



The importance of winning football games at youth level: Player and coach perspectives

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to determine if youth coaches in Iceland were over-emphasising the desire to win games in youth football. The research was conducted to see if winning games was prioritized by coaches ahead of developing football ability and football understanding of their players. The research also looked into the issues of burnout and overuse, to see if young players were at increased risk of the fore mentioned. I used both a quantitative and qualitative approach towards my research methods when collecting the data. 204 participants from four different clubs in the Reykjavik area aged between the ages 13-19 took part in answering a questionnaire. Interviews with the four head coaches of the same clubs were then conducted. Results indicated that why winning may be heavily emphasized by youth coaches it doesn't obstruct the development of the players and their progress towards improving as football players. Evidence from this research showed that winning games may be more associated to parental pressure on the coaches, which in turn increases the expectation levels. Further research should be focused on this particular aspect of youth football in Iceland to assess the needs of the coach/parent relationships in youth football.

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## Introduction

The purpose behind this study is to see if winning football games is being overly emphasized by youth football coaches in Iceland. I would like find out if there is a direct connection between the emphasis on winning football games and the mistreatment of young players. I would like to address the issues of burnout and overuse in youth football, to see if young players in Iceland are at risk. I believe that youth football coaches in Iceland are over emphasising the importance of winning games and this research may help give me some evidence to back up my theory. By conducting this experimental research I hope to give a select group of individuals between the ages 13-19 the chance to share their opinions towards this subject. I intend to use quantitative and qualitative research design to collect data from players and coaches alike. The players of the fore mentioned age will be asked to fill in a questionnaire which will be anonymous to protect their identities. I then intend to conduct interviews with four coaches who hold the role of head youth coach for their respective clubs. This will hopefully give me an insight into the coaching structure in place and what their perceived vision is towards future player development. I will look at the different aspects of winning and see what positives and negatives can arise from emphasising the need to win at youth level. I will also be referring to past researches conducted on the issue of winning and see if there is any connection between past research and my own.

There was recently a lot of controversy surrounding the men's national football team here in Iceland. In October 2010 the Icelandic national team was playing a European qualifying game against Portugal in the group stage, at the same time the Iceland under-21 national team was playing the 2<sup>nd</sup> leg of the play-off stage against Scotland. The under-21 game was of great importance to Iceland, and received a lot of media attention, as it was a chance for the men's Icelandic team to make it to a major tournament for the first time in their history. There were a number of players under the age of 21 and were therefore eligible for both national teams, some were considered full time internationals and had moved past the phase of playing for the under 21 team. Despite this, all players who were eligible for the under 21 team were told to play in the game against Scotland to help them qualify for the European championships in Denmark 2011. This decision made by the Icelandic football federation had mixed reviews from people within the football structure here in Iceland, and was met by anger from some, especially from national team coach Olafar Johansson("U-21 liðið hefur forgang", 2010).

Was this an example of the Icelandic federation putting winning ahead of player development? And what kind of message was this sending to youth football players and coaches alike? One of the most prestigious aspects in football is to represent your country at international level. All youth levels that lead up to this milestone can be considered as part of the learning phase towards the ultimate goal. For more information see (“Ég held að þetta gerist ekki aftur“, 2010).

## **Literature Review**

### **Winning at youth level**

Winning is a part of sport, it occurs at every level of youth development all the way to elite professional athletes competing at the highest level (see Van Lingen, 1997; McShane, 2002). The essence of sport is striving to win; without that attempt, the activity is of a different nature. However, in youth sport the aspect of winning can bring up many sensitive issues as to its importance. Research conducted by Franklin and Brown (1995) showed that athletes who have a strong desire to win, often have poorer coping skills and can become easily stressed in a competitive environment. On the other hand it can also be argued that promoting winning at youth level can build better character, strengthen an individual's personality traits and prepare individuals to become stronger in adult life (Feigley, D, n.d.). Football is of no exception, and the need to win seems to be one of the top priorities for many youth football coaches (see Van Lingen, 1997). If the importance of winning at youth level is over emphasised, the effects and consequences it can have on the developing phase of a young elite footballer can be irreversible. Youth football in general seems to be heavily dependent on the concept that winning is important, no matter what the age (see McShane, 2002). The ages 13-19 can be so important for young footballers, especially the more talented ones who are maybe looking towards some form of career within the sport. Coaches for these age groups need to be thinking about developing and nurturing talent, to help these players progress to a higher level. The first activity of a youth development scheme is to have players to develop (see McShane, 2002). Winning is not the most important feature of youth football, and coaches need to emphasize this more in modern day football, and Iceland is of no exception. European clubs are trying to develop professional players for their first teams. “It is my job as West Ham United's youth team coach and director of the centre of excellence is to produce a steady supply of players for the West Ham first team” (personal quotation, Carr, 1997). The youth

teams all lead up to the first team. The structure helps them to keep perspective on what they are doing. Winning takes a back seat to development as a player (McShane, 2002) by focusing too much on performance as opposed to teach in general (Ericsson, 1996). Thus, while many may ‘win’ at junior levels, they may end up ill prepared to make the important step to senior level and fail to make the transition (Moore et al., 1998; Stafford, 2005). There seems to be a certain stigma attached to youth football and the importance of winning football games at this level. There needs to be more of a balance between the emphasis of winning from coaches and the understanding of when it is pushed too far (Feigley, n.d.).

