

Analysis of the Current and Ideal Situation of Iran's Football Talent Management Process from the Perspective of the Elites

Mehran Nasiri, Ardeshir Poornemat

Abstract—The aim of this study was to investigate the current and ideal situations of the process of talent identification in Iranian football from the point of view of Iranian instructors of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). This research was a descriptive-analytical study; in data collection phase a questionnaire was used, whose face validity was confirmed by experts of Physical Education and Sports Science. The reliability of questionnaire was estimated through the use of Cronbach's alpha method (0.91). This study involved 122 participants of Iranian instructors of the AFC who were selected based on stratified random sampling method. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the variables and inferential statistics (Chi-square) were used to test the hypotheses of the study at significant level ($p \leq 0.05$). The results of Chi-square test related to the point of view of Iranian instructors of the AFC showed that the grass-roots scientific method was the best way to identify football players (0.001), less than 10 years old were the best ages for talent identification (0.001), the Football Federation was revealed to be the most important organization in talent identification (0.002), clubs were shown to be the most important institution in developing talents (0.001), trained scouts of Football Federation were demonstrated to be the best and most appropriate group for talent identification (0.001), and being referred by the football academy coaches was shown to be the best way to attract talented football players in Iran (0.001). It was also found that there was a huge difference between the current and ideal situation of the process of talent identification in Iranian football from the point of view of Iranian instructors of the AFC. Hence, it is recommended that the policy makers of talent identification for Iranian football provide a comprehensive, clear and systematic model of talent identification and development processes for the clubs and football teams, so that the talent identification process helps to nurture football talents more efficiently.

Keywords—Current situation, talent finding, ideal situation, instructors,.

I. INTRODUCTION

IN today's modern world, the success of sports fields and related federations depends on using the new scientific findings in the area of physical education and sports. The coaches try not to identify champions in each field randomly, or based on their own interest or relations; they do try to do it by applying scientific methods and defining and prioritize different indices, because in this way, in addition to saving

time and money, more success in achieving peak athletic performance can be obtained [1]. The process of finding talented athletes to participate in organized programs is one of the most important issues in contemporary sports [2]. In fact, identification of talents, determining their amount, and recognition of individual differences in a variety of talents are the main tasks of coaches and consultants, and the difference in performance of athletes who acquire the same skill, but in practice, show different performances, is because of the difference in their talents [3].

Scouting process allows us to anticipate the performance by measuring physical, physiological, psychological and social characteristics as well as technical capabilities [4], [5]. Finding the most effective and widely used talent identification method is very complicated, and has long been a concern for researchers. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of the eastern European countries noticed the weakness of the traditional talent identification programs, and tried to develop methods which were supported by scientific theories and evidence. The result of this new approach was that 80% of Bulgaria's 1976 Olympic medalists were those who were chosen through the scientific method. Athletes of East Germany and Romania showed similar results in 1972 and 1976 Olympic Games. Therefore, everyone came to believe that these successes were due to their scientific selection processes developed in the late 1960s. Talent identification programs were also considered in western, North American and Commonwealth countries in the 1980s [3]. In fact, talent identification programs have long existed in most countries and have been followed by different methods and patterns. The most complicated talent identification program was designed and followed in the East Bloc countries, especially the former East Germany and the former Soviet Union. The method they used for selecting athletes was far from a perfect program, but their regular procedure of talent identification, which included a close coordination with schools and their physical education programs, was better than those of other countries. Their talent identification programs were systematic. Provincial units actively looked for a talent on a regular basis and through methods based on measurement and evaluation and competition. While traditionally West Bloc countries relied on the person-centered models, in which there were some structures for talents to show themselves and be nurtured. These structure-centered models were based on the idea of sports for all, and normally discovered talents as a direct result of competitive performance. Specifically, United

Mehran Nasiri is with the Department of Physical Education, Bandar Anzali Branch, Islamic Azad University, Bandar Anzali, Iran (e-mail: mehran.nasiri22@yahoo.com).

Ardeshir Poornemat is with the Department of Physical Education, Bandar Anzali Malavan Football Club, Bandar Anzali Branch, Islamic Azad University, Bandar Anzali, Iran.

States has offered a good example of this model, and overall, this country exhibited great power and depth in sprint and hurdling that suggests competitive selection in these fields serves well and is effective. However, in less common fields, competitive selection shows poorer results [6].

