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PLAYER CAREERS OF FOOTBALL COACHES

Key words: age, performance level, professional player, player's development.

ABSTRACT

The paper tackles the question whether it is more important in the career of a professional football coach to have practical experience or to be well educated. An analysis of determinants of professional development shows that a football coach should be sufficiently educated, have playing experience and good coaching practice. The study examines the process of playing career of football coaches, for further comparison with other components of the coaching profession. The main method was a questionnaire survey. The study sample comprised 206 football coaches; 166 questionnaires were analyzed. The results showed that player experience is the basic component of the football coach's competences. Education has also an effect on coaching careers of former professional as well as amateur football players. Playing in the senior class, where most respondents used to be professionals, is of key importance. A former player career and its level are of considerable significance in the coaching profession.

INTRODUCTION

In their discussion of the coach's profile Svoboda & Vaněk [12] point to the dilemma which profile pillar is more important: professional practice or education. This study is a part of a more extensive research project dealing with the issue of professional competences of football coaches holding the highest coaching license. The theoretical basis of the coaching profession is information, and the coach's way to gain information is through experience or education. A football coach can be perceived as one combining player experience and expert knowledge. These two components can hardly be separated and the question remains whether and how they are balanced. Is a football coach's okaying experience from a first league or national representation more important than his acquired education and knowledge? Which of the two components should prevail?

The study focuses on an analysis of areas where we anticipate the presence of determinants of the coach's professional evolution and development of coaching abilities. The position of a coach requires appropriate education, player practice and coaching practice. The required levels of these components are conditions for issuing coaching licenses.

The aim of the study was to examine how important these compounds are in coaching careers and in perception of coaches, and whether data acquired from coaches correspond to theoretical data on coaches' professional competences. The present study deals with the analysis of player careers of coaches, which is important for further comparison with the other components of the coaching profession. The player career is the coach's former career in the field. In our view data on coaches' player careers, and playing level in particular, are very important. We divided the coaches participating in our study into those who

played in the national league, regional leagues and amateur leagues. We anticipate that the coaches with the highest coaching license, used to be top-class players in professional leagues.

METHODS

The study was based on the biodromal approach, i.e. life-span developmental psychology, in the context of football coaches' life-span development [8, 10] as well as on contact theory [1].

The research sample consisted graduates from UEFA PRO license studies from years 1999-2002 and graduates from upgrade seminars (n = 134), and graduates of ČMFS re-qualifying courses (n = 72). The choice of the sample was deliberate because the coaches should meet particular criteria. The only criterion for the selection of coaches was their coaching level as indicated by their license. All the coaches in the Czech Republic with the UEFA PRO license took part in the study. This criterion was chosen because the UEFA PRO license is a certificate of the highest level of education of football coaches and therefore of the quality which we intended to formulate. The sample comprised 206 coaches, who were sent the survey questionnaires. 166 questionnaires were examined in total, which is more than 80% return rate. The numerical characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Study sample profile

| Coaches | Number |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| UEFA PRO 1999-2002 | 134 |
| Re-certifying courses graduates | 45 |
| Upgrading courses graduates | 27 |
| Total questionnaires | 206 |
| Returned questionnaires | 166 |
| Returned questionnaires in % | 80.58 |

The study used the authors' own questionnaire. One of the five areas of questionnaire items concerned coaches' player career. The whole questionnaire was quantitatively evaluated and the data was subjected to statistical analysis. The absolute values of categories at separate items were transferred into relative

percentage values. The data was processed with SPSS 11 software package [11] using statistical significance, chi-square and statistical correlation. The Pearson's correlation coefficient was used for acquiring the force of linear dependence between two occasional quantities, chi-square test, and analysis of adjusted residuals, where the usage of chi-square was limited or impossible.

RESULTS

The age at which the respondents started to play organized football was almost exclusively (95%) between 6 and 12 years of age, which is very similar to the age coaches generally start to play. This means that most of the respondents started to play football in organized teams. The results showed that the majority of the coaches started their playing career in regional leagues (Table 2) which until the 1980s used to be the highest football competition level for school students in Czechoslovakia. One third of the coaches began their playing career in the student league; and one fifth in leagues below the regional level. Altogether 70% of the respondents used to play in the teenage league (Table 3), which is important as they met early with a professional approach to football and could absorb much experience for their future coaching practice.

Table 4 shows the shift in the playing level between the student league and teenage league. In 115 cases (69.2%) it remained the same, in 30 cases (18.1%) it decreased, and in 21 cases (12.6%) an improvement was observed. The McNemar test did not show a significant shift between the student league and the teenage league. Thus no substantial shift between the levels was noted.

