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Methods of Primary Selection of Young Football Players

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Abstract

There is a conflict between the objective need to improve the training of young players, the identification of promising athletes and the lack of scientifically sound methods of their selection on the indicators of physical development, physical fitness, functional status, personal psychological status. The aim of the study was to scientifically explain the methodology of sports selection of children for football. Methods included analysis and generalization of literature and content of the Internet, questionnaires, interviews, pedagogical observation, testing, pedagogical experiment, methods of mathematical statistics. The study involved 15 football coaches and 32 novice players aged 6-7 years. The study was divided into two stages. We found that the reason for dropout during the first year of training was the lack of a well-developed system of initial selection parameters. The methodology of primary selection of children for football lessons is developed and experimentally tested, consists of two parts, each of which defines the key organizational stages, tasks and relevant selection criteria. The conclusion and recommendation for football was based on a comprehensive assessment of indicators and the degree of motivation to play football. The effectiveness of the developed selection method was confirmed by the increase of physical and technical fitness after 1 year of training in the group of initial training.

Keywords: *initial training, young football players, selection criteria, expectation*

Introduction

Achieving a high level of results in modern sports today is interconnected with many factors. Among them we can enlist: the use of new advances in sports pharmacology, the use of high-tech equipment while training and competing, the introduction of effective training methods, optimization of competitive practices, but first and foremost studying individual characteristics of sport and developing effective techniques for going in for specific kind of sport (DenHartigh, Niessen, Frencken, &Meijer, 2018; Voronova et al., 2020).

In particular, in football, the athlete needs to have unique morphological data, a specific combination of a complex of physical and mental abilities that are at an extremely high level of development (Kaynar, & Bilici, 2018). It is especially important to correctly identify the ability to go in for sport among children of 6-7 years, which will determine the success of their future sport success, because particularly at this age kids usually take up football (Pot, Schenk, & Hilvoorde, 2013). Identifying these qualities determines the principle of an integrated approach (Shynkaruk, 2012). This approach allows not only to obtain significant information about the potential of a young player, but also, comparing different indicators, to identify possible ways of forming special abilities (S. Trninić, Papić, V., Trninić, & Vukičević, 2008). This explains the urgency of creating a methodology for selecting players, which will be aimed at both its organization and content.

Given the multifactorial nature of sport selection, almost all football experts consider it in their scientific publications.

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For instance, Lysenchuk (2002) developed a method of comprehensive assessment of a special technique for the selection of young players. Boychenko (2003) defined the fundamental milestones of sport selection of football players. Dulibskii (2003) suggested the ways to increase the efficiency of sport selection. Chudyn (2006) developed the technique of young football players' selection at different stages of long-term sport training. Lago-Peñas, Rey, Casáis and Gómez-López l (2014) draw attention to the relationship between performance characteristics and the selection process of young athletes. Sieghartsleitner, Zuber, Zibung and Conzelmann (2019) emphasize that the process of sport selection should take into account not only the results of multidimensional testing, but also the evaluation of the coach. The main prerequisites of sport selection are integral for other kinds of sport as well, which is confirmed by studies of local and foreign scientists, regarding basketball (Vozniuk, 2008; Shynkaruk, & Mitova, 2017; Stroganov et al., 2020); hockey (Coelho-E-Silva et al., 2012; Shynkaruk, 2020), etc. However, there are still a lot of scientific issues (both generic and practical) of selecting prospective athletes, which have not been studied well enough. This situation is especially relevant for scientific and methodological justification, practical development and implementation of methodology at the stage of primary preparation in football.

The purpose of the research is to scientifically support the methodology of selecting children for football

Methods

Participants

The study involved 15 football coaches (with at least 10 years of coaching experience) and 32 young players of 6-7 years of age. The compulsory condition for enrolling children in football training groups was a medical certificate with a doctor's permission to play sports. The study participants had no prior experience of playing football. The participants and their parents were fully informed about the testing procedures before participating in the study; the informed consent was signed by parents.

