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“An holistic evaluation of talent development within football”

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the development, problems, and overall evaluation of the talent development stage of Azerbaijani football. It covers the areas such as infrastructure, accessibility, mental and physical preparation of the athletes, the experience of the coaches, the environment around the football, traditions, and expertise of the clubs, and the other countries that are successful in talent development. The study focuses on mainly finding problems in Azerbaijani football and using primary and most secondary data to find the way to implement and battle the difficulties of developing elite-level football players that can be able to shine on the European football stage. The expertise of the clubs from countries such as Brazil, the Netherlands, and Spain will be used to gain the knowledge to understand the requirement to develop a great environment for talent development in order to raise elite-level football players.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction to the talent development

The future depends on the younger generation. As in all the other sports, talent development is as important as in football. With the high dedication from the governing bodies of football around the world and the government of Azerbaijan football became a priority land of focus in the likes of talent development. There is an order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on approval of the "State Program on development of football in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2005-2015" which one of its missions is "to develop a network of children and youth football schools, to establish specialized football boarding schools for children with special talents in football, and regional and national centers for the training of reserve football players". Details of the program will be on the appendix part of this document. While the work and projects are being done and continuing to be made, still Azerbaijan is having a hard time developing world-class talent both in men's and women's football. The results of the underage Azerbaijani national teams have not made much progress either. That is a concerning problem, considering that some countries, especially Iceland and Belgium achieve significant talent development results, while the other countries, for example, Netherlands and Brazil, etc. have always been a breeding ground for future football stars. This research aims to evaluate and compare the football talent development in Azerbaijan with the global approach, while trying to understand the role of football clubs' approach, governing bodies (Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan), and the young talents' and coaches' and community's perception. Not only that, but the research will also focus on identifying problems and finding solutions. This paper will have an overall approach and will include both men's and women's football and hopefully will help to understand the dynamics and roles of talent development in the development of Azerbaijani football. The main question to be explored will be: Is

Azerbaijani football on the right track to having the most optimized talent development results in the upcoming years? This question will be explored with the help of a holistic evaluation of talent development. The research will explore the environment, participating bodies' approach, and the players' perception of the unified goal – reaching the optimal results. UEFA, FIFA, and almost every footballing country have been focusing on talent development and grassroots football. While it has been a mission to develop the infrastructure and the environment for young footballers in the "State Program on development of football in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2005-2015" still no significant result has been noticed.

LITERATURE

2.1. Defining the youth football

While the exact definition can vary between the studies, this paper will look at the football governing bodies' approach to youth football through their competitions which are specifically made for young players.

When it comes to the UEFA, which is the governing body that AFFA is related to, the biggest event for youth football is the "UEFA Youth League". Through examination of the document which is published by the UEFA regarding the regulations named "Regulations of the UEFA Youth League," it is clear that the UEFA regulation for minimum player age for the 2022/2023 season this competition is 19 which is defined under article 35 as "players are eligible to play in the competition if they were born on or after 1 January 2004" (UEFA, 2022, p. 28). When it comes to Azerbaijan, the governing body AFFA has several youth competitions, the biggest one of them is the "AFFA Youth League", under the article 5 of the regulation of the competition for the 2021/2022 season it is shown that this competition is for the players who are born since 2004 (AFFA, n.d.-b). AFFA governed competition for the smallest age group in 2021 was for the boys under the age of 9 (AFFA, n.d.-a).

It is safe to say the minimum age requirement for youth leagues can vary with the decision of the regulatory body or the competition governing body. Youth football is a broad term that includes an environment for different age groups of footballers, generally under 18 or 19. But, still, the line is blurry because, commonly people can describe a professional player that is 23 as a young player since there are competitions across the world that have the U-23, U-21 rule, which limits the maximum age to a certain degree.

While the exact definition of youth football and talent development can be varied from governing bodies to the clubs this paper's definition of youth football will be the

environment around the players aged from 7 to under 21. So, hence youth football is the environment for the players from the age of 7 to under 21 to develop, play, and learn all the required skills to be professional footballers whether mental, physical skills, or game knowledge. In football, a youth system is a youth investment program within a team or league that develops young talent in youth teams with the goal of eventually using them in the first team if they show enough promise and potential, as well as filling squad numbers in some teams with limited resources.

2.2. Coaching and philosophy in youth football

There are many types of research in the area of talent development for elite sports in the literature. Further down the line, this paper will cover influencing factors, case studies, and stories of successful talent development in order to understand the reason behind talent development success in football.

Coaching and philosophy in youth football are one of the main influencing factors for the successful execution of elite talent development. The ideas behind the talent development and transferring deep knowledge about the football philosophy to the young players is crucial since it sets the tone in the mind of the young players and the approach from the club to the talent development. Certain clubs tend to have their ideas, beliefs, and their DNA, which is passed from generation to generation, from coaches to young, then young players come back to be a coach again at the youth levels, passing that philosophy again. One of the greatest approaches to the way of the game was the philosophy of the great dutch ex-player and coach named Johan Cruyff. In fact of the most successful coaches of today, Pep Guardiola once said *"I knew nothing about football before knowing Cruyff"* (Guardiola, 2017, as cited in Jongkind, 2019). Johan Cruyff, the inventor of "total football" changed the way of the philosophy of the game of the Dutch national team, AFC Ajax, and FC Barcelona. Cruyff's vision was the main reason for his successful run in the football

world. In his chapter in the “Routledge Handbook of Elite Sport Performance” Jongkind shares the idea about the team paradigm vs. player paradigm. The team paradigm focuses on the team results, rather than the player improvement. In his work, he states that “typical elite academy compositions show an overwhelming majority of players born in the first half of the year, often in a 70–30 or more ratio” (Jongkind, 2019, p. 68). While the club and coaches have the team paradigm the players, they usually bring to the academy are the relatively physical and strong ones, which gives a short-term boost instead of the player paradigm, which heavily focuses on the individual player development via different factors. Figure 8.2 from his work visualizes the difference between the team and player paradigms.

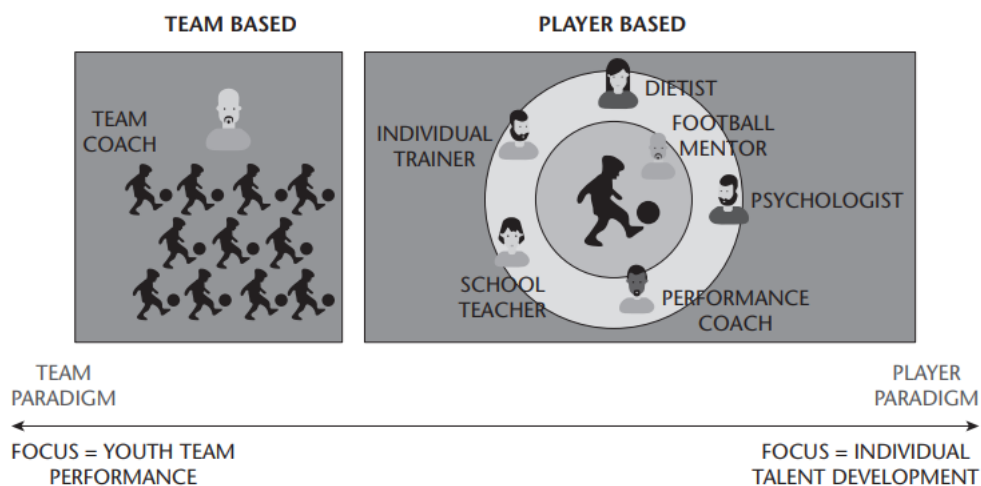


Figure 8.2 The team paradigm and the player paradigm

His conclusion after researching the philosophical factors in developing future players is that the most essential point is to have a clear goal, adhere to it, and gradually apply changes so that the organization can adjust to a new paradigm (Jongkind, 2019).

