

## SELECTION AND TALENT MANAGEMENT IN THE SOCCER ACADEMY OF DEBRECEN, HUNGARY

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### **Összefoglaló**

*A tanulmány célja a labdarúgók kiválasztásának és a tehetséggondozás rendszerének bemutatása a Debreceni Labdarúgó Akadémia példáján keresztül. Kutatásunk során elemeztük a témával kapcsolatos nemzetközi és hazai szakirodalmi forrásokat, vizsgáltuk az akadémia felépítését, működését és szerepét a fiatal labdarúgók képzésében. A labdarúgók tehetségének felismerése nem egyszerű feladat. A tehetséges sportolók kiválasztása egy több szempontot figyelembe vevő, komplex folyamat során történik, amelyben többek között a humánbiológiai jellemzők, fiziológiai és szociológiai tényezők, valamint a pszichológiai, kognitív tényezők döntő szerepet játszanak. Több tanulmány eredményei igazolják azt, hogy már fiatal korban meghatározható előre a felnőttkori sikeres teljesítmény.*

**Kulcsszavak:** labdarúgó, kiválasztás, teljesítmény, képesség

### **Abstract**

*The aim of this study is to deal with the survey of the selection and the system of talent management through the example of the Debrecen Soccer Academy. In connection with this topic we analyzed international and Hungarian articles, in addition we examined the structure, operation and role of the youth age players. It is not an easy task to recognise the talent of the players. The selection of talented sportsman is a very complex process during which you must consider many aspects such as human biological characteristics, physiological and sociological factors. Psychological and cognitive factors are also decisive. Several studies prove that being successful as an adult can be predicted at a young age.*

**Keywords:** soccer, selection, performance, skill

## COMPETITION SCHEME IN SOCCER ACADEMIES

One of the most important factors in choosing a sport is the socialization environment in which the child is brought up. This can significantly influence interest in the sport. In the early years of life, this family plays an important role, but sporting activities offered by kindergartens in a special activity also play an important role. In Hungary, in kindergartens, the Bozsik Institutional Program offers children the opportunity to participate in soccer activities held by professionals and to get acquainted with the basics of the sport. This program is an excellent opportunity to lay the foundations for later, club-level sports. Kids who participate in kindergarten soccer take part in kindergarten festivals 4 times a year, where members of the clubs are already present and watching talented kids. It is already possible for selected children to continue playing soccer at the club level, in the academies.

Children of the U7-U11 age group enrolled in academic training are participating in the Bozsik Association Program, which aims to "create a community mass base, strengthen sports affiliation, establish technical foundations, lay the groundwork for playfulness, and encourage creativity" (I04). The 50% rule that all children have the same play time, no results, no referees, is very important, so they want to maintain and apply the character of the sport.

The Bozsik Association Program has sub-centers in each county, with 3 groups and 4-6 clubs within the groups. The most important element of the program is the county-based district racing system for children in the U6-7, U8-9 and U10-11 age groups. At this age, it is important for young players get more playing opportunities and become accustomed to competitive conditions. The Bozsik Festival is organized 8 times a year for the U7 age group and 10 times a year for the U9 age group. This is a great opportunity for academies to get an idea of where young people are in education. The U11 age group is in the Bozsik "A" Regional Championship, where 6 academic teams from the region measure their skills 6 times a semester.

Players in the U13 age group are already competing in the NL1 (First Class National League) Regional Championship. Competing in the league system means that teams play matches on a regular basis, but they do not have to travel far due to the division of territories. As this age group includes two age groups (U12 and U13), the rules are different. Due to age characteristics and advancement in athletic training, the U12 is still playing in the 8 + 1 lineup between two sixteenths of the big field, while the U13 is already playing regular.

From the age of U14 onwards, soccer academy teams compete in first-class national leagues. In U14-15, the championship is played with 16 teams, resulting in many teams meeting each other, a higher number of matches and more travel time due to longer distances. In the U16-U19 age group, 8 academic teams are competing in NL1. Academies in Second Class (NL2) do not start teams.

This training structure helps soccer academies to deliver such high-quality training to talented players. It helps them to advance to the end of the training period and continue their careers in adult teams. That's why excellent professionals help athletes prepare, so that they can hold their ground not only at home but also at international level. Replacement training is important for Hungarian soccer, in which the role of soccer academies is of paramount importance.

## **INTRODUCTION OF THE SOCCER ACADEMY IN DEBRECEN**

Since the founding of the Debrecen Soccer Academy (DFA) in 2010, young people have been continuously integrated into the adult team. There are few teams in the forefront that, like DVSC (Debrecen City Soccer Club), rely primarily on self-educated juniors at the Soccer Academy, rather than buying more expensive foreign players. Currently, more than half of the Debrecen team is home-grown and relies on significant success for the club.

This kind of approach presupposes a significant and stable supply base, the structure of which is the result of years of work (SZALÁNCZI, 2019).