### **Coaches’ emphasizing winning at youth level**

Coaching is a very in-depth and complex skill and an elite youth football coach has to deal with many different aspects of youth development both on and off the football pitch. The coach, at any level, is a central figure in the athletic environment, assuming responsibility for the quality and direction of each individual’s sporting experience (DeMarco, Mancini & Wuest, 1996). The modern day youth coach has to take into consideration developing many technical attributes of a young footballer’s game. “As a coach you will need to nurture your players’ technical ability, as well as improving general play such as passing and moving. Technical work is something no player should neglect at any stage of his career” (Carr, 1997). These can include technique, skill, tactical understanding, as well as the physical attributes such as strength, endurance, speed, and flexibility. Also the psychological aspects of dealing with success and failure while trying to improve (see Verheijen, 1998). For coaches, educational programs should address aspects such as the importance of the process over the outcome in youth competition; the various stages of physical, psychological, and social development of young people; and improving the coach-player relationship through a change in coaching behaviour (Siegenthaler, K. L; Gonzalez, G. L. 1997). Furthermore, it would appear that coaches of young players assume a crucial role as significant others, affecting young athletes’ attitudes, self-esteem, and psychosocial development (Black & Weiss, 1992; Bortoli et al., 1995; Liukkonen et al., 1996). Technical and psychological aspects of youth football tend to be forgotten during a competitive environment, and the importance of winning usually takes over as the priority of the coach. During games, other studies indicated that most coaches’ behaviours are directed towards winning rather than focusing on players’ actions or on the development of appropriate technical skills (Cote et al., 1992).



There have been numerous research studies over recent years into coaches' behaviour towards youth development training (DeMarco et al., 1996; Cote, 1998; Lyle, 2002; Williams & Hodges, 2005). All coaches win and lose at different points throughout their careers, yet much of the research on effective coaching has been limited to head coaches who were able to maintain a high winning percentage for a lengthy period (Gearity & Murray, 2010). If a Coaches' emphasis is only on winning football games then it will have an adverse effect on the player's future progress, they will then begin to associate winning as a form of progress and development (Gearity & Murray, 2010). If the sport context is characterized by a value placed on interpersonal competition, social comparison, the coach emphasising 'winning' and achieving outcomes, and a public recognition of the demonstration of ability, a performance climate (see Ames & Archer, 1988). Winning has also recently been critiqued as a less than perfect measure of effective coaching and may not speak to athlete's learning outcomes or growth (Gearity, 2010).

The negative aspects that can arise from youth coaches over emphasizing winning at such a young age can hinder progress and create bad habits for future participation (Miller, Roberts & Ommundsen, 2003). Rule breaking and un-sportsperson-like behaviour are two topics which we try to avoid in youth sport. If the coach stresses such a win or lose environment, it is argued that cheating and un-sportsperson-like behaviour may likely occur (Bredemeier, 1999; Roberts, 2001). Research conducted by Miller, Roberts & Ommundsen (2003) found that when winning is overly emphasized by coaches and players are made to feel threatened by the possibility of losing, the importance of respecting the rules of a game become of little concern. It also seems that when the coaches' personal values of winning are strongly perceived, these personal values affect the player's understanding of the meaning of sports person-ship in competition (see Miller & colleagues, 2003 for a review). When the performance climate was high (winning), players were lower in sports person-ship. According to Miller et al., (2003) coaches' who are perceived to primarily emphasize winning likely affect players' acceptability of maladaptive behaviour.

### **The risk of injury, overtraining and burnout at a young age**

It seems like many coaches in general are thinking more about the results from football games and less about the welfare of their players and it is a fact that in football, the more 'gifted' players may be asked to train and play more competitive matches than the less 'gifted'