Testing

The study used empirical research methods:

- pedagogical observations were conducted to identify the means, methods and organizational forms of training young football players aged 6-7 in the groups of initial training of the first year of study, pedagogical observations were public;

-both questioning and interviewing (anonymous) were conducted to study the practical experience of coaches concerning the problems of selecting young players;

- physical testing determined the level of motor qualities developments and special abilities of young football players.

The tests choice to obtain information of physical and technical proficiency level has been conducted according to the educational standards proposed by the Children's and Youth Sports School program.

Standing long jump. The participant stood at the starting position: the legs are apart behind the starting line. Bending knees, he swung his arms back, then threw them out abruptly in front of him and, pushing off, jumped as far forward as possible, trying to land on his feet as far as possible, since the result was determined based on the distance between the starting line and the point where he touched the floor (mat) with the heels.

The 15 m running was from a high (standing) start. Out of the two attempts the best one was recorded. Measurements were made with a manual stopwatch up to 0.01 s.

Shuttle run 3x10m. By the signal, a football player sped up to the first marker (10 m distance), and then he returned to the starting line and again sped up to the marker, at which point the total time was recorded. The young football players were given two attempts. The best result was recorded.

The 50 m running was from a high (standing) start. Only one attempt was allowed.

The following tests were performed to assess the specific preparation of young sportsmen.

Juggling the ball with a foot. The kicks were performed with the right and left foot in any order at the signal of the coach. Two attempts were allowed. The best attempt was recorded – the maximum number of kicks before losing control of the ball.

Dribbling the ball 30 m in a straight line. It was made by the coach's signal. Two attempts were allowed; the average result was recorded.

Throw-in the ball at the distance. It was made with a soccer ball. The average result of two attempts was recorded.

Table 1. Football players data in the motor tests: scores

Data	R	Absolute data and scores									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
D1 –50 m running, s	1.3	9.22	9.19	9.16	9.13	9.1	9.07	9.04	9.01	8.98	8.95
D2 – standing long jump, cm		129	131	134	137	140	143	146	149	152	155
D3 – Shuttle running 3x10 m, cm		10.38	10.27	10.16	10.06	9.95	9.84	9.73	9.62	9.51	9.40
D4 –15m running, s		3.54	3.50	3.46	3.42	3.40	3.36	3.32	3.28	3.24	3.20
D5 – Dribbling the ball, times		<5	5		6		7		8		9
D6 – Throw-in the ball, m		<4	4		5		6		7		8
D7 – dribbling the ball 30 m, s	1.3	9.8	9.6	9.4	9.2	9.0	8.8	8.6	8.4	8.2	8.0

Legend: R – data premium rate

The technique to evaluate the special preparation of young football players in those exercises was used to compare the obtained results (Lysenchuk, 2002; Table 1).

The examination result of each student was compared to the control data and transformed into scores according to the scale according to table 1.

The following algorithm was used for the calculations:

R = (D1 + R1) + D2 + D3 + D4+ D5+ D6+(D7+ R2),

where: R – integral mark in scores; D1-7 – the data value in measurement; R1-2 – data premium rate.

Design

It has been held in two phases. At the first stage we stud-

ied the problem by researching scientific and methodological sources, interviewing coaches who work with youth teams. Based on the data obtained, the sports methods of selecting young football players were developed. At the second stage a basic pedagogical experiment of the comparative nature was carried out to test the effectiveness of the developed methods. The sportsmen were organized into two groups - control and experimental, each group consisted of 16 people. Players of the control group were selected by blind lot. The players of the experimental group were selected according to our proposed method.

Statistical analysis

The results analysis was inferred using the methods of mathematical statistics, and the following indicators were calculated: mean (M), square deviation (SD), error of mean (m). The probability of differences between the average results of the two groups was determined by the Student test (significance level $p<0.05$), and the hypothesis of the normal distribution of measurement by Shapiro-Wilkie test had been tested previously (Byshevets et al., 2019).