The introduction of the TAO system created a solid background for the education of the young. This funding system, in the form of indirect state aid to support spectacular team sports, introduced in 2011, allows taxpayers to pay corporation tax not to the state, but to support sport-specific areas, and to finance sports development programs (FAZEKAS, 2011; LENTÉNE PUSKÁS, 2014).

This kind of support for sport contributes to improving the operating conditions of clubs and creates the conditions for clubs to build up a significant supply base due to the fact that the sports organization does not bear the full cost of the competition. The TAO provides opportunities for various professional programs for the development of the younger generations, the purchase of modern training equipment, and infrastructure improvements that allow talented players to train and compete in the right conditions. Furthermore, the resources also allow participation in in-service trainings for the professional development of age coaches (LENTÉNE PUSKÁS, 2014).

The Debrecen Soccer Academy is one of the most prominent academies in the country, located in Pallag, 10 km from Debrecen. As a regional youth education center, the Academy plays an important role in educating and competing especially talented children of Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties. At the same time, the nearby academies are in competition, as the József Bozsik Soccer Academy of Nyíregyháza is nearby, and the Kisvárdai Soccer Academy has undergone significant development today. The 13 acres of the Debrecen Soccer Academy has 14 soccer fields next to a main building, which can be seen in the picture below (Figure 1).



*Figure 1: Pallag facility of the Debrecen Soccer Academy*

Source: [www.dvsc.hu/dla/akademia](http://www.dvsc.hu/dla/akademia)

The Academy's strengths include good location, modern infrastructure and a team of skilled professionals. It can be crucial for a young aspiring athlete to work with professionals who are nationally recognized and have years of professional experience.

In the system of the academy, the education of young people from U6 to U19 is provided (SZALÁNCZI, 2019).

Adjacent to the academy, the University of Debrecen Balásházy János Training High School and College creates ideal conditions for soccer players competing in the DLA junior teams by studying in sports school gymnasium classes and providing non-Debrecen residents with dormitory accommodation.

Thanks to the close cooperation of the Mother Association (DVSC) and the DLA, young people from the earliest age can feel that they belong not only to an association but to a family. Their academic outfit also features the association's logo, which the player can be proud of (SZALÁNCZI, 2019).

In addition to sports training, the Academy's goals include developing the right values for athletes in education, and a strong focus on healthy living. In terms of player development, the goal is to use the least amount of outside help, which we believe will succeed.

The former structure of the academies featured young players from the U14 age group. This has changed since the 2015-2016 season, when it has become mandatory for academies to involve the most talented children in academic education from the youngest age group (U6).

The Debrecen Soccer Academy also aims to provide the most talented with appropriate training. However, in order to keep late players or children with developmental disabilities out of the soccer system, other clubs are training alongside the DLA. Soccer players are constantly monitored, so it is possible to get from the partner clubs to the academy when the athlete reaches the right level.

The DLA, as a junior training center, works closely with the company competing with the adult NL1 team, giving talented players the opportunity to introduce themselves to the first team. At the same time, it is a great attraction that after the Academy training, those who do not qualify for the first team will continue their careers in DVSC Team 2. The DLA offers players the opportunity to compete with foreign soccer teams, take part in international tournaments, or even qualify for a foreign club.

### **A TALENT IDENTIFICATION IN SOCCER**

Identifying talented athletes is an important factor for any given sport. At the same time, the question arises as to what we consider someone to be more gifted than average, which are the parameters in which they are better than their peers. Ideally, all youngsters would find the sport that suits them, because if it is not right, they can lead to early sport leaving. In soccer, as in other sports, selection is also very important. To facilitate this, the Hungarian Soccer Association launched the OTP-MOL-Bozsik Replacement Development Program in 2011, which helps soccer build a mass base that is a form of immersion and facilitates the selection of talented players.

In Hungary, the aim is to establish a mass base through active recruitment in each sport. Then, based on the specifics of each sport, athletes deemed to be talented are selected based on a set of attributes and multiple criteria. In most sports, besides body traits and motor abilities, health, fitness, exercise, and resistance to injury are all parameters that

can be used to predict whether a young person will perform well in a particular sport. However, it is also important for the athlete to be well motivated, for example, to take part in academic training, as this can determine decisively whether he or she will become a top athlete. In addition, it is important that mental factors do not hinder daily performance, as the athlete must be mentally strong in addition to the high levels of training and competition that accompany top sport (HARSÁNYI, 2000).

Thinking quickly and making the right decisions is an important aspect of team sports, including soccer, as there are no two identical situations, and the situations that a talented player needs to react to are constantly changing. Thus, talent selection is a complex process that takes into account multiple factors, in which athletes are monitored through various measurements and the most talented are selected based on the results (BALOGH, 2011).

The talented athlete has outstanding abilities. There are many models and concepts of talent in the literature that refer uniformly to outstanding performance, that is, above average ability. At the same time, Mönks (2004) concluded that other factors play an important role in talent development. In addition to extraordinary abilities, above-average abilities, the role of family, school and associates is also essential.