(Hodson, 1999). Important growth periods happen within this long period (7-18 years), and coaches need to pay more attention to this issue and help prevent the risk of burnout, not try to increase it (see Hodson, 1999). By overworking the body, the likelihood of an overuse injury can increase and if the body is not given sufficient time to recover from heavy exercise bouts, burnout at youth level can occur (Weinberg & Gould, 2007). An overuse injury is micro traumatic damage to a bone, muscle, or tendon that has been subjected to repetitive stress without sufficient time to heal or undergo the natural reparative process (see Brenner, 2007). The majority of coaches here in Iceland have some form of coaching qualifications, especially those coaching the ages 13-19. The KSI coaching badges cover the aspects of burnout and overtraining in youth football. The overtraining syndrome can be defined as a “series of psychological, physiologic, and hormonal changes that result in decreased sports performance” (Brenner, 2007). Most coaches are aware of the signs of overtraining or burnout which is covered in the KSI UEFA coaching qualifications. One of the theoretical goals from KSI B badge is; Að hjálpa þjálfurum að öðlast grundvallarskilning á mannslíkamanum og hvernig hann bregst við þjálfun (Knattspyrnusamband Íslands). The UEFA B coaching badge is the qualification needed to coach youth levels and lower divisions here in Iceland.

Smith (1986) described burnout as a psychological, emotional, and physical withdrawal from a formerly pursued and enjoyable activity as a result of excessive stress. Athlete burnout develops as a result of chronic stress brought about by regularly appraising ones resources as insufficient to meet achievement demands. Within elite sport contexts, Cresswell and Eklund, (2006) described the process of striving to achieve ever increasing demands may become a contributory mechanism in the development of burnout when athletes perceive that performance is consistently falling short of acceptable standards (see Weinberg & Gould, 2007; Cresswell & Eklund, 2006). The desire to achieve and improve as a football player can have a huge impact on their chances of success or failure. When the desire to achieve at any cost overtakes the desire to develop as a player it can increase the likelihood of stress related factors and increase the risk of burnout (Hill, Hall, Appleton & Kozub, 2007) When these processes are employed consistently in the evaluation of achievement outcomes, athletes may become vulnerable to burnout. Research conducted by Hill and colleagues in 2007 found a correlation between personality disposition and the increased risk of burnout in young footballers (see Hill, Hall, Appleton & Kozub, 2007. for full review). Athlete burnout has also been defined by Raedeke (1997) as “a psychological syndrome of emotional/physical exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment, and sport devaluation”. If burnout occurs

during youth years, then it increases the chance of dropout from the sport (see Weinberg & Gould, 2007). If coaches know the risks but still insist on playing certain individuals, it is clear that their priorities lie in the wrong place. If an athlete decides to discontinue in a sporting activity it is usually related to some form of stress which has been placed on the athlete, whether it is physical or psychological. A child's decision to continue participating or to withdraw seems to be influenced by many motives, including conflict of interests, lack of success or improvement, dislike of the coach, lack of motivation or even the overbearing need for perfectionism in a specific domain (Gould, Tuffey, Udry & Loehr, 1996). According to Rowley (1992) transitions, or periods of change, are key for future development, and during 'sensitive' periods young athletes may be more vulnerable to dropping out of sport or retiring early. Pooley (1981) conducted extensive interviews with 50 youth soccer dropouts, 10-15 year olds. His results revealed that 54% of the children reported that they stopped playing because of conflicts of interest. 33% cited the over-emphasis on competition (e.g. the coach shouted negative comments when errors were made (see Smith & Bar-Eli, 2007). The impact from promoting winning at youth level ahead of developing their individual talents has been thought to have an influence of youth burnout and increase the likelihood of dropout. The environment, in which athletic development is nurtured, will therefore help determine the pressure perceived by the individual and the likelihood of achievement or lack of achievement levels, or even burnout (see Hill and colleagues, 2007).

When observing how a soccer club operates, two things are particularly worth noticing. The obvious one is how the clubs develop their youths as soccer players. The second but more important one is how the clubs keep perspective and balance to make sure the young people have fun and develop as human beings (McShane, 2002). Bangsbo (2003), author of the book, *Fitness training in soccer (the scientific approach)*, and spoke about the importance of how youth coaches understand the physical demands and intensity of youth football development programs. Another important aspect of youth training is the amount and the intensity of the training. The coach should carefully observe how the individual players respond to the training, as young players can easily be over trained (Bangsbo, J. 2003, p. 111).

### **Talented young players are at greater risk of overplaying**

One aspect of football which is becoming increasingly popular in the modern day era is talent identification (Martindale, Collins & Daubney, 2005). Football clubs in particular spend time,

money and other resources trying to find the best players at a young age in hope that they will become future prospects in the game. This will then enable the club to sell the young player for a substantial amount of money. Interest in effectively identifying and developing sporting talent has grown in many countries over recent years (See Martindale and colleagues, 2005). Most talent identification and development programmes throughout the world appear to use performance measures as a main indicator of talent at all levels. This could be why elite coaching is considered to be effective based largely on results and outcome instead of the process itself (see Lyle, 2002). If winning is emphasized and achieved, then progress and future development will be associated more with short term success.