The tendency toward talent identification in sports has also increased in many countries in recent years [7]. For instance, in 1994 Australia launched a Talent Search Scheme for identifying and nurturing talented sports persons in a specific time frame and for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, which were the most successful for the country in terms of sporting achievement. However, it seems that many programs focus on early identification of talent, often in order to choose the best young players who will likely become major players; while the process of training and nurturing is very important, it has somehow been neglected. Australia has a national scheme of talent identification, which is implemented with the help of the Australian Sports Institute, an academy of sports and sports organizations of different cities and regions of the country [8].

An investigation of the records of talent identification shows that, despite diversity, talent identification systems in the world have some commonalities as well. In talent identification, age is always an important factor with regard to the type of sport. Naturally, it will not have an acceptable conclusion if the age parameter to start playing a sport is not considered even though the other process of talent identification is considered well. Paying attention to the starting age, specialization and reaching peak performance are crucial factors in a scientific and exact talent identification process. Knowing the starting age of general and specific training is of great importance in the talent identification process. Surprisingly, the month of birth of different champions was studied, and the researchers noticed that more people who were born in the months before the beginning of the racing season had become champions, and some of them, in the year in which they were selected, had more opportunities of 8-12 months to gain experience and skills in comparison with others. For example, in Belgium, the Football Federation has selected the first of January as the talent identification month [9]. Another common point is paying attention to education. Most of the researchers believe that, without the cooperation of the education system, the chance of success of talent identification systems would be minimized [10]. Jaroor in 1982 in an article titled "Is talent identification essential?" stated that, at the moment, talent identification in many countries for coaches meant using a simple applicable field test, and that the main problem was that the non-flexible system of education in most countries could not nurture the potential talents even if they were identified. While the success of the former Soviet Union in talent identification was due to the fact that the education system worked perfectly cooperatively through special sports schools, and believed in a huge talent identification scheme for 8-10 year-olds, preliminary selection stage for 10-12 year-olds, and selection of the sport field for 13-14 year-olds based on tests and appropriate skills models developed for each sports field [10] Thompson and Bevis also in a study in 1985, and Reverdon

in 1988 confirmed the idea of Jaroor about talent identification, and state that the efficiency of the education system, its coordination with the Soviet sports system, along with the modern three-staged plan, the use of experienced coaches of physical education in private schools and implementing modern systematic models of performing skills of each sport field were the keys to success [11]. Other commonalities are that most scholars believe that determination and identification of criteria for talent identification in sports is essential. Another common point in talent identification is the existence of a talent identification system for success in sports [12].

Iranian society is very rich in human talents and shows eye-catching potential, and there is an appropriate context in this regard. But, apparently, the root of the problem must be sought in the lack of proper planning and process that suggests this problem has deeper roots in the lack of knowledge and ignorance about the real and main problems, as well as the absence of a well-established plan. In Iran, engaging young people in particular sports fields is mostly based on traditions, aspirations and individual interests, and depends on the popularity of the sport, parental pressure, specialty of school teachers and the availability of the intended sports facilities [13]. By using scientific research to identify the criteria that elite athletes have at their disposal and a favorable environment for nurturing these criteria, it can be possible that a greater number of high-level athletes would be achieved. At the present time, in scientific and exact talent identification programs, in addition to considering numerous and important factors, field and laboratory tests are employed by experts [14]. On the other hand, proper management of the talent identification process in sports saves time, energy and costs and makes talented people want to do the intended sports field. Additionally, those who do not have enough talent do not do those sports, and will try other fields in which they have more probability of success, so that in the future, they will not become frustrated because of the psychological causes of failure. Unfortunately, in our country, talent identification with new methods has received little attention in many different fields. Football is not an exception either, the sport which has a lot of fans all over the country these days. Meanwhile, the importance of football in the world is such that the number of FIFA member countries (207) is more than the number of states members of the United Nations (192). In most countries like Iran, the country's Football Federation is the largest sporting federation. This sport has allocated the most TV broadcast to itself and has the highest paid players [15]. In recent decades, football has become a multibillion-dollar industry, and according to Football Federation statistics there are more than 200 million active soccer players around the world [16].