This idea is also backed up by different researchers. Philosophy is the foundation for young players, especially understanding philosophy is even more crucial for the players around age 7-11. The best practice clubs tend to have a player-centered attitude, in which everything is done with their needs in mind, not the coach's or the system's. One recurring

theme across the top practice clubs is that they aim to sustain a play philosophy that can be applied to all age groups, not just the very young (Nesti & Sulley, 2014)

Coaching is one of the crucial parts when it comes to the development of the young player. A coach of the young team lays the foundation for the upcoming years for the young talent. There are many examples of the ex-players of the club, working as underage team coaches in the countries like Italy, Spain, etc. That usually gives great results, because ex-players understand the values of the club, pass philosophy to the young, and it helps to bind the community stronger. This pattern can be seen in the clubs like AFC Ajax, FC Barcelona, and AC Milan. It's important to note that the youth coaching staffs at Ajax, Auxerre, and Bayern, for example, had a number of high-profile former players who worked with the younger teams. Some of these people have been there for a long time. Retired World Cup players and very famous ex-professionals were among the members of this group (Nesti & Sulley, 2014).

Despite the clubs' defined organisational structure, there is an obvious lack of communication between the first team and youth settings. Typically, the first team manager appears to act independently of the young player development process. However, it remained unclear at this point if such a stance was a result of the club's organisation and principles, or whether it was an intentional decision made by the first team manager himself (Relvas et al., 2010).

2.3. Club ownership and mission

In the football world, there are a lot of clubs that are also vastly different in the terms of their structure, goals, and mission. While this paper is about talent development further down the line, it will discuss and examine the club's identity and approach toward youth development. For example, clubs like FC Barcelona (Spain), AFC Ajax (Netherlands), Sporting Lisbon (Portugal), Manchester United (England), and Santos (Brazil) are

renowned for their success in youth-level development. There is even a documentary named “The Class of ‘92” which is about the six legendary Manchester United academy graduate players - David Beckham, Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes, Nicky Butt, Phil Neville, and Gary Neville. While Manchester United is not the shining star out of mentioned clubs when it comes to the developing elite stars for European football, this success can be tied to the mentality around the club. We see this most visibly at Manchester United, Ajax, and Barcelona, as well as many other great clubs in England and Europe, who have a distinct vision and philosophy that has been in place for many years and may be linked to their 'DNA' or identity (Nesti & Sulley, 2014).

While earlier we talked about the philosophy of youth level coaches and clubs, it is important to understand that approaches to the youth level can be different motives. For example, FC Barcelona is famous for using their academy players to build their first team, and use them in order to gain sporting success, while the clubs like Sporting Lisbon and Santos operate and develop young players in a way to gain financial outcomes. While small clubs like AFC Ajax have no chance of keeping their players in the competitive transfer market, the passion of the players to win club tournaments like the UEFA Champions League adds fuel to the fire and in the end, Ajax gains financial results, year after a year.

The general club organizational structure when it comes to Europe and youth development looks somewhat like this:



CHART 2.1

(Nesti & Sulley, 2014).

While this is an easy and simple to understand formula, English football governing bodies like English Football League (EFL) and Premier League (PL) are researching and coming up with new plans to help clubs, coaches, and players to be more successful than ever. EFL has their “Youth Development” handbook and Premier League published their Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) which intends to help clubs to develop their local talents. Clubs, however, can have different visions around these suggestions, while they still try to comply with the new rules and scientific discoveries to optimize.

The main importance of owning and running a professional football club is to keep the business going. When the club ownership changes hands or the club itself is not stable enough, the results can be disastrous. Talent development can be a way to not depend on the transfers to bring sporting success, or in another way, it can be a tool to gain financial benefit.

A result of the survey that participated by 96 clubs from 41 European countries shows that “50% of the clubs define as an objective for the youth academy, ‘to create economic added value’ and 60% of the clubs consider their youth academy as a source of income, rather than a cost” (European Club Association, 2012, p. 14). When it comes to the eligibility, and club licensing UEFA and as well as local governing bodies across Europe have strict rules for the youth development and clubs’ investment in youth development. Some clubs struggle with youth development due to financial reasons, on the other hand, some clubs use it as leverage, for example, Chelsea FC is famous for loaning out academy players. As backed by the study, some Premier League teams have developed a commercial strategy that almost completely funds their Academies. The loan system and the fees earned have led to this. Some clubs loan out over ten players each season for various fees, which can be a win-win-win situation for the player to gain first-team experience and build his profile, the club to gain an immediate return on investment, and the host club to

gain the services of a player they couldn't afford otherwise. Clubs that have a defined vision and philosophy that touches all parts of the club, including youth development, will perform better. Playing style, recruitment strategies, coaching methods, and finance systems are four of the most important components to be influenced by this (Nesti & Sulley, 2014).

2.4. Education

Young players are not only having football in their life, but they also have typical things like school and studies. Which is a crucial part of every person's journey throughout life. Having a successful development and having the best grades in school can become a bit demanding for a lot of young kids. It is having been a quite concerning topic since there is a danger for a person to only rely on professional sports to make a living. One career-ending injury can end it all. So, it is understandable why a footballer should not forget about their educational level.

The top clubs feature numerous full-time staff members dedicated to education and welfare. Many of these people have previously worked as teachers. They realize the value of assisting athletes in obtaining a well-rounded education and apply that understanding to their position. They understand the pressures placed on athletes to balance their educational commitments with their roles as players. We discovered that effective practice included paying close attention to the individual requirements of each youngster. A one-size-fits-all concept was strongly resisted in this area of supply. There was a concerted attempt to instill in all players an understanding of how education may assist them advance in their football careers and be a valuable asset for those who do not receive professional contracts (Nesti & Sulley, 2014).

There are a lot of examples that can be inspirational for the players to focus on their academic career. One case is the case of the Vincent Kompany, now manager of his

youth club Anderlecht and ex-football player. After studying for a part-time Global MBA at Alliance Manchester Business School, the Belgian received a distinction score of 72 on his dissertation, passing with merit. And he accomplished it all while playing professional football, must mention he was injured for some time (Jones, n.d.). While this one is a shining example, there is a lesson to take since one of the latest major careers threatening incidents came from Christian Eriksen while he was playing for Denmark in EURO 2020. Another incident was that the prolific striker of the FC Barcelona, Agüero had a chest pain during the match versus Alaves and had to be taken to hospital, after that he has been diagnosed with cardiac arrhythmia, and with the advice of the doctors, he decided to retire from playing football. Although these two players were not young, still it can be shown to the young players and clubs to help them understand that they should embrace the idea of having a 'plan B' for the worst-case scenario.