Table 2. Player level in student competitions

| | | What was your highest level in student competitions? | | | |
|-------|--------------------|--|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Student league | 55 | 33.1 | 33.1 | 33.1 |
| | Regional league | 71 | 42.8 | 42.8 | 75.9 |
| | Lower competitions | 36 | 21.7 | 21.7 | 97.6 |
| | Did not play | 4 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 166 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 3. Player levels in the junior category

| What was your highest level in the junior category? | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|-------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Teenage league | 116 | 69.9 | 69.9 | 69.9 |
| | Lower level competition | 49 | 29.5 | 29.5 | 99.4 |
| | Did not play | 1 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 166 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The senior category of coaches comprised the professional level represented by the first Czechoslovakian league or the highest league in a foreign country; semi-professional level represented by second and third league, and lower competitions where the approach is amateur and football is just a hobby. Table 5 shows the division of respondents in the senior category into the competition levels they played. The highest level was represented by 55% of the respondents. More than one fourth of them played in the semi-professional second and third league. It is necessary to note that the second league gradually became a professional competition, where the UEFA PRO coaching license is required. Only 15% of the coaches played in the lower competitions. This

Table 4. Comparison of player levels of student league and teenage league**ot15 * ot16 Cross tabulation**

| | | ot16. Level in teenage category | | | Total | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------|--------|
| | | league | lower competitions | did not play | | |
| Ot15. Level in student league | league | Count | 50 | 5 | 0 | 55 |
| | | % | 90.9% | 9.1% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| league | regional competition | Count | 47 | 24 | 0 | 71 |
| | | % | 66.2% | 33.8% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| | lower competitions | Count | 17 | 18 | 1 | 36 |
| | | % | 47.2% | 50.0% | 2.8% | 100.0% |
| | did not play | Count | 2 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| | | % | 50.0% | 50.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | 116 | 49 | 1 | 166 |
| | | % | 69.9% | 29.5% | 0.6% | 100.0% |

McNemar shift test

k_15 * k_16 Cross tabulation

| | | ot16. Teenage category level | | | Total | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------|--------|
| | | league | lower competitions | did not play | | |
| Ot15. Level in teenager category | league | Count | 97 | 29 | 0 | 126 |
| | | % of Total | 58.4% | 17.5% | 0.0% | 75.9% |
| category | lower competitions | Count | 17 | 18 | 1 | 36 |
| | | % of Total | 10.2% | 10.8% | 0.6% | 21.7% |
| | did not play | Count | 2 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| | | % of Total | 1.2% | 1.2% | 0.0% | 2.4% |
| Total | | Count | 116 | 49 | 1 | 166 |
| | | % of Total | 69.9% | 29.5% | 0.6% | 100.0% |

Table 5. Player level in the senior category

| | | What was your highest level in the senior category? | | | |
|-------|---------------------------|---|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | 1st league, abroad, repre | 92 | 55.4 | 55.4 | 55.4 |
| | 2nd or 3rd league | 46 | 27.7 | 27.7 | 83.1 |
| | Lower competitions | 25 | 15.1 | 15.1 | 98.2 |
| | Did not play | 3 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 166 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 6. Comparison of player levels in junior and senior categories

ot16 * ot17 Cross tabulation

| | | ot17. Level in senior category | | | | Total | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------|--------|
| | | 1st league | 2nd and 3rd league | lower competitions | did not play | | |
| Ot16. Level in junior category | league | Count | 75 | 33 | 7 | 1 | 116 |
| | | % | 64.7% | 28.4% | 6.0% | 0.9% | 100.0% |
| | lower competitions | Count | 17 | 13 | 17 | 2 | 49 |
| | | % | 34.7% | 26.5% | 34.7% | 4.1% | 100% |
| | did not play | Count | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | | % | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | 92 | 46 | 25 | 3 | 166 |
| | | % | 55.4% | 27.7% | 15.1% | 1.8% | 100.0% |

McNemar shift test

k_16 * k_17 Cross tabulation

| | | ot17. Level in senior category | | | Total | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------|--------|
| | | league | lower competitions | did not play | | |
| Ot16. Level in junior category | league | Count | 108 | 7 | 1 | 116 |
| | | % of Total | 65.1% | 4.2% | 0.6% | 69.9% |
| | lower competitions | Count | 30 | 17 | 2 | 49 |
| | | % of Total | 18.1% | 10.2% | 1.2% | 2.5% |
| | did not play | Count | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | | % of Total | 0.0% | 0.6% | 0.0% | 0.6% |
| Total | | Count | 138 | 25 | 3 | 166 |
| | | % of Total | 83.1% | 15.1% | 1.8% | 100.0% |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---------------------|--------|----|-----------------------|
| McNemar-Bowker Test | 15.631 | 3 | 0.001 |
| N of Valid Cases | 166 | | |

supports our hypothesis that football coaches with UEFA PRO license played in the senior category, in professional or semi-professional leagues.