By recognising talent at an early age football clubs believe that they can get a head start in the player's development process. It has been known for some time that there is no rush to produce young star performers (see Bloom, 1985). Developing talent is a long term process and doesn't simply just happen overnight. In fact, it has been known for some time that early specialization and emphasis on all age groups, winning is associated with early drop out and wasted talent (Gould, Feltz, Horn, Weiss, 1982; Valeriote & Hansen 1986). One of the big question marks over this process is that not all promising young players make it to an elite level, far from it. A child may display natural ability to become a great player at a very tender age, he may then start playing for a club at an early age and receive specialized training but this won't guarantee a future in the game (see Burley, n.d.). If young talented footballers are over used at a young age with an over emphasis on helping the team win games at youth level, this can hinder their personal development in becoming a better player. It does happen – all too frequently- that a youth coach sacrifices the development of a particular player for the sake of the team as a whole (Van Lingen, 1997). This usually comes about when a player is asked to play in a different position (not his regular one) to have more of an impact on the game. This could relate to a fast/strong defender being asked to play as a striker to give the team a better chance of scoring a goal. It might increase the chances of the team scoring but it will not improve the defensive attributes of the individual. Many talented youngsters have thrown in the towel because they were forced to play as their coach dictated (see Van Lingen, 1997). Practice is still just as important for the talented players as it is for those who have not made it to such a highly skilled level. It is maybe even more important for talented young footballers, as those who show early signs of promise can become complacent and big headed because of their early promise or achievements. There is no question that practice is a necessary vehicle for attaining exceptional levels of performance in sports. Individuals who

appear 'talented' at a young age still need to invest considerable practice hours to compete at an adult level (Ward, Hodges, Williams & Starkes, 2007). Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer (1993;1996) reiterated the importance of practice in youth development and the benefits that individuals can obtain from practice methods. Commitment to practice and practice itself are more important than 'natural ability' in defining the road to excellence. Ericsson (1996) applied that the attained levels of performance are not limited by those factors associated with innate talent but are acquired through sustained investment in practice and deliberate efforts to improve (see Ericsson, 1996; Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996).

### **Effective youth coaching**

Like previously stated, coaching is a very complex structure. Because of the various coaching demands, coaches need to have numerous strategies to deal with different kinds of situations (Cote, 1998). Coaching is an ongoing process which changes as a player matures towards adult life. A modern day youth football coach needs to be aware of the gradual progress which a young footballer strives towards. It is recognised that people have different needs at different stages in their development and, as such, they often require different coaching environments as they progress (see Bloom 1985; Cote, 1998). Williams and Reilly (2003) described talent development as the opportunity for a player to be provided with a suitable learning environment in which they are able to realize their potential. Ericsson (1993) suggested that effective learning occurs when activities are well defined, are pitched at an appropriate level of difficulty, when useful feedback is presented, and the opportunity for repetition, error detection and correction is provided. One major factor that influences all performers throughout their sporting careers is the quality and appropriateness of the coaching environment (see Bloom, 1985). Coaching therefore has to be related to the specific group, individual or environment in which they operate. Most previous research on the subject of coaching has focused more on the participation aspect and the affects of coaching, rather than the coaching affects or guidance for pre-elites through the development stage towards elite status. The behaviour of coaches and their involvement with the youth players are more important in the development of talent than the initial ability of the player (Williams & Reilly, 2003). This just shows the importance of the role in which the coach plays and the environment in which the individual is coached will have a massive affect on the athletes' future in the game (see Bloom, 1985; Williams & Reilly 2003). Professional youth coaches

are concerned with developing players' personal excellence, more than their win/loss record. Indeed youth coaches are responsible for the quality and direction of the learning environment as well as team performance (see DeMarco, Mancini & Wuest, 1996).

One aspect of coaching that cannot be taught is experience. This is a feature of coaching that will build up over time and practice (see Carr, 1997). There are no books, training courses or even time spent as a footballer yourself that can influence the level of coaching experience. Becoming a coach after a playing career in football might give a slight advantage in terms of football understanding but the only way to become a top elite coach at youth or any level is through experience and time spent coaching (see Van Lingen; Carr, 1997). A coach must have a knowledge and understanding of all the problem areas before he can set up a coaching situation properly (Verheijen, 1998). Football clubs should try to give their players the best possible chances of succeeding in football by employing coaches with experience of some sort. Obviously the more experience, the better prepared the coach will be (see Verheijen, 1998). Soccer clubs need a lot of people with soccer experience and insight. Lack of such a soccer background is a problem (Van Lingen, 1997). According to Carr (1997) any practice is only as good as the coach employing it. Learning to coach well comes through experience, watching and listening and of course, trial and error. Just like that of players, youth football coaches are constantly learning and trying to strive towards improving their ability. A good coach sees a match in terms of clear objectives. Players are solely concerned with winning, but the coach regards competitive games as a means of promoting the development of his players (Van Lingen, 1997).