Being able to manage young players' educational and welfare requirements is an important aspect of professional football teams' holistic development of players. For example, one education and welfare officer at a very successful club stated that he would be unable to explain his position ethically unless he was dedicated to the larger purpose of training players to be self-directed and responsible adults. A lot of great clubs have a comprehensive and sensitive awareness of education and welfare. In clubs like Middlesbrough, Barcelona, Bolton, and Ajax, all staff members are committed to player education, no matter whether it took place in the classroom, on the training ground, or elsewhere (Nesti & Sulley, 2014).

2.5. Physical and mental health

What fans, coaches, and scouts generally look for in the player is their talent and the way they play on the pitch. This way is neglecting the mind, aura, and the tension in the locker room and their mental health. With physical ability, players can achieve great

outcomes, while if there are hard times going on inside the mind of a player, it will be difficult to fully focus on the game and, the abilities that will make him succeed. Considering the fact that young players are kids and teenagers, they can also be a victim of bullying and anxieties. Those are the times the players will need a strong guide, motivation, and support from others. Because of the popularity of the game, football players are frequently under a lot of strain, and the book does not shy away from tackling key concerns such as mental health difficulties, which the European Federation of Sport Psychology (FEPSAC) has also attempted to shine more light on with its newly issued position statement, or the obstacles of transitioning from junior to senior level (Konter et al., 2019). We can see this occurring at the top levels of professional football, particularly with the expansion of match analysis, player analytics, and physiological data. It is only to be hoped that clubs recognize that much of the most potent psychological material cannot be accessible in the same way that it can in other scientific areas. Sport psychology, thankfully, is not alone in this (Nesti & Sulley, 2014).

2.6. Facilities

When it comes to youth football environment and infrastructure has a crucial point for the young players. We see this trend of mostly in Europe.

In terms of youth development facilities, the vast majority of the finest clubs have joint campuses where first team and junior players, as well as their support personnel, are housed. This was a conscious choice made by some, and it is congruent with the club's goal. For others, sharing the same place has developed rather than being the outcome of a well-planned strategy. Regardless of how the facilities are structured, the top clubs recognize the numerous advantages of having children and senior players in the same location. Staff, for example, were quick to point out that the benefits are reciprocal. Young players learn firsthand what it takes to be a professional player, and first team players are

reminded of their crucial roles as role models and mentors to talented youngsters, some of whom will represent the club's future. Furthermore, clubs were conscious that being on one location allowed for better exchange of staff knowledge between youth and first team personnel, which aided in maintaining open and positive communication amongst each group. Club networks are an essential component of athlete development plans. According to the statistics, the large number of young athletes begin their athletic careers in schools but eventually graduate to clubs. As a result, these clubs should have the resources and facilities to produce high-level athletes, or they should be ready to refer outstanding athletes to other clubs if they are unable to provide the necessary training, level of competition, or breadth of experience. The club atmosphere is believed to be critical to the growth of young athletes, providing them with a "home" or "hub" as well as a community of friends (Nesti & Sulley, 2014).

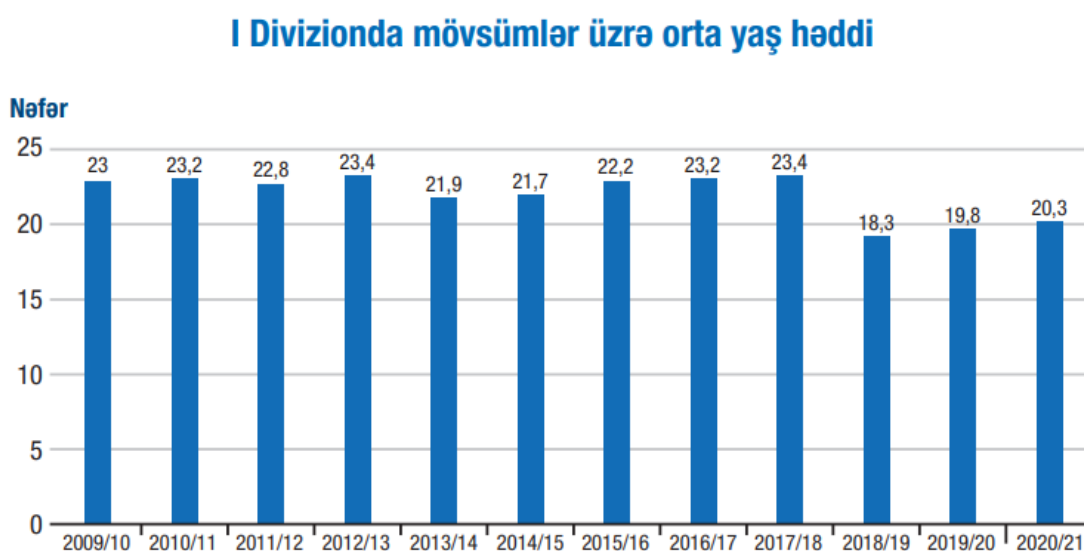
SITUATION IN AZERBAIJANI YOUTH FOOTBALL

3.1. General observation

In this part, the research will demonstrate, news articles, tables, and the overall situation in the recent years of Azerbaijani youth football.

When it comes to Azerbaijani talent being used in pro-level football, one great example can be young players being tested and improved by the secondary teams in the second professional football tournament in Azerbaijan called the “First Division”. Generally, the two top teams in the “First Division” league table, have a chance to play in the “Premier League”. So the top league is the “Premier League” followed by, the “First Division”. In the “First Division” we can see this great example of talent being used in the table below:

[Translation – Average age of the players from the “First Division” teams, by seasons]



(Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan, 2021).

The fact that young talents are being used is no coincidence when we take a look at the teams that play in the “First Division” on this table by AFFA (Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan, 2021):

[Translation - №, Clubs, U-23 players, Year of Birth, Older than 23 years old, Year of Birth, Points of the team.

Note: Some players are excluded due to the fact of matchfixing during the season]

I Divizion

No	Klublar	23 yaşadək	Təvəllüdü	23 yaşdan yuxarı	Təvəllüdü	Xal
1	Neftçi-2	28	1998-2003	2	1997	64
2	Zaqatala	15	1998-2004	6	1985-1996	56
3	Turan Tovuz	16	1998-2004	5	1992-1996	51
4	Sabah-2	23	2000-2003	1	1997	45
5	Qarabağ-2	27	1998-2004	-	-	37
6	Keşlə-2	30	1998-2004	3	1994-1997	31
7	Kəpəz PFK	16	1998-2005	5	1988-1997	28
8	Qaradağ Lökbatan	14	1998-2002	12	1988-1997	26
9	Sumqayıt-2	20	1998-2003	2	1994-1997	22
10	MOİK	18	1998-2002	7	1992-1997	20
	Ümumi	207		43		

Qeyd: mövsümün ortasında danışılmış oyunlarla bağlı futboldan uzaqlaşdırılan oyunçular hesabatdan çıxarılıb