Unfortunately, in many Iranian clubs, it is observed that talented players are identified, and despite the huge costs to a club, are recruited at basic levels. After surpassing the age limit set for playing in clubs at the basic level, and as the club has no plan to promote them while it has focused a long-term strategy to cultivate them; in the end, this situation leads to a

waste of club funds. One of the reasons for the slow progress of Iranian football and insufficient attention of clubs to the basic levels to invest in new talent; this can be the issue of inattention to talent development, because they do not participate in the talent identification and development processes completely, and without results, there is little economic justification for clubs. According to recent research, the minimum age at which a player can reach peak performance in football is age 22 years. However in Iran, football players at the age of 21 years, the age at which attention and support should be focused in order to reach peak performance in football, are instead relinquished by clubs against the players' best interests and is a situation that has greatly damaged the national and league football in the country. By understanding the talent identification and development processes, clubs can use them as an opportunity and improve their economic condition [17]. In Iran, based on the contents of the Sports Comprehensive Plan, which is a strategic program that has been in use for 20 years and is part of the National Sports Plan, there is no integrated, comprehensive and operational plan for talent identification. In addition, regarding talent identification, coordination among institutions in charge of athletics is weak. Nurturing athletes in our country does not have a structured and unified system; different organizations deal with it separately and there is no specific organization which deals with identifying talent seriously. Clubs, Sports Bureaus, Sports Federations and Associations, Ministry of Sports and Ministry of Education are organizations active in the field of talent identification in the country. But these activities, in each of the aforementioned organizations, have different procedures and there is not any comprehensive plan or system to be used as the basis for arrangements and actions of these organizations in regard to talent identification [17]. Failure of basic level teams in international competitions, instability in the structure of talent identification process of football, lack of proper and regular procedures to identifying and developing talents in football clubs, lack of nurturing basic players to make them professional athletes and factors such as these, are among the those that form the necessity and importance of this research. The Iranian Football Federation and the National Academy of Football, provincial and local football bureaus, clubs and academies across the country, the Physical Education Bureau of the Ministry of Education and other organizations related to talent identification in football, can benefit from the results of this study. Therefore, the researcher aimed at determining the current situation and the ideal situation of talent identification in Iran from the point of view of Iranian instructors of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), and comparing them.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was a descriptive – analytical study, for which survey and field data were gathered. The instrument was the questionnaire of the process of talent identification in football prepared in [17]. This questionnaire contains two parts: the first part was the general questions part, which focused on the personal information of the instructors including age,

qualification and field of study, the age range of their activity, work experience, their highest level of coaching and talent identification experience. The second part was the specialized questions, which included the current and ideal situations of the talent identification process in Iranian football, which was designed as a closed questionnaire. To determine the face validity of the questionnaire, the technical opinions of 15 masters and elites in the fields of Physical Education and Sport Science were used, and the questionnaire was accepted with their final approval. Furthermore, the reliability of the questionnaire was measured through the use of Cronbach's alpha (0.91). Participants of this study were all recognized Iranian instructors and members of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), who according to the report of Football Federation Education Committee, total 144 individuals. Thus, the available population consisted of 136 Iranian instructors of the Asian Football Confederation who had participated in the refresher course conducted the Iranian National Football Academy. From the sample of 136 questionnaires sent, 122 were collected and the data were analyzed by using SPSS software version 19. In order to describe the gathered data, descriptive statistics was used, and to test the hypotheses of the study, chi-square test was applied.

III. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Findings of the descriptive statistics showed that the age range of the participants was between 32 years and 71 years with the mean of 47.36 years. From the total of 122 people who answered the questionnaire, three (2.5 %) held a diploma, three (2.5%) an associate degree, 45 (36.9%) a bachelor's degree, 50 (41%) a master's degree, and finally, 21 (17.2%) held a PhD. Also, 78 (63.9%) of the participants graduated in the Physical Education field and 44 persons (36.1%) graduated in a field other than Physical Education. There had been 89 people (73%) of the participants working in adult age range, and the remainder (33 people, 27%) participating at the basic level, and 15 of them (12.3%) had less than five years of coaching experience, nine people (7.4%) had five to 10 years, 37 of them (30.3%) had 10-15 years, 29 (23.8%) had 15-20 years and 32 (26.2%) had more than 20 years of coaching experience. The highest level of coaching experienced by the participants was the province level for 25 respondents (20.5%), the third league for 13 (10.7%), the second league for 15 (12.3%), the first league for 30 (24.6%), the premier league for 21 (17.2%) and the national team for only 18 (14.8%). Also, 107 of the participants confirmed that they had experience of working as a scout in the process of talent identification, and just 15 persons did not have the experience of working as a scout in the process of talent identification. Among the 107, who had the experience of being a scout, 40 (32.8%) had less than five years of talent identification experience, 29 (23.8%) had five-10 years, 21 (17.2%) had 10-15 years, 13 (10.66%) had 15-20 years, and 10 (8.2%) had more than 20 years of talent identification experience in different ways.