Another aspect of coaching which has been discussed over the last couple of decades is that of a mentor towards the athlete's development. Coaches in general can give advice in many areas, from sporting understanding to life issues and problems that can arise (see Bloom, Bush, Schinke & Salmela, 1998). Studies have indicated that mentoring occurs when there is a trusting relationship between the teacher/coach and the student/athlete, when there is an interest on the part of the coach in the personal development of the athlete, when the coach purposefully allocates his/her time to fulfil the needs of the athlete, and when an imitation of behaviour takes place (Bloom, Bush, Schinke & Salmela, 1998). Bloom (1985) found that athletes were mentored by coaches at different stages of their development. Athletes don't often relate to the mentoring phase and the effects it has on their personal development until later in their career. Walton (1992) found that coaches were more than just teachers of sport

skills; they taught their athletes life skills that remained in-grained throughout their lives (see Bloom et al., 1998).

It is, however important to understand the different roles in which coaches work. Performance coaches, and in particular coaches working with elite athletes (high performance) undertakes work that differs from participation coaches (Lyle, 2002). High performance coaching is characterized by higher levels of commitment, more stable coach-athlete relationships, and greater focus on medium-to-long-term planning, monitoring, decision-making, and management skills to facilitate control of performance variables (see Lyle, 2002). The difference in the above coaching approaches applies strongly to the youth football setup here in Iceland. Unlike that of top European football clubs, youth football teams here in Iceland can often involve a group of individual's of mixed football ability and talent. The youth academies that are set in place at top European clubs will often feature a group of players of similar football ability and technical skill levels (see McShane, 2002). Whereas in Iceland there are no featured academy structures set in place for talented footballers, they just represent their present club, usually set by the location that they live in. Coaching elite youth footballers will only be effective if it has direction, quality and allows room for error and correction (see Carr, 1997; Van, Lingen, 1997). Research conducted by Smoll and colleagues, (1977) showed an important feature for youth coaches is to provide learners with feedback so that they can improve performance on subsequent practice attempts (see Smith & Bar-Eli, 2007). The provision of feedback help to promote efficient learning ensures correct development of the skill and influences the learner's motivation to persist with practice (Williams & Hodges 2005). Coaches who forget this process and focus more on the achievement of the team as a whole will provide an insufficient background for future development.

Motivation is a vital part of youth coaching, those coaches who can motivate their players towards completing their goals and improving as individuals can be considered as having a positive influence as a youth developer (see Olympiou, Jowett & Duda, 2008). Motivation is absolutely paramount to successful development in any form of pursuit; without it there is no drive to learn, develop or succeed (Martindale, Collins & Daubney, 2005). Most early research on the subject of motivation was grounded on the work of Deci and Ryan (1985; 2000), who introduced the self determination theory (SDT). The SDT is a motivational theory that is useful for understanding individual's motivation, its causes and consequences and how teachers' behaviours are significant predictors of student's motivation (Gillet,

Vallerand, Amoura, & Baldes, 2010). The use of extrinsic and intrinsic factors can have an influence on an individual's motivation and a will to succeed or complete a task. The use of rewards or punishments for successful or unsuccessful attempts has been used as a motivation tool to improve sporting performance (see Gillet, Vallerand, Amoura & Baldes, 2010). Intrinsic motivation has been deemed desirable due to the display of adaptive behaviours such as higher rates of long term participation, persistence and effort (Vallerand, Deci & Ryan, 1987). However, extrinsic motivation has been associated with success in elite sport (Chantal, Guay, Dobрева-Martinova & Vallerand, 1996). According to Mageau and Vallerand (2003) coaches' behaviours are one of the most important features of an athlete's motivation (see Gillet, Vallerand, Amoura & Baldes, 2010). More recent studies have focused on the research related to the difference in goal (Ego) achievement and task achievement towards motivation in youth athletes (see Balaguer, Duda, Atienza & Mayo, 2002). The goal achievement approach focuses on coaches who emphasize the importance of winning, ahead of developing skill, ability and understanding. The task achievement approach focuses on coaches who emphasize importance of mastering a skill, or part of a training that will further an athlete's development (see Miller, Roberts & Ommundsen, 2003). Where-as both methods have been used by coaches to have effects on athletes in the developmental stage of their young football careers, it is the task-involving motivational climate which has showed the more positive results towards learning and improving (see Balaguer, Duda, Atienza & Mayo, 2002; Miller, Roberts & Ommundsen, 2003). Duda and Balaguer (1999) also proposed that coach leadership behaviours hold implications for motivational processes, and coach leadership behaviours are viewed as instrumental in developing motivated, competent, and satisfied athletes as well as teams. Balaguer and colleagues (2002) examined the interrelationships between the task and ego features of the motivation climate and athletes perceptions of their coach's leadership behaviours. They found that a perceived task-involving motivational climate was positively related to athletes' perceptions of improvement with the technical, tactical, and psychological facets of performance. Moreover, it was found that perceptions of a task-involving climate were associated with athletes' ratings of their coach as an "ideal" coach, for more (see Balaguer, Duda, Atienza & Mayo, 2002 for review).