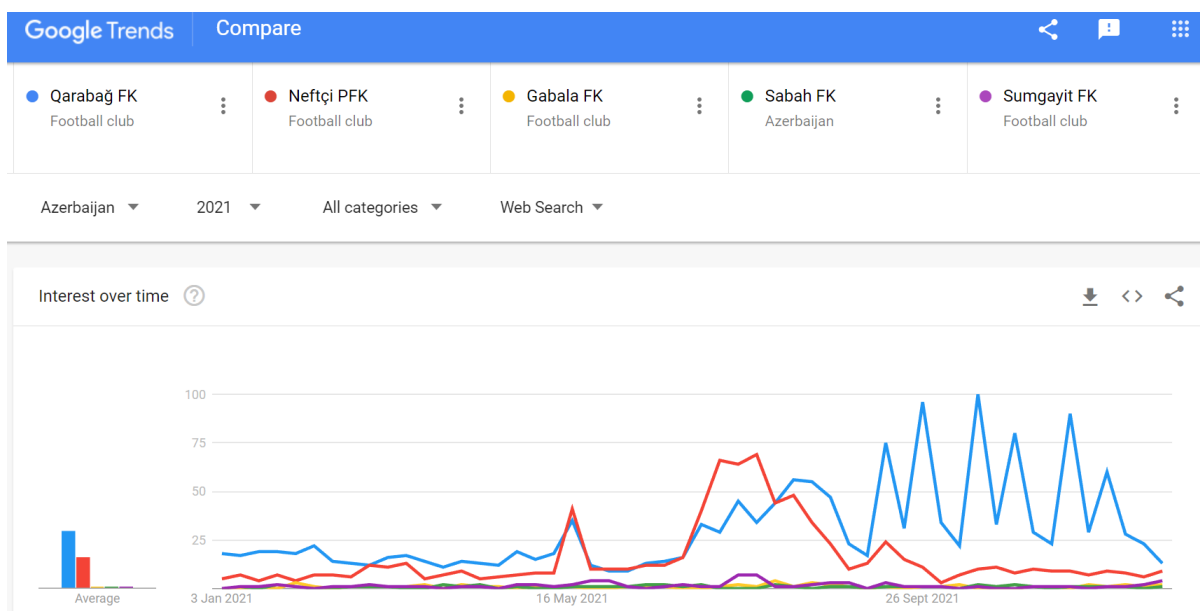
The half of the teams on the league is the second teams of the “Premier League” teams, which in a way helps to develop and, in the future, improve the talents to play on top level, gain new experience to one day become a first team player.

The recent overview of “Premier League” according to the transfermarkt.com looks like this. There are certain trends we can see from this dataset:

CLUBS - PREMIER LIQA 22/23					
club	Squad ↑	ø age ↓	Foreigners ↓	ø market value ↓	Total market value ↓
 Qarabağ FK 🏆 🏆	27	26.0	11	€522Th.	€14.10m
 Neftchi Baku	25	26.2	12	€394Th.	€9.85m
 Sabah FK	29	24.7	11	€286Th.	€8.30m
 Zira FC	24	25.8	6	€300Th.	€7.20m
 FK Qabala	26	24.3	9	€221Th.	€5.75m
 FK Sabail	25	24.8	6	€190Th.	€4.75m
 Sumgayit PFC	22	25.7	6	€190Th.	€4.18m
 Turan-Tovuz IK	31	24.3	4	€79Th.	€2.45m
 Kapaz PFK	29	24.1	5	€47Th.	€1.35m
 FC Shamakhi	14	26.0	4	€82Th.	€1.15m
	251	25.6 Years	73	€235Th.	€58.92m

Alongside FC Sabail, FC Qabala still looks like the main producer of the young talent within the “Premier League”, with both of their main squad average is less than 25 and there are less than 10 foreign players. This is understandable, because unlike the clubs like Qarabag FC and Neftchi Baku, they are not the most dominant contenders for league title and UEFA competitions. One of the biggest projects and hope is also Sabah FC because, since the day club was established, the management was a hope for the young players due to their facilities and their approach to the youth teams and development.

Here is a comparison of web-searches, interest over time for the biggest market value squads and Gabala FC.



(image is from trends.google.com)

As shown by the graph, two biggest clubs have been the main trend on the internet, which is partly due to their fanbase and rivalry and performance throughout the years. This can be a crucial point to understand that the clubs who has good sporting performance are getting popular and via the tournament prizes they can improve their squads, not focusing solely on the youth. However, a club like Gabala FC continues to improve and battle the obstacles with youth development.

In his case study journalist Dashgin Aziz answers this question; “apart from the elite teams, which clubs have an academy?” on his report:

In this sense, we should mention “Turan Tovuz”, which plays in the First Division. Well-known Azerbaijani coach Adil Shukurov has been appointed head of the academy, which was funded by FIFA, UEFA and AFFA. “Turan Tovuz” carries out practical work in terms of discovering talented football players in the regions and attracting them to the academy.

In addition, there have been football schools of foreign clubs operating in Azerbaijan, and there are still those that continue to operate. In this sense, the first thing that comes to

mind is "Manchester United Football School". In 2014, the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan (AFFA) and the English club Manchester United opened a permanent "Manchester United Football School" in Baku as part of a new partnership with "Bakcell". This event fell on the sports agenda of Azerbaijan as a "bomb". Broadcasts, websites - in short, this school was talked about everywhere, PR was carried out. Every summer, children with good results at the academy are sent to Manchester, England, where they visit the base of the club "Manchester United" and have the opportunity to watch the team's games from the stadium. The costs were covered by the telecommunication company Bakcell.

This project lasted 4 years. Thus, the agreement on the operation of the Manchester United Football School in Baku, established in 2018 for the development of children's football, in cooperation with the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan, Bakcell, and the English club Manchester United basically over. (Aziz, 2021)

Manchester United's case has been referenced in the interview with Zeynaddin Abdurakhmanov on the "Appendix" part of this research.

In his interview with İlkin Sultanlı for the "Futbol+" newspaper, Sabuhi Safiyarlı, who is an expert in this field and has experience working in "Gabala Football Academy" says that:

Based on my experience, and what I have read and learned, I can say that we must reform our children's leagues. We must study the experience of European countries in this area. For children's teams, a distance of 50 kilometers is the highest limit, and children cannot be taken to play at a distance from it. It was a waste of both time and energy. When a child is taken from Baku to Zagatala for a tournament, two days are lost. That child may not be a footballer in the future. We must not lose him as a person, as an individual. With the current schedules, children are far from classes and schools. He loses his day on the way to training and games. And then when that child can't be a footballer, he can't benefit society. Who turns it into a useless frame? When we held the tournament in Gabala,

Anderlecht brought teachers with it. After the rehearsals, these teachers conducted school lessons for the children. This method is used in many places, and those who do not know the lesson are not allowed to participate in football training. After adjusting his grades at school, he is released to practice. Great intelligence is important for a footballer. This is the main shortcoming of our footballers. They should not only play football with their feet, but they should also have intelligence. To some extent, education was also a major source of strength for the player. There is an example of the "Golden Army" in Turkey, which created a simple businessman and did great things. It was necessary to study such examples. For children under a certain age, the score is not important, because they should have more fun. In some places, when the score difference reaches two goals, an additional player is released. The child football player who lost with a score of 0:10 is broken. We must take all this into account. We must have a formal decision; we must choose a certain path. Only then can we work systematically and achieve results. (Safiyarlı, 2021)

Youth team coach Samir Abdurahmanov when asked “what are the current problems in children's football?” answered:

There is a lack of the main field. The children used to play at the old “Neftchi” base. In that area, there were a lot of risks to children in general. It is reported that the heads of AFFA's children's football department must systematically change the grass cover of the “Neftchi” base. This process must be resolved before the new season. If the right system is established, it will help to raise children at a professional level. Our main goal is to bring up these children properly and hand them over to big clubs and the national team and see the results. I hope that the problems in children's football will be solved soon. Interest in children's football league is growing. This is due to the fact that children have enthusiasm. (Abdurahmanov, 2020)

Here is a small part from the interview of Shahin Diniyev who is AFFA's Coaches Committee member to “oxu.az” newspaper:

Children's football in Azerbaijan is really in a deplorable state. I said this in 2018 as well. At that time, we went to the Czech Republic for the U-19 national team's games. We could only beat San Marino. But we lost to Norway. There, a journalist asked how we managed to beat only San Marino. I told him that it would be difficult for us to beat San Marino in a few years. It wasn't long before our national team lost to Liechtenstein. Such things stem from the problems in children's football, the lack of players. At the root of it is the poor performance of club football academies. No funding is allocated to lower age groups. Our clubs have established lower age groups because this is a UEFA requirement for a license. Each club has teams in the 6-7 lower age group. Believe me, if UEFA removes these conditions, our clubs will cancel most of those teams. These teams have to continue their activities just to get a license and play in Europe. Let me give an example of the situation a few years ago. By the order of President Ilham Aliyev, a 10-year State Program for the Development of Football was adopted. A lot of money was allocated. How much money was spent on children's football? Again, large sums were allocated, and players were taken. At that time, only 2 good steps were taken. One of them was the establishment of the Baku Football Academy, and the other was the establishment of the Gabala Football Academy, one of which no longer exists.

Speaking of "Gabala"'s school, I can say that the academy can give results only at a rate of 10-15 percent. For example, if there were 700 players in the academy, only 30-40 players continued to play. That is, the academy is not working at full capacity. Good players must grow up in the academies of our clubs. To do this, they must pay attention to children's nutrition, rest, education, and training twice a day. When such factors are properly implemented, a quality player grows. I completely agree with Rashad Sadigov's views. The crisis in Azerbaijani football has already begun. Our best club is Karabakh. So, which player of the team plays in the squad? True, they are slowly developing players. But not enough. It seems that our club pays full attention to children's football. Even if there is

a legionary limit, the local player is transferred from another team. It's not right to throw everything on the coaches.

There must be conditions to train a quality player. We always discuss this in the AFFA Coaching Committee. Earlier, 83 teams took part in the U-14 championship of Azerbaijan. Because AFFA covered the travel expenses of those teams so that they could come and go to the games. But after this assistance was eliminated, when those teams switched to U-15, 70 teams suddenly disappeared. A total of 13 teams competed. So, on average, about 1400-1500 players disappeared. The problems are too big. Serious discussions are needed on this issue. There is very little attention to children's football. Why don't we train players? Why don't our clubs get players from their lower age groups for the main staff? Each of our clubs allocates funds to the main team. But teams of lower age groups are left out of the spotlight. (Diniyev, 2022)

One of the main problems that is around the facilities for youth players in Azerbaijan is that a lot of stadium and ground are artificial grass. Which experts argue that makes it injury prone for the players to play on. The debate between artificial grass and real grass is always a trend when the talk is around youth football. There is a lot of pros and cons of artificial grass. One study found that there is no correlation between injuries and third-generation artificial grass, but a lot of severe injuries come from artificial when compared to the natural grass:

Table 2 Exposure and injuries on different surfaces for the 10 teams playing at facilities with third-generation artificial surfaces

	Artificial turf	Grass	Other surface
Exposure (hours)	58512	24362	7317
Training	51266	18355	7246
Match play	7246	6007	71
Injuries (number)	483	274	18
Training	301	100	12
Match play	182	174	6

Although there was no difference in the incidence of serious injuries between surfaces, there was a tendency for less severe injuries to occur on the grass in training (Ekstrand et al., 2006).

When it comes to the great improvements and steps in order to improve youth football in regions AFFA has built a new academy in Tovuz in January 2021, with the help of UEFA and FIFA, called "Turan Tovuz" Football Academy. Which was a piece of great news, but still had some backlashes when introduced to the public, because of the artificial grass.

The opening event was attended by AFFA President Rovnag Abdullayev, Head of Tovuz District Executive Power Mammad Mammadov, Executive Vice President of AFFA Elkhan Mammadov, President of the Western Regional Football Federation Nadir Nabiyev and Chairman of "Turan Tovuz" Club Board Ogtay Abdullayev. FIFA and UEFA have allocated AZN 3.5 million and AFFA AZN 800,000 (FIFA and UEFA 81%, AFFA 19%) for the construction of the academy. 19 companies participated in the construction process through announced tenders. The funds were spent on administrative buildings built on the territory of the academy, as well as four football pitches and other works.

It should be mentioned that at the meeting of the AFFA Executive Committee held on March 4, 2019, a decision was made to establish and build a Football Academy under the "Turan Tovuz" club in Tovuz region. (Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan, n.d.)

Below there are some pictures from Turan Tovuz Football Academy (images and screenshots are courtesy of AFFA):





STADIUM

- 4 changing rooms
- Press conference room
- Media study
- Medical room
- Doping control room
- Delegate room
- Referee room
- 2 Sky-Box
- Technical rooms

(all rooms are equipped with the necessary appropriate equipment)

TECHNICAL

- Substation
- Boiler house
- Pumping
- Water reservoirs
- Central ventilation



ACADEMY

- Academy rooms: 11 rooms - for 70 people
 - Rooms for the main team: 16 rooms - for 30 people
 - 2 restaurants, 2 kitchens
 - Fitness, sauna, changing room
 - Doctor's room
 - Meeting room
 - Office room for 11 people
 - Laundry
 - Technical and service rooms
 - 4 mini pitches (1 indoor)
- (all rooms are equipped with the necessary appropriate equipment)

Here is a snippet of from interview that conducted by Ilkin Sultanli from "Futbol+" with Adil Shukurov, coordinator of Turan Tovuz" Football Academy:

- How will the educational problem of children who will learn the secrets of football in the academy be solved? Will they continue their education?

- As you know, it is important for children at this age to continue their education. The structure of the academy was such that those who are involved in football there continue to secondary education. As a club, we have taken all these into account. We have established a relationship with one of the secondary schools located nearby, and we have started the documentation work. Children who stand out in the selections and are admitted to the academy will study in that school. In addition, we will conduct additional training and courses so that the children we attract to the club academy become literate in the future. This was very important. Because the years of hard work should not go in vain. In order not to lose talented football players, we must organize our activities correctly and be careful with them. We insist on this.

- You have been in this business for a while now. What do you see as the main problem of children's football?






















- As we have mentioned many times, the main reason is that our clubs do not treat children's football seriously, they did not provide enough time for the coaches to develop their talents. Almost all clubs play to win results and prizes. This, in turn, causes coaches to prefer experienced players instead of young players. As a result, young football players cannot develop, they leave this field without confirming themselves. In my opinion, as the number of children's academies increases, problems will decrease as this field is systematically approached. (Shukurov, 2021)

3.2. The case of the FC Baku and demolition of the stadiums

FC Baku is a Baku-based Azerbaijani football team that has been an amateur club since 2016. Baku had previously spent 18 seasons inside the Azerbaijan Premier League, winning the title twice and the National Cup three times. In 2018, the club terminated operations (wikipedia.com, 2022).