Table 6 shows the shift in the playing level between the junior and senior categories. In 125 cases (75.3%) the level remained the same, in 10 cases (6.0%) it decreased and in 31 cases (18.7%) an increase was noted. The McNemar test revealed a significant shift in the playing level between the junior and senior categories (which means a significantly higher level in the senior category). In almost 25% of cases there was a shift in the level between junior and senior leagues. The claim that the transfer between juniors and seniors is usually the most sensitive change in the player career is supported and denied at the same time. We confirm that there is a significant shift between the levels, on the other hand, the trend goes in an unusual direction – one category up.

The last question in the questionnaire concerning player career was about the age at which the coaches finished their active player career. This data is important especially for

comparison with the age at which the coaches started their coaching career. However, it is interesting to look at the table separately. We expected that the end of an active career will be predominantly between the ages of 30 and 40 years; however, only 50% of the coaches ended their career in this age range. On the other hand, less than 30% of the coaches ended their career even before they were 30. This data is not substantial within the questionnaire; it is only possible to guess the reasons for ending the career, most probable being injuries or changes in attitude. More than 10% of the coaches played actively after 40 years of age.

The vast majority of the respondents started their player career in the student category on the highest level, either in regional competitions or later in the student league. Almost the same percentage played in the junior league, which was supported by the McNemar test which showed a significant shift between the levels. In the senior category more than one half of the respondents played at professional levels, either in the first

Table 7. Comparison of player level in senior category with coaching level at the beginning of coaching career

ot17 * ot20 Cross tabulation

| | | ot20. Level at the beginning of coaching | | | | | Total | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|--|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------|-------|--------|
| | | 1st league | 2nd and 3rd league | students, SCM league | lower competitions | students | | |
| Ot17. Level in senior category | 1 st league | Count | 11 | 20 | 12 | 24 | 25 | 92 |
| | | % | 12.0% | 21.7% | 13.0% | 26.1% | 27.2% | 100.0% |
| | 2nd and 3rd league | Count | 0 | 0 | 3 | 21 | 22 | 46 |
| | | % | 0.0% | 0.0% | 6.5% | 45.7% | 47.8% | 100.0% |
| | lower competitions | Count | 0 | 0 | 2 | 11 | 12 | 25 |
| | % | 0.0% | 0.0% | 8.0% | 44.0% | 48.0% | 100% | |
| | did not play | Count | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | | % | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 66.7% | 33.3% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | 1 | 20 | 17 | 58 | 60 | 166 |
| | | % | 6.6% | 12.0% | 10.2% | 34.9% | 36.1% | 100.0% |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 36.481 ^a | 12 | 0.0003 |
| N of Valid Cases | | 166 | |

^a – 10 cells (50.0%) have expected Mount less than 5. The minimum expected count is 20

league or the national representation. Approximately one fourth of them played in the semi-professional second or third leagues. The McNemar test showed a significant shift between the junior and senior levels. The obtained results supported out anticipation that football coaches during their player career did play at a senior level. The first category in which the coaches played was in almost all cases the student category, with 75% on the regional level and higher. The shift into the junior category was accompanied by a change of level in 31%, with an increase only in 13%. 70% of the respondents played in a junior league. At the shift to a senior league 25% of respondents changed their level, but only 6% of them decreased their level. In the senior category 55% of the coaches played on a professional level which is the first league or representation. 28% of them played in a semi-professional second or third league. Only 15% of the coaches played in lower competitions.