### **Important aspects of youth development for elite football players**



It has been generally accepted that elite youth football development training programs are a process of gradual improvement towards the ultimate goal. This is to have a career in the sport or play at the highest level possible as an adult (see Van Lingen 1997; Verheijen, 1998). Obviously a coach wants his team to win. Unlike parents and spectators, however, he regards winning as of secondary importance. His player's soccer development comes first (Van Lingen, 1997). As an individual progresses from stage to stage in his developmental curve, different approaches and different methods of coaching can be used to obtain the best results.

The influential role that parents play in youth sport is something that is gaining increased popularity (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). Research by Brustad, Babkes and Smith (2001) showed that there is connection between a parent's influence on the motivation and the perceived enjoyment of the child. How parents act before, during or after a game/practice can have an effect on the performance and enjoyment level (see Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). One issue of competitive team sports and in particular football, is the parents will to win, unlike coaches, parents regard winning as a form of success and development (Van Lingen, 1997). Parents, maybe unknowingly are playing a key role in setting the motivational climate for their children. It is thought that parents can increase the desire for their child to achieve or even hinder success due to increasing stress levels (see Hedstrom & Gould, 2004).

It is however important to understand football from a young athletes perspective. All individuals are not the same, and some may have a greater desire to win than others at youth level (McShane, 2002). Concentrating on winning or a victory for your team can have its benefits in youth football, and it can create a togetherness and group solidarity through accomplishing something together as a team (see Van Lingen, 1997). A coach who emphasizes the importance of winning, and finds it brings him into conflict situations, must be able to appreciate that this is part and parcel of the players' development process. Most young players do feel that winning is very important, and are best served by an inspirational coach who remains enthusiastic and optimistic (Van Lingen, 1997). Coaches may want to implement this process into the coaching development of their players at some stage in their football learning development. During a match a coach will take the necessary measures to achieve a good result. Sometimes the coaches' aim will be to achieve a victory for his team, and sometimes it will be to promote an individual's personal development as a player. It is the coaches' responsibility to balance between the two aspects for best results (see Van Lingen, 1997). It should be noted that this particular feature of coaching can help in the learning process of a young footballer or football team, but it should not become the main focus of the

coaching process. It is crucial that an elite youth coach understands the difference in this process and implements it when necessary.

### **A proven coaching success**

One country that has had undoubted success at developing youth football talent in the last couple of decades is Holland. Many countries can relate to Holland's youth academy set-up as the benchmark for other countries to work towards (Burley, n.d.). Ramond Verheijen (1998) author of the book *The Conditioning for Soccer* spoke in general about the development process of a football player. A soccer player must develop from seeing very little of the information in the large picture (the beginner) to seeing the large picture with very little information (A top player). Holland has been able to produce an incredible amount of quality elite football players over the years, which have played regularly at the highest level. Even though the country is small in size, the football academies set in place seem to reproduce talented footballers year after year. According to Wim Van Zwam (2010) the Dutch national youth coach. "We easily forget to deal with the players as individuals. We should treat them as individuals. This has been one of the reasons that Holland is able to produce some great players. They care for individuals and motivate them to give their best by awarding those medals and awards and giving accolades. Young players do not like to be criticized and often react negatively towards criticism" (personal quotation).

By relating to the youth structure in Holland I'm not implying that all youth programmes should change structure and copy that of the Dutch football federation, far from it, especially as Iceland has a very unique football structure set in place. In Iceland everybody is encouraged to partake in sports programmes; young athletes can join a club at any age, there are no restrictions denying athletes to join because they may not have the right qualities to make it as an elite athlete. Football is of no exception, any young boy or girl can join a club as long as they pay the annual fee. I believe that this approach encourages sports participation and gives everyone an equal chance. Youth structures that are set in place need to have clear goals and objectives for them to be successful. The coaching environment needs to be set to best suit the players involved in the training sessions with a coach who clearly understands the youth coaching process.

## **Research**

For this research paper I decided to use both a quantitative and qualitative approach towards collecting my data. I thought this mixed approach would be best suited to the participants taking part in the research.

### **Goals and objectives**

The purpose behind doing this research was to see if Icelandic youth coaches were over emphasising the need to win football games at youth level. The research was also conducted to view how the players perceive their coaches abilities towards developing their individual football talent. Finally, the research was performed to see if the players were at risk of overuse or burnout because of over competitive coaches in youth football.