A. In Current Situation of Talent Identification Process in the Nation from the Samples' Point of View

From the total of 122 Asian Football Confederation instructors participating in this study, 30 persons (24.6%) confirmed that their club has a talent identification program, while the remaining 92 (75.4%) say there was no talent identification program. Nearly all participants, 116 of them (95.1%), stated that preparing a talent identification scheme for football was essential in Iran, with only six respondents (4.9%) suggesting it was not necessary. Twenty-four persons (19.7%) said that a talent identification scheme existed, while 98 (80.3%) claimed that there was a lack of such a scheme in Iranian football. With regard to the talent identification process and talent development, 24 respondents (19.7%) stated that it received enough attention in Iran, while the remaining 98 (80.3%) believed that it did not receive enough attention. At the individual club level, 49 persons (40.2%) said that the process of talent identification and talent development in their club received necessary attention, while 73 persons (59.8%) believed that in their club it did not receive the necessary attention. Most of the respondents, 116 (95.1%), knew the new and scientific methods of talent identification completely, while six (4.9%) say they did not know about the new methods, while 60 (49.2%) confirmed that their club used performance testing as the football talent identification method, 62 (50.8%) said their club held competitions. According to the results, none of respondents confirmed that scientific and grass roots methods were used for talent identification in their clubs.

B. In Ideal Situation of Talent Identification Process in the Nation from the Samples' Point of View

Of the respondents, there were 60 (49.2%) who applied the grass roots method and 62 (50.8%) who applied scientific methods, while none of them believed that testing administration and holding competitions were the most appropriate methods. There were 62 respondents (50.8%) preferred the scientific method and 54 (44.3%) who opted for the grass roots method, while six respondents (4.9%) suggest that holding competitions was the most appropriate method of talent identification in football in Iranian clubs; meanwhile, none of the of the respondents preferred testing performance as the most appropriate method of talent identification. Considering the method to attract players in their club, 39 respondents (31.96%) confirmed that most potential players visit the club personally, three (2.45%) mentioned being referred by selected individuals, 24 (19.67%) mentioned using players' recruitment call, 12 (9.83%) mentioned being referred by school teachers, football academy trainers and Youth and Sports Department teachers, and 44 (36%) mentioned a combination of all the above mentioned factors as a way of attracting and recruiting players. With regard to which of these methods is the most appropriate, six respondents (4.9%) said the players' visit to the club, 15 (12.3%) chose being referred by selected individuals, nine (7.37%) said using a players' recruitment call, and 92 (75.4%) chose being referred by school teachers, football academy trainers and Youth and

Sports Department teachers. Meanwhile, 74 respondents (60.7%) said that they were satisfied with the way their club was attracting and recruiting players, while 48 (39.3%) mentioned that they were not satisfied. The majority of respondents, 118 (60.7%) confirmed their club had a football academy, while only four (3.3%) confirmed their club had no such academy. For those clubs with a football academy, eight (6.7%) said that the football academy at their club was held for under-12 years, 18 (15.2%) for under-13 years, while 92 (77.9%) confirmed their club's football academy was offered for all age ranges. Meanwhile, 86 (70.5%) supported beginning the talent identification process for under-10s. As the responsible organization that must play an important role in the identification of football talent, 45.9% of respondents identified the Ministry of Education, while just 3.3% highlighted the Ministry of Sport and Youth. When asked the most appropriate group in football for talent identification and nurturing, 86% of respondents highlighted the talent identification instructors trained by the Iranian Football Federation, while interestingly, none of the respondents suggested parents take on the role. Again, club coaches were identified as talent identification groups who played a main role in Iranian football (90.2%), while parents and sports teachers (0%) have no role to play.