The results revealed an interesting relationship between the player level in the senior category and the level at the beginning of coaching (Table 7). The group of respondents who played in the first league included a substantially higher number of those who started to coach in the first, second or third league. This result supports our anticipation about a relationship between the player career and professional position of a coach with UEFA PRO license. A higher level in the senior playing category is connected with a higher level of coaching and vice versa.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical and empirical research has been carried out to identify phenomena determining sporting careers from the beginning of preparation to the end, and in the case of coaches, up to the start of their coaching careers. Our empirical experience shows that the causes of success of a professional athlete or coach should be looked for not only in the area of manual and psychological parameters but also in the environment of athletes from the start of their biological and sporting development, in particular, family environment and sporting socialization. We presume that coaching activity is a continuation of an active sporting career in the given area, and it only confirms a coach's relationship with sport. It is very difficult for a coach to leave the environment in which they used

to function. A coach's relationship with active practicing of sport is then transferred into coaching activities. It is therefore not substantial whether one acts as a player or as a coach, but what is their relationship to sport. In our opinion, this relationship is forged during childhood. In the first period of ontogenetic development the key factor of social functioning is the family environment. As a child grows other environments come to play. In the case of organized sport it is mostly the team or the club. The respondents' answers show that not all of the coaches had played football as their first or only sport in childhood or adolescence. Some of them entered a football club and stayed there, some went through general sporting preparation, and others changed another sport for football. The start of a football career can be marked by joining a football club, even in cases when someone had played football before. Entering a team means starting professional sport training which contains physical, technical, tactical and psychological preparation.

Apart from differences related to the starting of a football career there are also differences in its length, ending and reasons for its ending. These factors are not important for the purpose of our thesis. Player career in the context of our research is significant, especially in terms of its level on which the respondents played in the individual categories, as experience and watching other coaches remain primary sources of a football coach's knowledge [3]. The school student category is mostly the first category in which the coaches started to play organized sport. In many cases it was the parents' decision rather than the child's playing abilities assessed by a coach to choose a particular football club. On the other hand, we can expect that a child brought to a team playing in a student league or in regional championships had better background than the children in lower competitions. We can expect greater player growth under professional coaching than under amateur leadership in lower competitions. Playing competition was probably also higher in better clubs and the children were forced to work hard. Although the student category is divided into younger and older, for the purpose of the questionnaire we preserved a more general division. In the junior category football still remains a free-time activity and the children come to training sessions and matches when they are not at school. There are exceptions, for example, individual training plans for some

students, but they would still form one team, on one level and with a similar training and match system. There are players in a team who prepare for a professional career and those who intend to keep football as their hobby. This category is often the time when the players stop being children of their parents and they are not so much influenced by their parents' expectations. Children start to make their own choices of their hobbies and leisure pursuits. It is also the time when they deal with puberty and adolescence, with all its emotionally sensitive elements, and their bodies also undergo major changes. Maturing boys also start to perceive the opposite sex and other potential treats which can hold the player back from their appropriate approach to the training process.

The junior league is different from the student league and more similar to the senior league. The junior league includes junior divisions and regional championships. For the purpose of our research we divided the levels into lower competitions and junior league where the time consumption of training is on the highest level. There is also the presumption of a professional approach of the players and coaches and a more difficult football playing level. This approach gives a possibility of player's development but also lowers the possibility of good education. On the other hand, on lower levels, players normally attend school and training sessions in their free time, which does not jeopardize their education, but then they are unprivileged in terms of their sport development. The stabilizing of the level takes place usually at the junior age, when one starts to direct one's life. We try to emphasize the importance of the level on which coaches were active during their player careers because we think it is the key factor for determining the level on which they act as coaches. If a junior player acts on a high level, then probably he will remain on this level until the end of their career to become a professional football player.

The senior category is probably the most important one for our study for many reasons. If we deal with differences between coaches with professional backgrounds and coaches with amateur careers, then it is necessary to find out on what level they played in the senior category. Firstly, it is the longest part of a player career, therefore, the players have a chance to encounter more coaching styles and approaches, and secondly, it is the time when the players become adults and are able to

perceive and process information concerning training and competitive matches.

Then there are players who play on the professional level and players who play on amateur or semi-professional levels. Whether it is their own choice or the result of an insufficient career, this is important for further coaching careers. Professionals are in daily contact with football, coaches, players and the club management. Football is their job and they adopt a fully professional approach to it. In professional football it is common to train daily and in stages, undertake special training exercises, take part in training camps before competition, attend special tactical meetings, and develop appropriate player lifestyles. Professional players therefore can witness the management of a football club, the training process and matches. The semi-professional level is closer to the professional level than to the amateur competitions. The coaches are usually professionals, training conditions are comparable to those of professional clubs and the training process is also similar. The amateur level does not feature many training units, and its quality is also lower. Training units are two or three times a week after working hours, not always all the players can come, some can be physically or mentally exhausted, training conditions are worse, there is no possibility of rehabilitation, coaches on this level mostly volunteers rather than selected on the basis of their abilities, and finally, the training process is not of professional quality.