### **Quantitative Research**

Quantitative research is the use of numerical measurement and analysis, this form of research involves measureable quantities. Variables can be easily measured and then converted into numerical form using a statistics program, like that of SPSS which I used for this research project (Gratton & Jones, 2010). A quantitative questionnaire was designed for the young participants to try and build some numerical data which could be used as a form of clarification to back up my theories towards the issue of winning at youth level. The questionnaire was designed for Icelandic youths, so the 14 questions put forward in this research questionnaire were written in Icelandic. The questions were then translated back over to English text for completion of this assignment. As English is my maiden language, it felt like the most appropriate way to conduct this part of the research.

### **Qualitative Research**

I used a qualitative approach for this part of the research process as I thought it would give me more information and diversity towards the structuring of the paper. Qualitative research is generally used to capture meanings or qualities that are not quantifiable, such as feelings,

thoughts and experiences. This can help to give to give a broader range of information to work with, especially as you achieve clearer explanations and reasoning behind the participants answers (Gratton & Jones, 2010).

The four coaches that took part in this qualitative research design all had good football qualifications. Coaches (A) and (B) had both completed the UEFA A coaching licences but also held a Bachelors degree in sports. Coach (C) had completed his UEFA A coaching licence and coach (D) held the UEFA B level six coaching badge. The UEFA A coaching licence is the highest regarded football coaching level here in Iceland, except for that of the UEFA Pro licence, which is technically needed to coach in the best football leagues in the world (e.g. England, Spain, Italy, and Germany).

All four coaches had been coaching for what could be considered as a long period of time. Coach (A) had 8 years coaching experience, 5 of those being as head youth coach overlooking development of the youth structure. Coach (B) has been coaching for over 10 years, with 3 of those years as head youth coach. Coach (C) had 9 years coaching experience with 2 years as head youth coach. Coach (D) had nearly 25 years coaching experience with quite a few years as head youth development coach among many other roles within the football youth structure here in Iceland.

## **Method**

### **Procedure**

I contacted all four clubs before conducting the research to get clearance and permission to visit the clubs and speak with the young males. I then personally spoke with each coach to get permission to show up at a given training session to speak with the young males about taking part in the research. Participation was voluntary and required the completion of one questionnaire (14 questions) for a quantitative research design. Participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers for the questionnaires and all answers would remain confidential. That means though-out this paper there will be no mention of the four clubs who participated in the research, the coaches and the players names will remain confidential. The participants were also informed beforehand that the questionnaires involved answering questions about their current coach. As this can be a delicate subject, to answer questions

relating to the efficiency of their coach, I reassured them that the whole process was confidential, and nobody except me (the researcher) would have access to their answers. I made sure that I personally overlooked every age group who took part in this research by being present while they filled in the questionnaires. This was done to explain the details to the coach, and make sure that the coach had no influence on the participant's answers. Even though participation was voluntary the boys were keen to partake and there were no participants who were asked to complete the questionnaire and declined. The coaches also showed great support and advised the young males that it would be fun to partake and help the research process. Two of the clubs involved in the research had large amounts of players for each age group, and were split in to 3 or 4 different teams. Therefore I asked the coaches to pick out a sample of 20 participants who were representing the top teams (Group A & group B) to partake in the research process. The other 2 clubs involved in this research did not have an abundance of youth players to choose from, and only had 1 team per age group, so all the players from each age group were asked to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaires took around 5-10 minutes to complete, and players completed them before or after their training session. This was determined by the coach's desires, some thought it better to have the participants complete the questionnaires before training, and other coaches after training had finished.

The questionnaire was built up on 14 questions about how the players viewed winning football games at youth level, and also their coach's desires to win at youth level. I wanted to know what the player's perceptions of their current coach were, and did they believe that he placed winning ahead of developing their football ability. The questionnaire was also designed to see how far a coach would go in order to win at youth level, and if they were putting their players at risk of overtraining or burning out at such a young age. Also to see if coaches were overusing talented players to further the teams desire to win, ahead of developing his personal development as a football player. I wanted to see how many players were asked to play a competitive game while carrying some form of injury and what their response was, when asked. Then finally to get their opinions about the youth structure of football here in Iceland, and if they thought that winning was over-emphasized during their young careers.