In the recent years, Azerbaijani footballer Mahir Emreli who was born in 1997 and is a product of FC Baku academy has been a real hope for the other Azerbaijani players and for the youth as he managed to play for Qarabag FC (Azerbaijan), Legia Warszawa (Poland), and currently (2022) plays for Dinamo Zagreb (Croatia). His main position is the center-forward. All the clubs that he has been playing for are highly performing clubs at domestic tournaments (top tier leagues and domestic cups) and the UEFA tournaments as well. In fact, he is the top valued Azerbaijani football player in the recent years according to the transfermarkt.com which is a German-based website that specialized in football analytics and transfer market analyses all around the world.

Here are the top 5 Azerbaijani players ranked by their market value (highest to lowest) from transfermarkt.com:

#	player	Date of birth / Age ↑	Nat.	club	Place of birth	Height ↓	National player	International matches ↑	Market value ↓
11	 Mahir Emreli Centre-Forward	Jul 1, 1997 (25)			Baku	1,87	 Azerbaijan Current national team player	36	£1.35m
8	 Emin Mahmudov  Central Midfield	Apr 27, 1992 (30)			Krasnoselskoe, Saatly Region	1,76	 Azerbaijan Current national team player	31	£1.08m
2	 Qara Qarayev Defensive Midfield	Oct 12, 1992 (29)			Füzuli	1,69	 Azerbaijan Current national team player	76	£810Th.
27	 Toral Bayramov Left-Back	Feb 23, 2001 (21)			Baku	1,85	 Azerbaijan Current national team player	10	£585Th.
30	 Abbas Hüseynov Right-Back	Jun 13, 1995 (27)			Ganja	1,79	 Azerbaijan Current national team player	22	£495Th.

Note: The data is gathered by advanced search motor within the website and two options has been used: 1. Player must be Azerbaijani citizen. 2. Player must be an active player.

Here is a insight from interview which has been made in 2016. The vice-president of the FC Baku, Yashar Seyidov for "Qol.az" news agency:

Question: What will happen after that?

Answer: The team will continue its performances. I will talk to club president Hafiz Mammadov about these issues. A decision must be made. Both the club and AFFA management should come together and find a way out of the situation. Issues related to the club's future should be resolved. It won't happen. Today, football in Azerbaijan is fighting for survival. There are up to 300 children in our football academy. We have given 45 players to the national teams. But no one cares about this club. There is no institution left to which I have not applied. Although I appealed to the Milli Majlis, deputies, AFFA president, Ministry of Youth and Sports and other institutions, it did not help. I have already decided to apply to international institutions. I have prepared all the documents. I will hold a press conference on this in the near future. We have no other way. It is about the fate of 300 children. If the academy closes, those 300 kids will drop out and pick up bad habits. I

will also apply to UEFA and FIFA. I will inform you that there is no support for a club that gives 45 players to national teams.

Question: Do you think those institutions will be interested in the fate of "Baku"?

Answer: Maybe they care about children's football. Nobody is interested in children's football in Azerbaijan. I think that maybe other countries have humanism that we don't have? Maybe they will be honest about the fate of 300 children, unlike us? If they do not react, we will have to accept the closure of our academy. This is not only Yashar Seyidov's problem. After all, the academy of "Baku" gives Azerbaijan so many players. Last year, our team was the national champion in three age groups. As if no one sees the sinking of a club of this size. Since I have no other way out, I have decided to apply to international organizations. (Aghamammadov, 2016)

The club unfortunately is not operating right now, and their stadium has been destroyed:

The construction of the former base of "Baku" FK, located in Binagadi district, Bilajari settlement, has been stopped.

Sportfm.az reports that the reason for this is that the president of the club, Hafiz Mammadov, is suing.

He demands that the company that owns the territory of the base be reimbursed for the expenses he incurred here at the time. The request of the former businessman is the return of 25 million manats.

H. Mammadov is trying to prove that the destruction of the football complex he built on the land belonging to the former "Delfin" LLC by the company that bought it is illegal.

Because "Delfin" LLC took possession of that area 3 years ago based on the decision of Baku Administrative-Economic Court No. 1 and decided to demolish the stadium.

The State Urban Planning and Architecture Committee allowed the demolition of only the former "Delfin" hotel, the former Golf Federation and the famous "Kahreba" restaurant.

This process has already been completed. Along with it, the former training base was completely demolished, thus changing the profile of the capital's biggest football infrastructure. (sportfm.az, 2021)

This kind of fate of the clubs are not a surprising factor in Azerbaijani football, and in the recent years news about the demolition of the stadiums and training-bases have been a recurring trend in all over Azerbaijan.

METHODOLOGY

4.1. Methodology

For this research analysis news, secondary literature, and interview have been used. Although the resources around young talent development in Azerbaijani football were scarce. When analyzing news, the most used topic was talent development in Azerbaijan. Apart from that, reports, and secondary literature including interviews of experts and papers by professionals were analyzed. Also, two individual interviews have been done to cover different aspects and ideas. Introduction to the interviewees and questions is in the “Appendix” part of this paper.

Firstly, primary data was collected via the interviews with the experts and it has been analyzed by the patterns and the ideas.

Secondary data from interviews, as well as other publicly available sources has been used to gather information and evaluate the overall status of the youth football in Azerbaijan.

RESULTS

5.1. Results

Football in Azerbaijan is not much developed when it comes to getting results and raising the future generations to achieve significant improvement on European and global arena. One of the things that has also negatively influenced the development of young talent was COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in youth leagues to be suspended. The governing body of the leagues AFFA had to comply with government rules. Because of the pandemic the 2019/2020 season was halted by the AFFA. However, the leagues planned to start earlier, the start date was 2021. Here is a quotation from the announcement AFFA has published:

The organization of children's leagues, which have not been held for almost two years due to the pandemic of the coronavirus (COVID-19), has been resumed. Last week, 4,032 players competed in various age groups organized by AFFA. Thus, a total of 144 matches were played last week in the U-10, U-11, U-12, U-13, U-14, U-15, U-16, U-17, and Youth leagues organized by AFFA. (AFFA, 2021)

Although it took a toll on the improvement of the players, this is not entirely dependent on AFFA. A big share and influence when it comes to the development of new talent is the responsibility of the clubs. AFFA as a governing body should ensure that with the regulations there is a balanced and right environment for the development of the youth talent. In Azerbaijani clubs, the development of youth talent is not improved that much. As backed up by the interviewee Zeynaddin Abdurakhmanov, there was only one big instance when it comes to youth development, and it was the academy of the Gabala Sports Club. Unfortunately, as time went by, Gabala had financial struggles and is not on the glorious times recently, while their underage teams are performing well, no big talent has been

developed lately. The goals of the "State Program on development of football in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2005-2015" was not accomplished as the research shows.