In their research, Csáki et al. (2013) investigated aspects that may be necessary for the selection and success of talented players. In their study, they found that parents and family background both have a huge role to play in transforming a young player into a top athlete and possibly becoming a professional (CSÍKSZENTMIHÁLY et al., 2010; OROSZ, 2008; CZEIZEL, 2004). Other researchers (CHUSION et al., 2012; KUN-TÓTH, 2010) call attention to the role of the coach. Reilly et al. (2003) provide an excellent summary of what can be predictors of talent selection in soccer, which is summarized in Table 1.

*Table 1: Some potential predictors of soccer talent*

<b>Predictors of soccer talent</b>		
<b><i>Physical Factors</i></b>	<b><i>Psychological Factors</i></b>	<b><i>Cognitive Factors</i></b>
Physique	Motivation	Anticipation
Muscle Mass	Treating anxiety	Decision making ability
VO2 Max	Self-Confidence	Creativity
Heart Volume		Intelligence
Anaerobic endurance		

*Source: Reilly et al.: Identifying talented players based on their own design*

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL FACTORS**

Motivation and anxiety management play a huge role in this sport. A confident, self-confident player can be a lot more successful, play more bravely, liberally, so you can easily get the most out of yourself. Although personality tests used for measurement alone do not necessarily give a true picture, psychological test procedures developed for a given sport, when combined with other general methods, provide information that is close to reality. Sports-specific soccer talent can be predetermined based on physical, psychological and cognitive factors, but more research has confirmed (WILLIAMS, 2001; OROSZ, 2008) that professional players not only have excellent physical abilities, but psychological characteristics are important. Williams and Krane (2001) concluded that players' peak performance under high pressure and burden is related to motivation, anxiety and psychological factors. For academic soccer players, self-esteem, self-esteem, concentration, and anxiety management have proven to be key factors in research studies. Observing these factors together helps to select talent. Psychological support also refers to the impact of the family and the people around them. If soccer gets the support of a family or the support of friends, it can influence him in a positive way. Family trust is an important factor in developing self-confidence and delivering the right performance. Examining players' abilities, several researchers have found that skilled players perform better in position recognition and in completing a given game situation (WILLIAMS - DAVIS, 1995).

During the monitoring of motor abilities, the analysis is carried out by selection specialists based on several aspects, such as running speed, long jump, etc. Motor skills, though inherited from our innate traits, can be developed through training. When using running tests, it is worth bearing in mind that during the preparation period, during the race, and possibly at the end of the tournament, when players are likely to be more tired, the tests may show different values, so it is worth taking measurements at several times. In terms of selection, you should pay attention to a player who, in addition to consistently high numbers of matches and workouts, is outstanding at the end of the tournament and is probably more talented than his counterparts in these parameters.

Here's how to group the motor abilities:

- Physical abilities;
- Coordination capabilities;
- Joint motility, flexibility;
- Cognitive abilities;
- Traits.

## **BIOLOGICAL FACTORS**

Biological age and physical development are no longer the primary choice. It is not clearly proven that the physically best-placed individual will become the best soccer player. Frenkl's (2009) work proves that biological age can be a real trap for later maturing and slower-growing children, as they may not be selected because of poor performance in the early stages. It should be noted, however, that the individual maturation process of junior

players also varies from one individual to another (LAWRENCE, 2008). Following the selection, the players' continuous development should be monitored and promoted. Late-maturing players should not be left to drop out, because they can catch up with their peers at the right time of biological maturity, and in many cases perform better. At a young age, prominent players are usually accelerated and, by virtue of their superior performance, can outperform their peers, thus placing them in a lower position in the coach's ranking (REILLY et al., 2000).

Biological maturity can be of paramount importance for goalkeepers and defensive players, who are generally taller and heavier in weight (REILLY et al., 2003), and body characteristics can also be an advantage when selecting for these positions. Several studies have focused on the observation of players born in different months, mostly international research, but there is a small biological role.

### SUMMARY

In this study, we focused on the process of recognizing and selecting soccer talent through the example of the Debrecen Soccer Academy as a youth education center. In our study, we introduced the system of competition for junior soccer teams in the Soccer Academy. In Hungary, the Bozsik Institutional Program provides an opportunity for children to get to know soccer already in kindergarten, and talented players who enter the academy are given the opportunity to prepare and compete in the Bozsik Association program. Gifted athletes are selected through a multi-faceted, complex process in which human biological characteristics, physiological and sociological factors, and psychological and cognitive factors all play a decisive role. Previous research shows that soccer talents can be predetermined by physical, psychological and cognitive factors, but psychological factors also play an important role. At the same time, the selection of talented players should consider the fact that biological age and physical development are no longer the primary choice, as it is not clearly demonstrated that the best physically structured individual will be the best soccer player.

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I03: <https://www.dvsc.hu/dla/akademia>

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