

**Title:** Preparing Footballers for the Next Step: An Intervention Program from an Ecological Perspective

**Authors:** Larsen, C. H., Henriksen, K., Alfermann, D., & Christensen, M.K.

**Year:** 2014

**Keywords:** Athletic talent development environment; career transition; elite sport; soccer; talent development

**Sport(s):** Football, soccer

**Journal:** The Sport Psychologist

**Main Theme:** Social support

**Secondary Theme:** Culture, identity, personal characteristics

**Aims:** The purpose of this article is to present practitioners and applied researchers with specific details of an ecological-inspired program and intervention in a professional football (soccer) club in Denmark. The study utilised an intervention approach from a holistic-ecological perspective, focusing on the athletic talent development environment (ATDE) rather than the individual athlete. **Method:** To do so, the researchers used applied ethnography to improve problem-solving in sport. Data sources were observations, interviews, and informal remarks gathered during the intervention. Also, meetings and communications with relevant persons at the club, focus groups with the under-17 coach and players; and participant observations of training sessions served as additional data sources. Intervention delivery involved delivering three distinct, but interrelated efforts. First, a series of workshops targeting the under-17 players, but also inviting players from the professional department and coaches and focusing on developing a range of specified psychosocial skills. Secondly, an ongoing supervision of the main coach with the purpose of helping him support the program and stimulate psychosocial development between

workshops. Lastly, psychological training sessions on the football pitch designed to facilitate transfer from workshop discussions to actual on-pitch performance.

**Results and Practical Implications:** The findings of the research indicated that career assistance programmes in elite sport are challenging and complex to plan, albeit being necessary for developing personal characteristics, which could prove instrumental to career transitions. Career assistance must aim to develop personal characteristics, and should involve the athletes' environment to underpin development. Integrating several informants such as former athletes, current elite athletes, and coaches. Involving multiple informants in the delivery might also serve the purpose of developing supplemental sources in the daily life in the club outside a workshop setting. Using more integrative efforts, and aligning more individuals in the environment such as family, siblings, teachers, and coaches could create stronger connections throughout the environment. Lastly, this study is first and foremost an intervention. Larsen and colleagues stress that the purpose was to illuminate how an intervention might take the holistic-ecological approach and develop an integrative effort in career assistance programs.

TASS have produced this lay summary. The full article is available (permissions may apply):

<https://journals.humankinetics.com/doi/10.1123/tsp.2013-0015>