With regard to which organization must play a crucial role in talent nurturing, clubs were identified as the most crucial (82.9%), while the Ministry of Education was seen to have the least important role (2.4%). About the organization which played a crucial role in talent development in Iran, the Football Federation was identified as the most important (54%), while the Ministry of Education was the least (2.5%).

TABLE I
FREQUENCIES OF THE BEST METHOD TO IDENTIFY PLAYERS

Potential player's identifying method	percentage	Frequency	Expected frequency	The remaining difference
Competitions	4.91	6	40.7	-34.7
Scientific methods	50.81	62	40.7	21.3
Grass Roots	44.26	54	40.7	13.3
Total	100	122	122	-

TABLE II
CHI-SQUARE TEST OF CHOOSING THE BEST METHOD OF IDENTIFYING FOOTBALL PLAYERS

χ^2	df	Sig
45.11	2	0.001

Tables I and II show that according to the amount of χ^2 (45.11) and the obtained level of significance (0.001), from the point of view of Iranian Instructors of the AFC, the best method to identify football players, was the scientific method. After that, the Grass Roots method, with subtle fluctuation in comparison with the scientific method, stood at the second level.

Tables III and IV show that according to the amount of χ^2 (20.49) and the obtained level of significance (0.001), from the point of view of Iranian Instructors of the AFC, the best age to start talent identification in football was at 10 years.

TABLE III
FREQUENCIES OF IDENTIFYING THE BEST AGE TO START TALENT
IDENTIFICATION IN FOOTBALL

Age to start talent identification	percentage	frequency	Expected frequency	The remaining difference
Under-10	70.49	86	61	25
Under-12	29.51	36	61	-25
Total	100	122	122	-

TABLE IV
CHI-SQUARE TEST OF IDENTIFYING THE BEST AGE TO START TALENT
IDENTIFICATION IN FOOTBALL

χ^2	df	Sig
20.49	1	0.001

TABLE V
FREQUENCIES OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT SHOULD HAVE THE MOST
IMPORTANT ROLE IN TALENT IDENTIFICATION

Organization	percentage	frequency	Expected frequency	The remaining difference
Football Federation	45.90	56	40.7	15.3
Ministry of Education	34.42	42	40.7	1.3
Ministry of Sports and Youth	19.67	24	40.7	-16.7
Total	100	122	122	-

TABLE IV
CHI-SQUARE TEST OF THE ROLE OF MINISTRY OF EDUCATION IN TALENT
IDENTIFICATION

χ^2	df	Sig
12.56	2	0.002

Tables V and VI show that according to the amount of χ^2 (12.56) and the obtained level of significance (0.002), from the point of view of Iranian Instructors of the AFC, the most important organization that should have a main role in talent identification was the Football Federation. After that, the Ministry of Education, with a slight fluctuation compared to the Football Federation, stood in second place.

TABLE VII
FREQUENCIES OF THE ANALYSIS OF THE BEST AND MOST APPROPRIATE
GROUP FOR TALENT IDENTIFICATION

Groups	percentage	frequency	Expected frequency	The remaining difference
Sports teachers	4.91	6	40.7	-34.7
Club coaches	4.91	6	40.7	-34.7
Trained scouts of Football Federation	90.16	110	40.7	69.3
Total	100	122	122	-

TABLE VIII
CHI-SQUARE TEST OF THE BEST AND MOST APPROPRIATE GROUP FOR
TALENT IDENTIFICATION

χ^2	df	Sig
177.31	2	0.001

Tables VII and VIII show that according to the amount of χ^2 (177.31) and the obtained level of significance (0.001), from the point of view of Iranian Instructors of the AFC, the best and most appropriate group for talent identification, was the trained scouts of the Football Federation.

Tables IX and X showed that according to the amount of χ^2

(78.72) and the obtained level of significance (0.001), from the point of view of Iranian Instructors of the AFC, the most important organization involved in football talent development was the clubs.