Results

During the interview with the experts who train children football teams, we found out which problems they faced selecting children for beginner groups and suggested filling in a questionnaire.

The interviewing revealed that the reasons impeding the selection are the following:

- a great number of children who have health problems and cannot go in for football due to doctors' recommendations (33.3%);
- children's low motivation for physical activities (26.7%);
- the enormous academic load and additional classes with tutors (20.0%);
- insufficient number of sport camps for regular training, located near the place of residence or study of children (13.3%)
- lack of parents' support (6.7%).

Obviously, most of these reasons are objective. We also analyzed the percentage of children leaving sport in the beginner groups during the first year of training. We compared the lists of children made on October 1st, January 1st June 1st, and September 1st of the next academic-training year.

Table 2. Quantitative analysis of the beginners' training groups: the first year of football training

The object of the research	October	January	Selecting from the last, %	June	Selecting from the last, %	September	Selecting from the last, %	General selecting, %
The beginning group preparation, participants' quantity	161	123	23.6	99	19.5	74	25.3	54.0

The summarized data of Vinnitsa sport schools can be seen in Table 2.

The obtained data show that at the beginning of the training year the number of children according to the requirements was 10 educational groups (161 persons), then by January the number of children in the groups decreased by 23.6%, and by the end of the year by another 19.5%. After the summer holidays, out of 161 children who had been chosen, only 74 remained in groups, which means 25.3% of children quit going in for football during the summer. Thereby, the total quantity of such children was 54.0%, slightly less than the official statistics. However, these changes occurred in just one year of training; so, it is alarming and requires an immediate solution.

The results of our survey with coaches working with children's teams on the problems of initial selection are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Football coaches' questioning results: the initial selection (n=15)

Questions	Possible answers, %		
1. How long does the selecting process continue?	a month	two weeks	several days
	33.3	20.0	46.7
2. How many stages does the first stage of selecting have? (physical education lesson, meeting with parents, test training)	three stages	two stages	one stage
	26.7	40.0	33.3
3. What criteria do you use during the primary selecting?			
a) visual screening		100.0	
b) expert's opinion		20.0	
c) physical preparation tests		46.7	
d) technical proficiency tests		33.3	
e) anthropometric data		20.0	
f)physical well-being health assessment		100.0	
g) playing football motivation		93.3	
h) biological and passport age		13.3	
i) child's age		93.3	
j) parents' desire		60.0	
k) psychic and moral and volition qualities		73.3	

Summarizing the data, we found out that many coaches used different criteria to choose the most gifted children, but in most cases these criteria are subjective. Most often, selecting is conducted spontaneously, or coaches rely on the already formed level of technical and tactical skills, which can be demonstrated by children in the test games. Children's' potential opportunities are generally not taken into consideration.

The algorithm has been developed to select children for football training, thus generalized idea of the organization, structure and content of sport selection at the stage of primary preparation was created (Figure 1).

