

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF ACADEMY FOOTBALLERS IN CORRELATION WITH THE EPPP.

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Introduction

The lack of research within the youth academy football environment in correlation to psychological well-being is surprising (Mills et al., 2014). This study explores what academy coaches portray as psychological stressors for their players, whilst establishing what measures are in place, in addition to what could be implemented further by both clubs and the EPPP (Elite Player Performance Plan).

Blakelock (2019) demonstrates the toxic environment academy football can be when revealing that players can feel sheer relief when being released, concluding that further support needs to be put in place from the outset. Alfermann et al., (2004) states that depression and anxiety disorders are increasing with those under competitive anxiety, stating the competitive nature within academies has a deep psychological impact.

Mills et al., (2012) states all clubs will approach the psychological welfare of their players differently, but that the question remains on what further support should be implemented by the EPPP. Conn (2017) discusses the lack of psychological welfare within academies that collaborate with the EPPP (2012). Detailing instances where youth players released have tragically committed suicide, highlighting the cruelty within the lack of support.

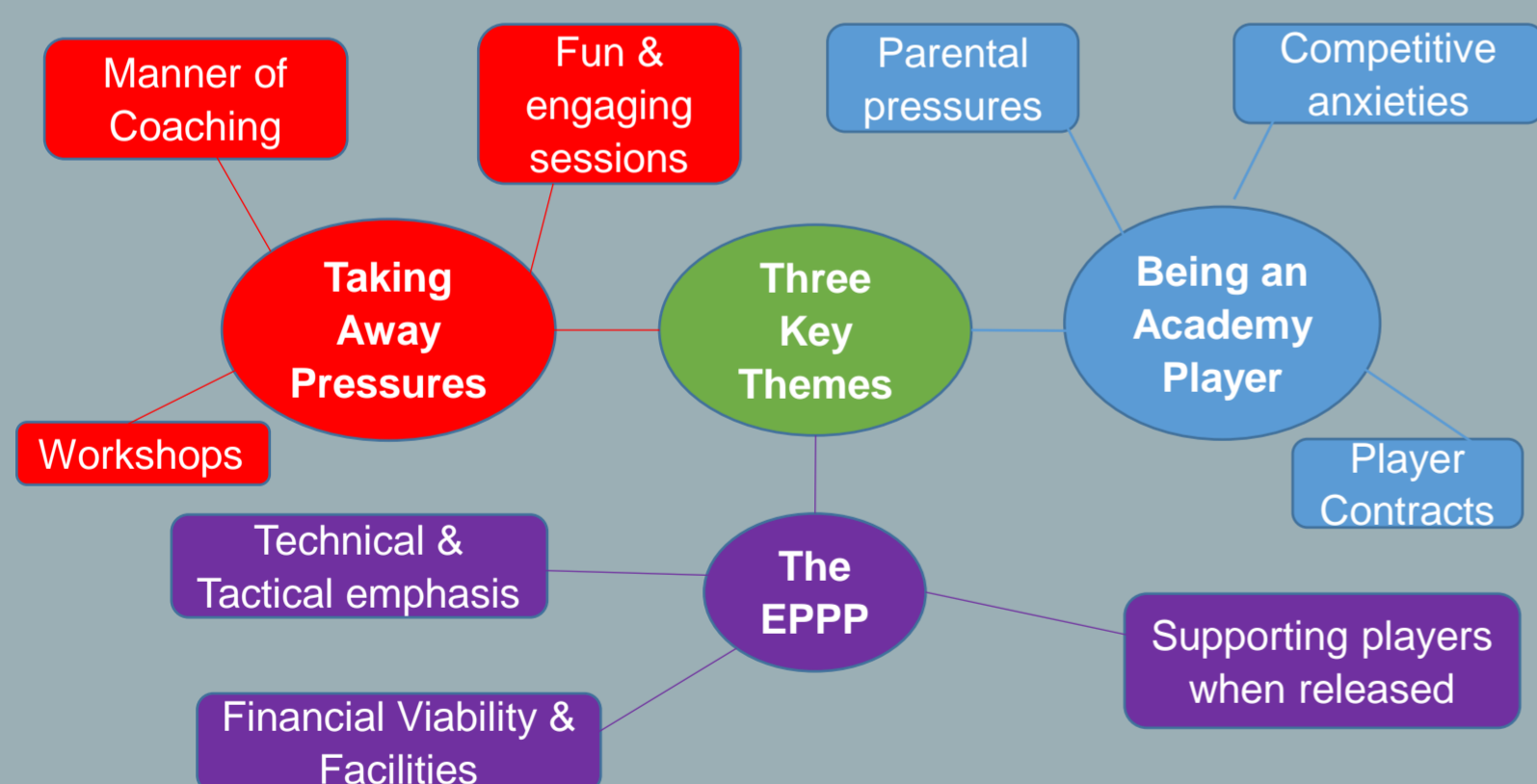
Objectives

- To determine how coaches within a youth academy football club can improve the psychological well-being of their players in correlation with the EPPP.
- To create recommendations for how both football clubs and the Premier League (EPPP) can further support the psychological well-being of their players whilst at the club and once released.

Method

- Design** - The study design consists of interpretivism with primary qualitative research.
- Participants** – Participants are current academy coaches that all obtain a minimum of the UEFA B (Level 3) coaching qualification.
- Procedure** - Three in-depth semi-structured interviews took place separately at each club's academy training ground.
- Materials** – An interview structure was used with each participant to ensure all relevant topics were covered. All interviews were recorded on a digital device to then be transcribed.
- Data Analysis** - Thematic analysis was pursued within the data collection, the data was analysed and put into three key themes that were emphasised throughout.

Results



Conclusion

- Coaches often struggled to find the fine margin between positivity and realism when working with both players and parents within an academy.
- If the Premier League (EPPP) were to implement their own workshops separately for both players and parents it would aid this issue as well as ensuring all academy players across the country got the same appropriate psychological support.
- It is clear that both clubs and the Premier League need to produce appropriate exit routes and support mechanisms for those players released.

Discussion

- Interestingly, participants countered Calvin (2017) and stated that parental pressures were one of the largest burdens their players faced. Competitive anxieties in relation to gaining their next contract and competing in fixtures was also highlighted.
- The study supported the work of Holt and Mitchell (2006) in that all clubs will approach the psychological welfare of their players differently. However, coaches countered the work of Nesti and Sulley (2014) who argue the amount of documentation needed on players within an academy is unnecessary.
- The study supported the work of Jones (2018) in which the EPPP prioritises technical and tactical excellence and financial viability with facilities, all 3 coaches were able to state that their current club were currently developing their training ground facilities.

Key References

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