TABLE IX
FREQUENCIES OF THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT SHOULD HAVE THE MOST
IMPORTANT ROLE IN TALENTS DEVELOPMENT

organization	percentage	frequency	Expected frequency	The remaining difference
Football Federation	9.83	12	61	-49
Clubs	90.17	110	61	49
Total	100	122	122	-

TABLE X
CHI-SQUARE TEST OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ORGANIZATION IN TALENTS
DEVELOPMENT

χ^2	df	Sig
78.72	1	0.001

TABLE XI
FREQUENCIES OF THE BEST METHOD OF ATTRACTING TALENTED FOOTBALL
PLAYERS

Recruiting method	percentage	frequency	Expected frequency	The remaining difference
Player's visit to the club	4.91	6	40.7	-34.7
Being referred by the Football Academy coaches	75.41	92	40.7	51.3
Being referred by selected individuals	19.28	24	40.7	-16.7
Total	100	122	122	-

TABLE XII
CHI-SQUARE TEST OF THE BEST METHOD OF ATTRACTING TALENTED
FOOTBALL PLAYERS

χ^2	df	Sig
101.18	2	0.001

Tables XI and XII showed that according to the amount of χ^2 (101.18) and the obtained level of significance (0.001), from the point of view of Iranian Instructors from the AFC, the best method of attracting talented football players was by being referred by Football Academy coaches.

IV. DISCUSSION

The current situation of talent identification process in Iranian football, from the point of view of Iranian Instructors of the AFC, is displayed in Table XIII.

Investigating the current situation of talent identification process in Iranian football from the point of view of Iranian Instructors of the AFC showed that:

- At the moment, there is no systematic program to identify talented players. The lack of a program to identify talented players in football will greatly harm the talent identification process. The fact that sports organizations are program-centered can help to limit wasted time and energy, while increasing the probability of achieving organizational aims. Performing based on the personal styles adopted by coaches and football talent identification officials, as well as the lack of coordination among responsible organizations in talent identification,

demonstrates and confirms that in Iranian football that there is still no appropriate program or procedure for talent identification.

TABLE XIII

CURRENT SITUATION OF TALENT IDENTIFICATION PROCESS IN IRANIAN FOOTBALL FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF IRANIAN INSTRUCTORS OF THE AFC

The subject matter	The current situation in Iran
Regular program to identify talented players	Does not exist
Talent identification scheme	Does not exist
Paying attention to talent identification process and nurturing football talents	Do not do
Talent identification methods	Performance Testing and holding competitions are used
Football players' attracting methods	Paying a visit to the clubs, recruitment call, and being referred by school teachers and football academies trainers
The existence of football academy in their club	There is
The existence of different age ranges in their club's football academy	All the age ranges of under-10, -11, -12, -13 and -14 years
Playing a pivotal role in talent identification process	Club's coaches
Playing a pivotal role in talents development	Football federation, Ministry of Sports and Youth, clubs, Ministry of Education

- Like many other sports, a talent identification scheme does not exist in the Iranian football structure; this shows the weakness of scouting and identifying talented football players programs in the country. Models and programs of talent identification specify the route for organizations and administrators at each and every level, and present the methods that in every stage of the talent identification processes, what organizations and which individuals should perform in. Such programs are now common practice in many countries. According to the theoretical background of this study, talent identification is not a fleeting matter; rather, it requires the investment of considerable time and energy. Therefore, for promoting the culture of talent identification and relying on its models and programs, knowledge and awareness should be placed at the disposal of individuals and society.
- In addition, in Iran, the talent identification process and developing football talents do not receive enough attention. This neglect was also observed in many clubs around the country. Due to the lack of a systematic program for identifying talented players and a scouting scheme in the Iranian football structure, it is obvious that authorities just glance at the talent identification matter in Iran. One of the reasons why clubs pay less attention to talent identification and development can be the tendency toward gaining quick results, and satisfying the managers and officials of the team. This superficiality could have consequences for the country's football structure.
- Furthermore, currently in Iran, performance testing and hosting competitions are the most common methods used to identify young football talent. These methods may be appropriate procedures for national and club teams for

selection among adult players, but at the basic club level, consisting of immature players, such methods fail to clearly and individually evaluate comprehensively, the features and skills of basic level football players at younger ages, as most of these players have not yet learned the skills of competitive football.