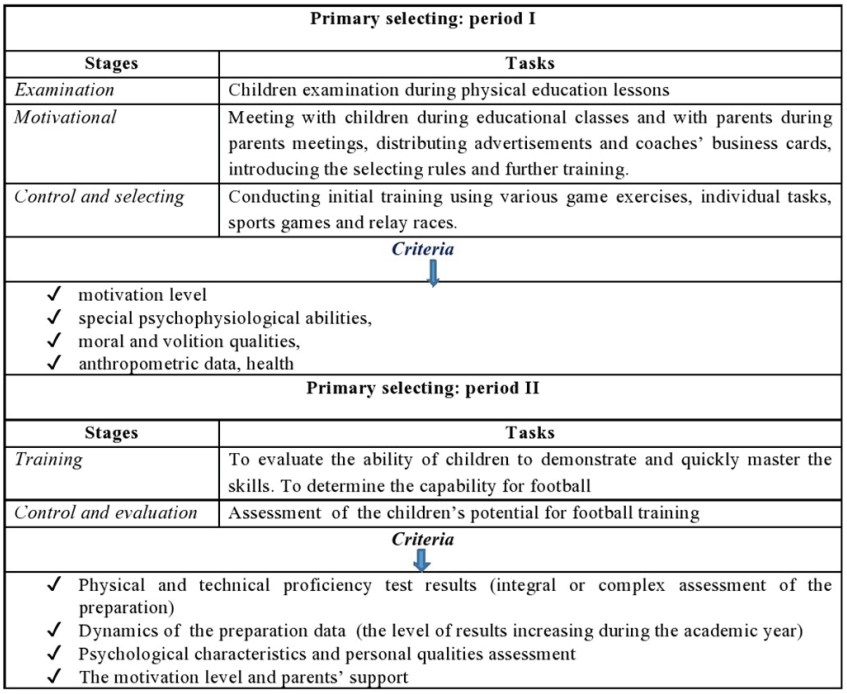

FIGURE 1. Algorithm of selecting children for football

The real evaluation of the effectiveness of the pedagogical methods of selecting children for football are the pedagogical tests results of young football players.

Two groups were formed for the pedagogical experiment. The experimental group included the children who had succeeded during all the previous stages of selecting. The control group was formed randomly. The changes in physical and technical proficiency of young football players are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Young football players' physical preparation data: different stages of the research

Group	The research stage	Tests			
		Shuttle running 3x10 m, cm	50 m running, s	Standing long jump, cm	15m running, s
Control (n=16)	October	10.0±0.92	9.19±0.80	136±3.46	3.5±0.2
	May	9.84±0.79	9.07±0.65	143±3.17	3.4±0.12
	Data difference	0.16 (t=1.76; p=0.754)	0.12 (t=1.41; p=0.544)	7.0 (t=10.34; p=0.000)	0.1 (t=1.26; p=0.716)
Experimental (n=16)	October	10.1±1.04	9.20±0.87	137±3.75	3.5±0.09
	May	9.51±0.59	8.98±0.57	151±4.32	3.28±0.09
	Data difference	0.59 (t=2.99; p=0.000)	0.22 (t=1.91; p=0.477)	14.0 (t=14.83; p=0.000)	0.22 (t=1.87; p=0.334)
Data difference control and experimental group		0.33 (t=1.33; p=0.412)	0.09 (t=0.42; p=0.610)	8.0 (t=6.04; p=0.000)	0.12 (t=3.38; p=0.000)

Taking the results into consideration, we can infer that the experimental group results in the physical preparation tests were higher (increasing 2.4-10.2%) than in the control group (increasing 1.3-5.1%), although positive changes occurred in both groups. The young players of the experimental group met the standards of Children's and Youth Sports School in 15 m running, and exceeded the control standards in others tests. The control group results were merely close to standards. A probable difference was recorded in" Shuttle running 3x10 m" (t=2.99; p=0.000) for the experimental group and in "standing

long jump" for both groups (control - t=10.34; p=0.000; experimental - t=14.83; p=0.000). Statistical reliability between the final values of the experimental and control groups was determined in the tests of standing long jump (t=6.04; p=0.000) and 15 m running (t=3.38; p=0.000).

We also recorded the changes in technical proficiency data during the research. The data obtained indicated that the training process during the first year had a positive effect on the level of special preparedness; statistically significant changes were determined by all indicators in the experimental and control groups, but the level of increase was different: 6.4-21.1% in the control and 12, 5-37.3% in the experimental groups. Statistical reliability between the final indicators of technical proficiency of the players of the experimental and control groups is determined in the tests of throw in the ball (t=3.17; p=0.000) and juggling the ball (t=4.47; p=0.000) (Table 5). The increase in technical proficiency is explained by the stage of preparation and low initial results.