DISCUSSION

6.1. Discussion

When it comes to the results of the Azerbaijani National Team, and the youth teams, there is no doubt that something is not working for them. The research around the problems of the current situation of Azerbaijani football is almost nonexistent. There should be more emphasis on the development of youth talent. Because, the future of football is dependent on the young talents, which will be the byproduct of the clubs and the attention to the youth development. The results of the research are that Azerbaijan when it comes to youth development is not as much improved and not on the level to compete with the European way of talent development. Youth development should be understood deeply and improved upon to develop and align Azerbaijani football with the elite level of European and global football in the future.

6.2 Limitations

The main limitation of this research was around the location. While research has been done in England, the research could not include real-life observations, real-time questionnaires with players, etc. Getting one-on-one interviews was also difficult due to the same reason. Research initially planned to have observations to the infrastructure and matches between youth teams, but for the aforementioned reasons it could not be possible.

CONCLUSION

7.1. Conclusion

The research question was: “Is Azerbaijani football on the right track to having the most optimized talent development results in the upcoming years?”. Based on the secondary resources and qualitative analyses, it can be concluded that the short answer for that is, negative. With recent attention and environment around youth development, Azerbaijan is not on the right track to achieving optimized talent development in order to improve future elite-level performance.

Past research around the topic of youth development in Azerbaijani football was scarce, almost non-existent. This research itself had limitations; future research is highly needed to improve the scientific resources around the youth development in football in Azerbaijan.

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APPENDIX

8.1. Interview with Zeynaddin Abdurakhmanov (written answers):

Zeynaddin Abdurakhmanov is the player of Sabail Football Club, which has also been a part of the Manchester United camp.

Question 1 – What was the hard part about being an underage football player?

Answer: In fact, the first steps in a football career, as in other fields of work, are somewhat difficult at first. I have left my home since I was 11 years old. Both in my career and my life, my first long trip was to Manchester, England. Just as there were good times, I also felt my first difficulties in England. The main thing was to miss my parents, family, and loved ones. I even cried in the first days, and then I was a little relieved after contacting them. I was so bored that I did not intend to return to a big club like Manchester for the second time after returning to my homeland. Then I was transferred to the most famous football academy in Azerbaijan - Gabala. Then I encountered the same difficulty. Then, as time went on, everything went well.

Question 2 – What was different for you when you were in a Manchester United camp?

Answer: In fact, when I went to England, I was a young, inexperienced footballer. For the first time, I saw a big academy, coaches, staff, balls, uniforms, everything there. I think I was lucky to be there. The players there did not have enough experience like me, because they were my peers. I got the main experience from coaches, in their sentences, in their training. Therefore, I can say that the biggest experience I saw in my career was at Manchester United, then in Azerbaijan. We trained 3 times a day in England. They paid attention to every detail. They were very professional in their approach to nutrition, sleep,

and rest. I really felt a big difference compared to Azerbaijan. I hope that we will also make great changes, develop, and move towards great success.

Question 3 – What kind of mental challenges did you face while you were an underage footballer?

Answer: Yes, I can't say that I haven't faced enough moral hardships, we have all faced them. As you pointed out, yes, psychological assistance is provided at a high level abroad. In Azerbaijan, it is only on the national team. Personally, my main psychological problem was my quick temper. I remember one time, I listened to someone and believed it when he said "you won't make it". I was feeling down after that time. There have been many days when I thought negatively. But I tried to fight against it. I read a lot of psychological books, I was motivated, books from successful people were my main help, and I really felt a positive change in both my life and my career. And most importantly, I learned from successful people that every failure is part of the path to great success.

Question 4 – Was it hard to transition to the first team?

Answer: To be honest, difficulties are always everywhere. But I had a very difficult two months during the transition to the main team. Because I was really making a lot of mistakes. Both the excitement and the many surprises in training and games, as well as a more professional approach to everything in general, created certain difficulties for me. It took some time to get used to it, and I got used to it over time. I felt comfortable.

Question 5 – What kind of problems do you think there are for young aspiring players?

Answer: At the moment, I think the main problem of talented players is bad habits and psychological weakness. Such a problem is generally visible everywhere. I think a lot depends on the player himself. Whether or not he goes the wrong way. Because if you are

really a professional, if you are serious about your work, if you want to succeed and think about your future life, you should not even have time to think about that path. The main role here is discipline. A disciplined person will succeed not only in football but also in life outside of football. Because discipline is the decision to do things you don't really want to do in order to achieve what you really want to achieve.

Question 6 – What would you want to be changed in the way of talent development in football?

Answer: The situation of football in Azerbaijan is clear. Some steps are being taken for development, but I think we need more, we need to increase. For the development of football, in my opinion, every club should have its own professional academy, as well as abroad. Because the footballer grows up at a very young age and in the future, he will do what he took from the specialists at a young age. There must be a good environment for him. Yes, there are some academies in Azerbaijan. I have been in the highest-level academy for 4 years and 6 months. But what is heartbreaking is that not every academy is able to continue, there is only a handful, and after some time, they collapse due to financial problems. Therefore, more serious decisions must be made regarding youth football. There is that one rule I personally like in the Azerbaijani Premier League, at least one player under the age of 21 must participate in the squad and be on the bench as a limit. Young players are preferred and there are great chances for the future for young players. But unfortunately, this limit is removed for the 2022-2023 season. I hope that many football academies will be established in my country and our talented footballers will grow up to be future professionals in the European arena.

8.2. Interview with Mr. Kenan Hakimov (recording):

Kenan Hakimov is the Director of the Sports Department of Public Television. He has a bright background in sports media and is the host of the “Plenty of sports” (Bol idman in Azerbaijani) analytical sports show.

Note: He had been introduced to all questions first, then shared his expertise and opinion around the questions.

Question 1. What kind of problems do you think local clubs have around talent development?

Question 2. How do the infrastructure and regional football development influence talent development in Azerbaijan?

Question 3. What is the difference between Azerbaijan and other countries when it comes to talent development?

Question 4. How do the rules from AFFA and PFL influence young talent's transition to a pro-footballer?

Question 5. What kind of inequalities do you think we have in talent development?

Question 6. What problems do you think there are and how we can battle that?

Answer: Of course, there are many problems. There are complex problems. And one of the most obvious problems in training a footballer is that they must train on natural grass. From childhood, he should play football on natural grass, artificial grass, not synthetic. No matter how high they meet the standards, they cannot replace the natural grass, in my opinion. And this is one of the main problems we have. This is because children are more likely to be damaged by artificial turf, and certain diseases of the feet have already appeared since then. This is one of the main problems. We compare with Europe, in

