% of the clubs allow parents at training sessions

A successful youth academy starts with the recruitment of talent, for which you need a well-equipped youth scouting department. There is high pressure on a club's scouting system to select talent early enough, before other clubs get hold of them. The scouting department

needs to be closely linked to the technical heart of the club to set the right parameters for selection, but also closely linked to the supporting functions of the youth academy (education, social and psychological). Competing with other clubs to highlight talent is always the biggest challenge but the ultimate focus is always on quality and not quantity of players.

Furthermore, it is important that if a young, talented player wishes to play for another club in a foreign country, the transition happens at the right moment. History demonstrates that the majority of successful players moved to a foreign country when they were ready for it: after they have developed their football talents in combination with their social, educational, psychological and personality development towards adolescence.

The principles of education are to combine football with school in building the character of a player. His personality and mental strength are decisive on the pitch. The focus on education, school results and the disciplinary behaviour of players is the core philosophy in most clubs nowadays.

INFRASTRUCTURE (FACILITIES, MEDICAL, SOCIAL)

- 75% of the clubs have a combined facility for the youth academy and first team
- On average, there are 4 pitches per youth academy
- 66% of the clubs have transportation for their academy players to training sessions
- 75% of the clubs carry out anthropometric assessment
- More than 50% of the youth academies work with a psychologist, mostly for mental screening and about 60% of the clubs provide social support

One of the key fundamental requirements of a youth academy is the availability of an infrastructure, based on the following pillars:

- Quality of the assets, such as natural grass fields of the highest quality which allows maximum development of the individual technical skills and ball circulation at maximum speed. Many clubs use a mix of natural grass fields and artificial turf.

- Most clubs have a vision of hosting the 1st team selection and the youth academy in the same area, it is aspirational for the youth to feel and see the first team in the proximity of their daily development. However, there must be sufficient separation between the two groups to allow a maximum tailor-made private utilization for the different entities and for the groups' processes.
- A remote, quiet area is preferred to enable the coaches to teach and nurture the talent in a peaceful environment with no external distractions. It is very important to have restrictions regarding admission of agents and parents at the training grounds.
- The science and medical facilities on offer differ per club particularly as far as effective usage of these facilities is concerned, which depends on the vision and implementation of the club by the coaches vis-à-vis the medical staff.
- Game time: U12, 22–26 matches of 50–60 minutes, 13–15 age group, 30 matches of 70 minutes and above 16, 30 official matches 90 minutes
- Number of tournaments decrease over the years (from 10 to 6 per year), whilst international tournaments increase (1 to 2 per year)
- 75% of clubs work with video analysis and coaching syllabus physical fitness training starts at most clubs from age 14 years.

Most of the academies nowadays have a top-quality infrastructure. This is certainly true for those visited for this Report.

In order to avoid failure, the optimal youth academy cannot be sustainable without an infrastructure of excellence and in this respect there is no difference between clubs from different countries, culture or size.

TECHNICAL CONTENT & COACHING

- The majority of clubs have a consistent system of play, the 4-3-3 being frequently mentioned (52%), followed by 4-4-2 (28%)
- 66% of the clubs focus on individual progression rather than team development; however, most training sessions are organised with the team
- All clubs have defined learning objectives and most work with 3 age groups: under 12, 13–15 age, 16 and above age group
- Team sessions: U12 41–42 weeks, 3x per week, 4–5 hrs per week, 13–15; 44 weeks, 5x per week, 7 hrs per week; 16 and above 5x per week, 7–9 hrs per week
- Individual sessions: U12 once per week 30–60 minutes and >12 at least 2x per week, 90 minutes to 2 hrs per week

The vision with respect to the technical content differs per club. In one club the strength of the youth academy is best symbolized by the vision that the first team has to play similarly to the youth teams, whereas in 99% of the clubs the youth teams have to follow the example of the first team. The balance between individual training sessions and team training differs per club, some have no individual training, while others focus on increasing individual training sessions.

The major challenge is finding the right balance between technical and tactical development of the players within the different age groups. With the increasing speed of the game, it is even more important to focus on technical development in all age groups (in the youngest age group, all the individual creativity unwinds through fun and play without coaching interference, the middle age groups sees introduction of more specific technical development for defence, midfield and forward positions and, in older age groups there is more focus on tactical playing systems).

The profile and quality of the academy director and the coaching staff is a critical success factor and differs among clubs. It is important to find the right balance between coaches who have a background as football players and coaches educated through academies/universities.

A critical success factor is the importance of communication between the academy director and the coaching staff, and within the coaching staff. For the continuity of talent development at all levels it is important to understand and harmonize the content of the coaching programs and the implementation across all youth teams, for which continuous communication,

learning and application is an evolving process. It is fundamental that the academy director's main task is on the field, "coach the coaches", and not the administrative management.

FINANCE & PRODUCTIVITY

- 50% of the clubs spend less than 6% of their budget on youth academy
- 30% of the clubs spend up to € 0.5 m on youth academy
- 30% of the clubs spend between € 0.5 and 1.5 m on youth academy
- 30% of the clubs spend above € 3 m on youth academy
- In general, there are around 6 academy players that are regularly playing for the first team
- On average 8.6% of academy players signed a 1st professional contract at the club in the last 3 years
- 50% of the clubs have a minimum of 2 first players who were registered at the youth academy for at least 5 years
- In almost 50% of the youth academies, the budget increased significantly over the last 5 years
- Staff (26%), facilities (15%) and players' contracts (15%) are the most important costs of the youth academy

- The visited clubs on average produce between 30 and 50 players per year playing in the national championships

It makes sense to invest in youth because with an efficient youth academy the clubs save money by not paying transfers and inflated salaries. This policy will bring sanity back to the game and improve its connection with their fans. Indeed, we found that the average spending on youth academies across Europe is only 6% of the total club's budget, but 60% of the clubs consider that their youth academy is a source of income, rather than a cost. Half of the youth academies have the objective to create economic added value.

Investments in a youth academy offer a good return, also in terms of identification of players with the club and supporters.

With financial fair play coming into operation, the costs of the academy excluded from the breakeven requirements, make it essential for each club to increase investment in youth academies and to make it a crucial pillar of sustainable growth in club football.



CASE STUDIES



Arsenal FC, England



AFC Ajax, Netherlands



RC Lens, France



R. Standard de Liège, Belgium



FC Bayern München, Germany



NK Dinamo Zagreb, Croatia



FC Internazionale Milano, Italy



FC Barcelona, Spain



Sporting Clube de Portugal, Portugal





FC Levadia Tallinn, Estonia

“The message that comes across to me is that the clubs that take the development of young players seriously can be the clubs to benefit most.”

- Liam Brady, Arsenal FC, England, Youth Academy Director -

“Even if there is no blueprint for 100% success in this field, a youth academy is central to building a club programme.”

- Bodo Menze, FC Schalke 04, Germany, Youth Academy Director -