Table 5. Young football players' technical proficiency data: different stages of the research

Group	The research stage	Tests		
		Throw-in the ball, m	Juggling the ball, times	30 m running with dribbling the ball, s
Control (n=16)	October	5.8±0.79	5.7±1.19	9.40±0.83
	May	6.5±0.63	6.9±0.78	8.8±0.72
	Data difference	0.7 (t=3.34; p=0.000)	1.2 * (t=4.38; p=0.000)	0.6 * (t=3.10; p=0.000)
Experimental (n=16)	October	5.8±0.72	5.9±0.89	9.60±0.92
	May	7.2±0.62	8.1±0.74	8.40±0.96
	Data difference	1.4 (t=4.73; p=0.000)	2.2 * (t=5.93; p=0.000)	1.2 * (t=4.41; p=0.000)
Data difference control and experimental group		0.7 (t=3.17; p=0.000)	1.2 (t=4.47; p=0.000)	0.4 (t=1.83; p=0.334)

The method of comprehensive assessment of physical and technical test results and the cumulative assessment of young football players' proficiency show the results of the changes that took place during the research (Figure 2).

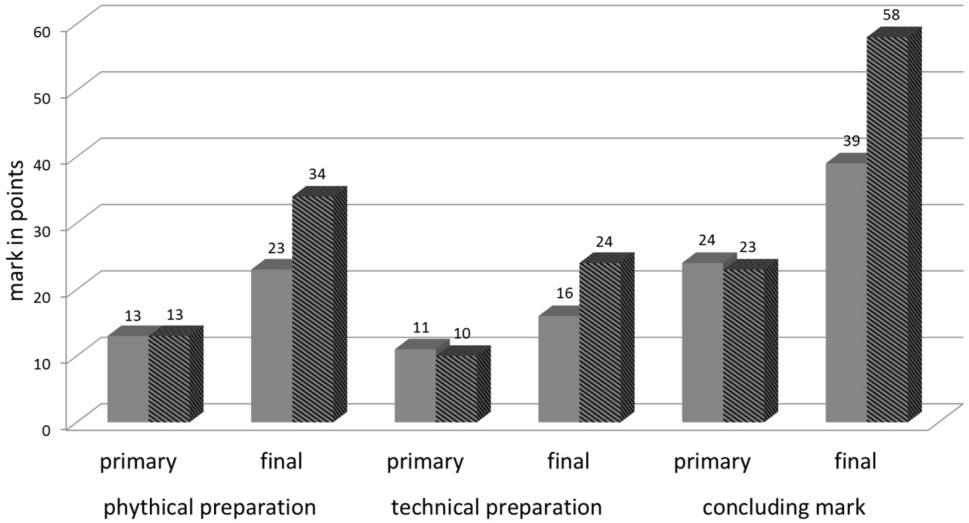

FIGURE 2. Physical and technical proficiency, cumulative assessment: dynamics of the results in points: – control group; – experimental group

Discussion

Scientific and methodological literature analysis proves the importance of sport selecting for the preparation of qualified athletes, which is emphasized in the scientific studies of sports training (Devinder, & Kansal, 2010; Adkhab, Tkhazeplov, & Khodair, 2014; Gil et al., 2014; Kilger, & Börjesson, 2015). The future implementation of sportsmen's individual abilities depends on the first correct step of preparation. The special feature of modern football should be the effective selection of children to meet the requirements of intense competitions.