- In Iran, players are attracted to the clubs through paying a visit to the club, attending a recruitment call by the club, and being referred by school teachers and football academy trainers. The negative point of this finding is that, this issue shows the lack of a permanent and effective procedure for attracting and recruiting new players in clubs and football teams in the country. The positive side can be the cooperation of different sectors in order to attract new players to the clubs and football teams.
- The majority of clubs (96.7%) have a football academy, of which, 77.9% were working with talent in all age ranges of under-10, -11, -12, -13, and -14. This represents desirable conditions of the clubs in paying attention to training football skills by keeping football academies active. Apart from paying attention to the growth of football academies quantitatively and in numbers, clubs and officials should pay attention to the qualitative growth of these academies. Although the aim of the Football Federation at the basic level football (Grass Roots) is to comply with the International Football Federation (FIFA) and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), it is the maximum presence of the players on the football fields that it must be considered exclusively qualitative.
- At the moment in Iran, club coaches play the main role (90.2%) in the talent identification process. Those coaches, who have technical and academic knowledge in the field of talent identification at various levels, certainly, cannot play an identical role based on a scientific program in talent identification. Nevertheless, there are many individuals among the coaches whose scientific and practical ability can be noticeably valued and helpful.
- In addition, the results showed the national Football Federation, Ministry of Sports and Youth, clubs, as well as the Ministry of Education, respectively, play a role in the talent identification process, and that each of these entities paves separate paths in this process, which results in overall effectiveness.
- Due to all the identified issues, Iranian instructors of the AFC believe that establishing a talent identification program is necessary for Iranian football. In fact, if we want to follow the development and growth path in Iranian football faster and more systematically and with more favorable qualitative and quantitative results, we should conform to plans and practical schemes. Achieving this goal can yield positive results for the Football Federation, National Academy, and National Olympic Committee at the macro level, and for the provincial and each city's football bureau, and amateur and professional clubs at the micro level in the country. The lack of results

of the national basic level teams, as well as the absence from the Olympics for decades, indicates the necessity of developing a talent identification scheme for Iranian football. According to the results, 95.1% of Iranian instructors of the AFC acknowledged that they were fully familiar with the scientific and modern methods of talent identification. Based on this finding, it is clear that there are suitable grounds for scientific talent identification around the country and the knowledge and experience of these people can be used for scientific talent identification. Also, as these instructors are responsible for training the coaches at different levels in the country, the necessary training can be given to coaches who are getting started in their jobs, so that they will be able to use scientific and modern talent identification methods more and with greater awareness.

The ideal condition of the talent identification process in Iran from the point of view of Iranian Instructors of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) is presented in Table XIV.

TABLE XIV
IDEAL CONDITION OF TALENT IDENTIFICATION PROCESS IN IRAN FROM THE
POINT OF VIEW OF IRANIAN INSTRUCTORS OF THE ASIAN FOOTBALL
CONFEDERATION (AFC)

Examined process	Ideal conditions in Iranian football
Talent identification method in football	Scientific methods and the issue of basic level football (Grass Roots)
The players' attracting method	Being referred by school teachers and football academy trainers
The best age to begin talent identification process	Under 10-years of age
The best and most appropriate group for talent identification	Trained scout of the Football Federation
The organization which must play the main role in talent identification	Football Federation and Ministry of Education
The organization which must play the main role in talent development	Clubs

Investigating the ideal condition of the talent identification process in Iran from the point of view of Iranian Instructors of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) showed:

- Based on the point of view of Iranian Instructors of the AFC, scientific methods (50.8%) and Grass Roots method (49.2%) were the most appropriate methods for talent identification in football. However, this investigation of the current situation showed that in Iran performance testing and holding competitions were used more than other methods. Thus, in a comparison of the current situation and the ideal situation in Iran from the point of view of Iranian Instructors of the AFC, there was a huge difference among the methods employed. Whereas in many developed countries, including the countries surveyed in this study such as Germany, England, Australia, and the United States, mostly, scientific methods are employed to identify talented football players.
- Introduction by school teachers and football academy trainers was considered as the best method to attract football players to clubs in an ideal situation. The

investigation of the current situation of the methods used to attracting players to the clubs showed that going directly to the club, a player recruitment announcement, and being referred by school teachers and football academy trainers were the different ways of attracting players to the clubs. Therefore, by comparing the current and ideal situations of the methods of attracting players to the clubs, and due to the huge differences between the current and ideal situation relating to the talent identification process in Iranian football, the ways of attracting football players to clubs is closer to the ideal condition.