In the group of coaches who played at a professional level in the senior category there are more coaches who started to work on a semi-professional or professional level. This result is very important in the context of our research. We can see that none of the respondents playing in the senior category at a lower level than the first league started coaching on a professional level. If we accept the fact that to get on a professional coaching level is harder than to stay there, then we can say that player career in senior professional teams is one of the basic presumptions for training on a professional level. It is understandable with regard to the specifications of the football environment, where the social factor plays an important role. A professional football player whose main task is playing football, surrounded by football coaches and managers is closer to being offered a coaching job on this level. Kissner [9] states that as a player the coach encounters other

training models and can later apply them in his own profession. It is also the knowledge of the professional approach to training, matches and the club as a whole which make a professional player better than an amateur one. Here we agree with Glaubitz [5] who notes that there are only few coaches who have never been active players, which does not mean that a good player would make a good coach. Gould, Giannini, Krane & Hodge [7] state the most important knowledge sources are constant adaptation of one's own training methodology to experience and watching other successful coaches. Continuous interaction is one of the best sources of knowledge for expert coaches. We agree with the opinion that an opportunity to gain practical experience should be a part of educating programs for coaches [2, 3]. Also Gilbert & Trudel [6] observe that learning from experience is a necessary part of coaching education. The respondents who played on a lower level in the senior category usually started to coach a lower category too. We can hardly expect that a player of amateur football will be recruited by a professional club as a coach without any previous coaching and player experience on this level. If an amateur player can start a coaching career, they have to face more difficulties than a professional player, which can complicate the decision whether to go this way or not. As mentioned earlier, it is obvious that the career of a professional coach is influenced by his player career in the senior category. We agree with Gerish [4] that a football coach cannot live from their expert competences. Our results show that more than one third of the UEFA PRO licenced coaches work on the level which does not require such a professional license, they have no contract or they do not coach at all. One fourth of the coaches are at the highest level, in the first league or in the national representation. If we count professional clubs in the Czech Republic and representation teams of all categories, we find out that the supply exceeds the demand more than three times. The market for professional coaches seems to be saturated and if we say that UEFA PRO license means quality, then we can say that Czech clubs and representations have a great variety to choose from their best home coaches.

The coaching profession involves an unusual overlapping of two different careers: playing career and coaching career. The playing career can be seen as one of elements of preparation period which has to be completed by the educational element:

coaching courses or license studies. Another overlap occurs when a player acts as a coach at the same time and develops two careers simultaneously. The subsequent phases of the coaching career copy the process of a regular professional career. The main stimuli for the coaches are usually wishing to stay connected with top level sport, interest in the sport, helping young people or giving back the experience gained during playing. Coaching motivation can be also developed by children if they take part in the given sport. Then the coach can simply like the feeling of remaining in the sport. When players finally finish their careers, they usually start their coaching careers right away. The factors for ending a player career are connected with getting old, family obligations, health complications but also pressure from the job, development of other interests and other changes in life. The career of a professional player is closer to starting a coaching career on a higher level, because such an individual works in a professional club. On an amateur level there is still the element of volunteering. In both cases the availability of local training education is important as well as the opportunity to train and the opportunity to work with older coaches. It is also hard to imagine a person who coaches in a senior league or a 1st league but never played on such a high level before.

Our results show that the shift between the categories within the shift between the age categories is minimal. We can say that the family is probably the key element deciding a player career. The development of the career of a professional football player enables them to get to know professional and experienced coaches, witness their approach to the players, training, the media and also see the way a professional club is run. The career is in coherence with the professional statute of the player filled almost exclusively with activities closely connected with playing. The player at the end of the career is like a high school graduate without practice. At the end of their career players are usually offered to remain in the club on various positions. Most commonly these positions are coaching jobs. Our results show that the majority of coaches started their coaching careers after finishing playing; most commonly, on the level they played. The advantage over the coaching applicants from amateur levels is their experience gained during a professional football player career. The results of our research reveal that playing

experience is a basic component in the competence of a football coach, which decides about their future coaching level. The educational component is also important for the coaching career of former players and amateur coaches. The most significant is therefore playing in the senior category where the greatest percentage played at a professional or semi-professional level. Also the level on which the coaches start their career depends on the level they played in the senior category. The importance of player career and its level seems to be crucial for the future coaching career. With regard to this, the importance of the initial level increases because as we can see there are no substantial shifts between the age categories.

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