Europe, children from the age of 5 train on natural grass. As well as in Turkey itself or in other countries. And this is one of the main problems. Unfortunately, some of our clubs, the vast majority, train on artificial turf, children's teams, and lower age groups. As far as I know, tomorrow's team will train some age groups on natural grass fields around the Baku Olympic Stadium. Of course, this is obvious, because training on natural grass and maintaining natural grass is more expensive. Therefore, we use artificial turf. The second issue is related to coaches. In my opinion, our children's coaches should be more enthusiastic, more enthusiastic about this work, because our clubs are very focused on the result. And they do not pay much attention to the results of children's clubs. However, you can raise a good child and then transfer him to other clubs at a good price, you can earn money. For example, the Gabala team has been taking children's football seriously for many years, controlling everything from their diet. And in the end, we see that the result of the Gabala team is that they have a member of the Gabala team in all national teams today. This also had a positive effect. I don't know if there is a connection between regional football and regional infrastructure, but it would be good if there were boarding schools in the regions. Boarding sports, football schools. That is, the children would not break when they were educated. There, both their education and nutrition, everything would be there. And children with special abilities were taken there and trained as footballers. Such a thing can be done. And at the same time, of course, there must be a lot of tournaments. They should go to tournaments more often. For example, you say what is the difference with Europe, in Europe they can get on a bus and go to any country for 40 euros. In our country, the tournaments they go to the most during the year are in Georgia and Turkey. And the number of these tournaments is very small. It should be a lot because it is necessary from the point of view of their worldview to increase their international experience. Again, there are many problems, and we need a comprehensive approach. And in general, UEFA and FIFA allocate certain grants every year for the development of

children's football, if I'm not mistaken. It is necessary to control whether those grants are spent as intended in clubs. That's it. It is a very broad topic related to children's football. At the same time, of course, some of our parents should not interfere, that is, someone should come and hand over their child to the coach or offer money to the coach so that my child can be more focused and play. Of course, such new inequalities happen, they should not happen. If someone's child is rich or poor, the coach should not pay attention to such things. In addition, coaches must be psychologists, they must be teachers when working with children. In the newly formed children's leagues, for example, the coach shouts at the children. Besides, the child is 10-11 years old and does not understand why it is important to win this game. They do not have to play with the result. However, there are some club leaders who try to make sure that the coach does not lose his job or win a prize from the club management. Of course, there are nuances. Someone is trying to play more of his relative. There are such issues. In short, there are enough problems. But the main thing I still say is that natural grass, inventory, and children must be provided with uniforms, quality balls, and sportswear. Also, boarding schools in the regions would be very good. For example, in Ganja and Tovuz - where we always have a footballer. I wish it would be possible, that from there a certain 100-200 children were selected as a result of the selection process. If only, they talked to their parents, and they grew up in their hometown, and we could make it so it would not interfere with their education, everything would be there for them - food, accommodation, education, everything. I hope I was able to answer your questions.

8.3. Interview with Mr. Emin Hajizada (written answers):

Emin Hajizada is an International Scout, specialized scout in Go and Play LLC for regions: Balkans, Poland, Czech Republic.

Question 1 - How did what you learned in the foreign experience help you as a football scout?

Answer: I can say that my foreign experience helped me to look at football from a completely different perspective. I now look at football differently. My experience in Croatia completely changed my ability to analyze football.

Question 2 - What are the differences between the European experience and the Azerbaijani experience of talent development in football?

Answer: There are sharp differences between European football and Azerbaijani football. The country's football lags far behind both lower age groups, game mentality, and mental preparation of players. The coaches' methodology and training methods are applied in outdated ways, in addition, the players' normal level of education and football education is another point.

Question 3 - Do you think there is a lack of infrastructure in Azerbaijan for the development of underage teams?

Answer: Of course, there is a lack of infrastructure in Azerbaijan. Especially in lower age groups. Tomorrow, which spends millions on foreign players, all its children up to the u19 age group are taught the secrets of football in the Neftchi Base, which is worn out and the

plastic artificial cover is torn. In addition, the U-10, U-12, and U-14 leagues are held on artificial turf and on the same day at the same venue. There can be a no bigger problem than this.

Question 4 - What are the mistakes made by Azerbaijani clubs in developing youth players?

Answer: Methodology, education, athlete psychology. Three of the 3 important steps are being done wrong in our country:

1. Education - many of our players get a school certificate by force, their basic worldview and other knowledge are at the lowest level.

2. Athlete psychology - it is an important step to explain the athlete's mindset to children from childhood, to understand that defeat and victory are part of this game. Unfortunately, none of this is taught. Accustoming children to legionary life from a young age is not done at all. 99% of players know only the Azerbaijani language, English and other languages are not taught at the academy. The usual rules of etiquette are not explained to the players by the clubs.

3. Methodology - The worst case of Azerbaijani football is that everyone "plays for the result". From the U-8 team to the first team, all coaches play for good results, there are very few coaches who explain the correctness of football.

Question 5 - Do you think the general conditions created for children's football are satisfactory?

Answer: Although AFFA is working in this direction, this activity is not satisfactory. In addition to AFFA, individual clubs should also work here, but there is no progress in any of them except for some clubs.

Question 6 – Is Azerbaijani football ready to train the stars of the future? If not, when can it be?

Answer: No, we are not ready as a country. Unfortunately, with our internal mentality and thinking as a nation, we cannot produce any star players in the next 100 years. We are not ready for this as a nation, neither in terms of the academy nor in terms of the player group, we have the strength for it.

8.4. Snippet of the State Program On the development of football in the Republic of Azerbaijan

- Main objectives and tasks of the program:

The main goal of the State Program for the development of football in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2005-2015 is to implement the state policy in the field of football in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Physical Education and Sports", as well as other normative legal acts related to physical education and sports, the development of football and its infrastructure in the country. It consists in ensuring the development of football, the creation of appropriate conditions for playing football, the restoration of old stadiums, the design and construction of new ones, the training of international level players, coaches, referees and other football specialists.

- The main tasks of the program are as follows:
 1. expand the infrastructure of football, strengthen its material and technical base;
 2. to improve the system of training and retraining of football specialists;
 3. to develop a network of football schools for children and teenagers, to create specialized football boarding schools for children with special talent in football, regional and republican centers for the training of reserve football players;
 4. to strengthen information-enlightenment and propaganda work related to football;
 5. to establish and develop relations with foreign football organizations and institutions in order to apply advanced technologies in the field of football;
 6. to enable the use of football fields and facilities by all sections of the population.

- Main directions of development football in the Republic of Azerbaijan

In 2005-2015, it is planned to implement the development of football in the country in the following main directions:

1. creation of football infrastructure in educational institutions, residential areas of the population;
2. development of training programs on football for educational institutions;
3. preparation of methodical tools and recommendations for football;
4. opening of football sections in secondary, secondary and higher schools;
5. organization of football championships of pupils and students;
6. holding football competitions between neighborhood teams;
7. creation of training groups on women's football in existing and newly opened children-youth sports and boarding schools;
8. establishment of boarding schools specialized in football for talented children in all regions of the country;

9. ensuring the participation of national teams in international competitions, including European and World championships in Olympic games, and club teams in European tournaments;

10. establishment of a medical and rehabilitation center equipped with modern equipment under the Association of Azerbaijan Football Federations;

11. improvement of the training system of football specialists;

12. promotion of football, which is the most popular and influential type of sport;

13. expansion of international cooperation in the field of football development.

- Expected results

The measures planned to be implemented by the program will allow to achieve the following results:

1. to apply healthy lifestyle principles in society;

2. increasing the number of citizens engaged in physical education and sports, including football, in the country as a result of the popularization of football;

3. increasing the number of children, teenagers and young people playing football in the country's general education schools, higher and secondary educational institutions, children's and youth sports schools;

4. creation of specialized regional boarding schools for football talented children covering all regions of the country;

5. attracting teenagers and young people to football as a result of the development of the material and technical base of football;

6. to open additional jobs in all cities and regions of the country;

7. training of international level professional footballers who deserve to protect the country's image in the international arena. (e-qanun.az, n.d.)