- In examining the best age to begin the process of talent identification in ideal conditions, under-10 year age group was considered as the best. In investigating the age ranges of football academies, it was found that in many clubs in Iran, currently, training football skills begins at the ages under 10. Therefore, the current and ideal situations are not so different. Although training football skills and the starting age for training can be different from the principled talent identification start age, if they exist, can generally be considered as the basis for scientific talent identification.
- As the best and most appropriate group for talent identification, in an ideal situation, trained scouts from the Football Federation were selected. Investigating the current conditions determined that football club coaches played the main role in the talent identification process. By comparing the current and ideal situations, it was noticed that there was a great difference between current and ideal situations of the best and most appropriate talent identification group. Football coaches with the appropriate technical and academic knowledge in the field of talent identification at various levels can have a positive impact on training and raising awareness within talent identification through participating in the courses conducted by the Football Federation for selected coaches.
- The ideal situation of talent identification showed that the Football Federation and Ministry of Education were the organizations which should play the main role in talent identification, and the clubs were the organizations which should play the main role in talent development. Investigating the current situation, it was found that football clubs played the main role in talent identification, while the Football Federation, Ministry of Sports and Youth, and the Ministry of Education were the organizations that also had a role to play role in nurturing young talent. By comparing the current and the ideal situations, it became clear that there was a great difference between the current and the ideal situations in regard to talent identification and development processes. The results of this study revealed fundamental issues associated not only the process and procedures associated with talent identification, but also with fully developing that talent once it has been identified. Based on these findings, managers of the Football Federation are

encouraged to look at ways to revise and develop the current situations to the ideal one.

REFERENCES

- [1] Imanzadeh, Reza (2007). Prioritization of the talent identification indices in taekwondo. Master's thesis, faculty of physical education and sports sciences, Islamic Azad University, Karaj branch.
- [2] Brown, J (2001) Sports talent, Human Kinetics chapter 4, 11.
- [3] Bompa, T (1999). Periodization: theory and methodology of training. Champaign: human kinetics.
- [4] Regnier, G., Salmela, J.H., Russell S.J. (1993). Talent detection and development in sport. Handbook of research on sports psychology. New York: Macmillan.
- [5] Reilly, T., Williams, A.m., Nevill A., Franks, A (2000). A multidisciplinary approach to talent identification in soccer. *Journal of sport science*, 18, 695- 702.
- [6] Gharakhanloo, Reza; Afzalpoor, Ismaeil (2007). Investigating the current situation and documenting scouting indices in the field of football. Research project, institute of physical education and sports sciences, Tehran.
- [7] Abbott, A. and Collins, D. (2002). A theoretical and empirical analysis of a state of the art' talent identification model. *High Ability Studies*, 13, 157-178.
- [8] Russell J.J. Martindale, Dave Collins and Jim Daubney. Talent Development: A Guide for Practice and Research with in Sport. *Quest* 2005, 57, 353-375.
- [9] Helsen W, F. The role of talent. Physical precocity and practice in the development of soccer expertise. *Journal sport science* 2000, 18:727 - 736.
- [10] Jarver, J. (1982). Do We Need Talent Identification. *Modern Athlete and Coach*, 20(1), Jan 1992, 7-8.
- [11] Tomson, R. W., & Beavis, N. (1985). Talent Identification in Sport. Report on behalf of Otago University and Community Sports Trust for Newzealand Sports Foundation Inc. and the Ministry of Recreation and Sport. Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago, Faculty of Physical Education.
- [12] Alijani, Eidi (2001). Investigating the current situation and documenting scouting indices in the field of track and field. *Research in sports sciences*, 4, 1-23.
- [13] Islamic Republic of Iran, Ministry of Youth and Sports. <http://msy.gov.ir/index.php?newlang=eng>.
- [14] Bloomfield, D. (1995). Talent identification and profiling science and medicine in sport. *Blackwell science*, 206-221.
- [15] Albert, P., Koning, R.H. (2008). Statistical thinking in sports. New York: Chapman & Hall/CRC, Taylor & Francis Group.
- [16] Halicioglu, F (2006). The impacts of football point systems on the competitive balance: evidence from some European football leagues. *Rivista di Diritto Economia Dello Sport*, 2(2), 67-76.
- [17] Doostdari Khosrokhani, Sajjad (2012). Documenting scouting indices of football and providing suggestions for nurturing talents from the point of view of the basic level's coaches of Tehran province. Master's thesis, faculty of physical education and sports sciences, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran branch.