However, so far, most coaches do not consider the following factor, which casts doubt on the effectiveness of the entire training process. At the same time according the Ministry of Youth and Sport of Ukraine statistics, it is a well-known fact, that in footballers' group of Children's and Youth Sports School, Specialized Children's and Youth Sports School of Olympic Reserve, Ukrainian Football Club, Ukrainian Olympic Reserve, a significantly high dropout rate has been identified; 70% of children stop football training due to the inconsistency of the program requirements and the deficiency of selecting and training system (Ovramenko, 2003). The results of our questionnaire determined the criteria that are used by coaches to select children for football. An important component of the selecting process is determining its criteria. The major criteria of the selecting process defined in the program of Children's and Youth Sports School are the following: motivation for football, the age

when the training begins, morphological features, health, the correspondence between the biological and passport age, the level of motion abilities. The questionnaire revealed that during the primary selection, the method that is used by coaches most often is visual screening (100%), which means that the future of the child in the sport is determined by ordinary observation. The least attention is paid to the biological and passport age identification (13.3%), the use of expert assessment (20%) and anthropometric data (20%).

The preparation problem cannot be solved only by natural selection because talented children get rejected together with the ones that are not inclined towards football (some children are low-skilled, but have high potential). Sometimes inappropriate methods are used working with such children, which is emphasized by most scientists (Rybin, 2001; Shynkaruk, 2002, 2011). All things considered, we can assume that the effectiveness of the selecting process for football depends greatly on solving two problems: metrological (what data are used as selecting criteria, how often and how accurately measurements are made) and methodological (the organization of instructional and training processes at the stage of primary training during the continuous selecting).

Taking the obtained data of theoretical and practical research into consideration, we have proposed a pedagogical technology of selecting children for football. Two stages of primary selecting were pointed out during the first preparation according to the presented scheme. The first period consists of three stages, and its main goal is to involve as many children as possible. The main methods of assessment are visual screening, pedagogical observation, medical and biological control. Footballers' main qualities and functions are poorly developed at this age, they are not clear and it is still difficult to identify them. Thus, selecting based on pedagogical testing at the beginning of the year is not used. Among other selecting criteria are also the level of children and parents' motivation, special psychophysiological abilities, such as sense of time, space, game-related thinking, attention, the development of moral and volitional qualities; desire to win, endurance to tensions, communication skills, ability to work in a team; anthropometric data (weight, height, length of limbs, etc.) and the health conditions for playing football.

During the second technological period of selecting, capabilities for playing are determined, inclinations for the development of special abilities is revealed, the level of motional activity is assessed, new movements and unfamiliar physical exercises are mastered. At the end of the year, contests, tests and competitions are held to check if the pre-selected group of children meet the requirements of successful specialization in football. Children special qualities, personal traits and basic preparation allow to determine their sport inclinations and their ability for improvement in this type of sport.

More significant changes obtained from the experimental group show the effectiveness of the developed technology of selecting children for football. Furthermore, it should be noted that as the result of our study the new understanding of the training organization in team sports at different stages has been developed (Kostiukevych, 2019a; Kostiukevych et al., 2019b).

Conclusions

Football is one of the efficient means of the improvement of schoolchildren' physical activity, and at the same time it remains the most favorite kind of sport in our country. Leading and young scientists devoted their principal works and research to the issue of sports selecting, acknowledging its role in the system of qualified sportsmen's preparation.

At the same time, in the theory and methodology of the national football there is a controversy between the necessity of the improvement in the young football players' training process efficiency and the lack of data-based methodology of selection based on the criteria of physical development, physical preparation, functional state of body systems, and personal psychological status. The problem of children and youth sports at the level of sport selection, according to the Ministry of Youth and Sports statistics, is a large number of children who drop out due to the imperfection of sport selecting methods.

The developed methods of selecting children for football involves two selecting periods, each of which has its stages and tasks to be solved, and each period has its own selecting criteria too. The selecting process itself lasts during the first year of preparation. The final decision to involve a child in football is based on a complex assessment of data and motivation to play football.

The efficiency of the selecting methods is confirmed by the increase in physical and technical proficiency data, obtained after the first year of training.

The complex assessment data of the experimental group preparation increased from 23 points to 58 points, while that of the control group increased from 24 to 39 points during the first year.

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Conflict of Interest
The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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