Once I had collected all the data from the young males participating in this research process. I arranged a meeting with the four youth coaches who held the role of head youth coach and were in charge of over-seeing all youth development for their respective clubs. I

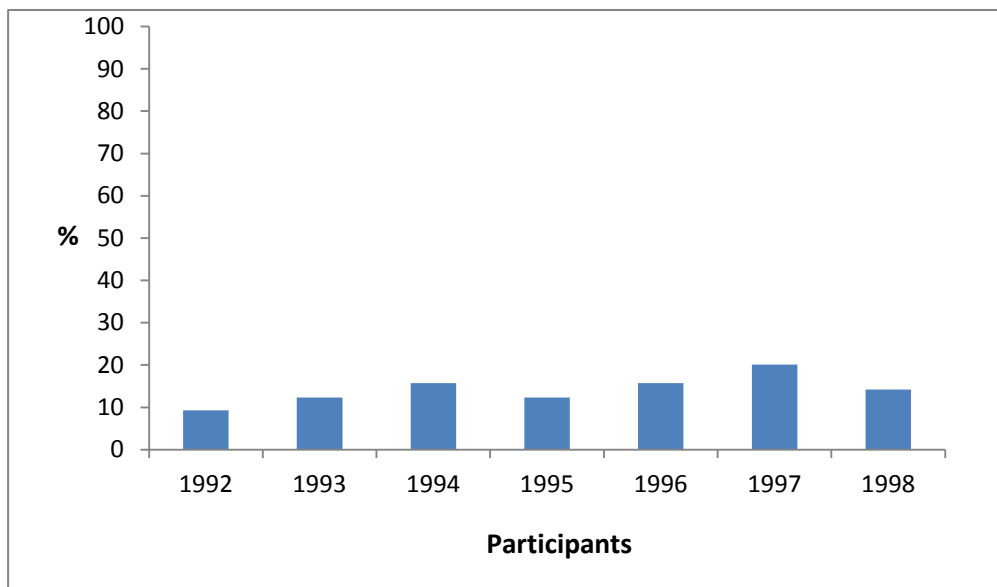
conducted a one-on-one interview with each coach to get their opinions on the same subject (Winning at youth level). The interviews were built up on a similar structure to that of the questionnaires, but the coach's were able to give more in-depth answers to the questions and reasoning behind them. I put forward a fixed set of questions to each coach who was then able to answer with more than just a yes or no remark. I tried to let the coaches have the freedom to speak and encouraged in depth answers with reasoning and implication behind their comments. I thought this method would work better than providing each coach with a questionnaire, as it gave them the chance to explain their answers. The interviews lasted no longer than 30 minutes and were conducted with only myself and the coach present at the time. To protect the identities of the 4 coaches who took part in this research, they will be referred to in future reference as coach (a), (b), (c), and coach (d).

## **Participants**

Participants were 204 Icelandic young males who were representing four different football clubs in the city of Reykjavik. Their ages ranged from 13-19 years old with a mean age of 15.7. The head youth development coach who over looks all youth trainings from each of the four clubs were also involved in the research (4 in total).

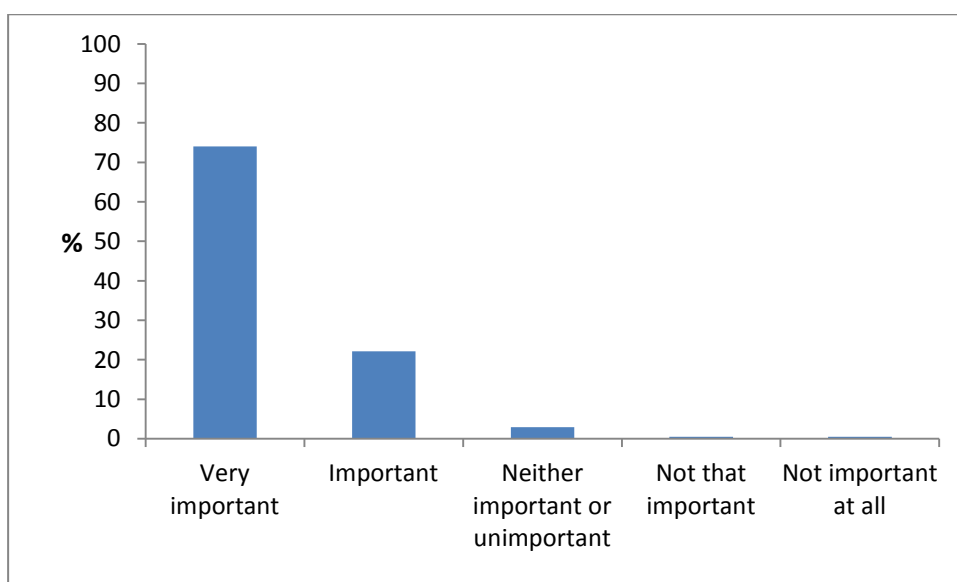
## **Results from questionnaires**

The results from the questionnaire survey show that there were 204 young males that participated in the research and all but one individual revealed his age. All participants were born between the years 1992-1998. Chart 1 indicates that the biggest percentage of participants who took part in this research was born in the year 1997. This means most of the participants for this research were training with the under 14 age group (aged 13-14) within their respective clubs. The fewest participants were born in the year 1992. This chart also shows that nearly 50% of participants for this research were born between 1996-8.



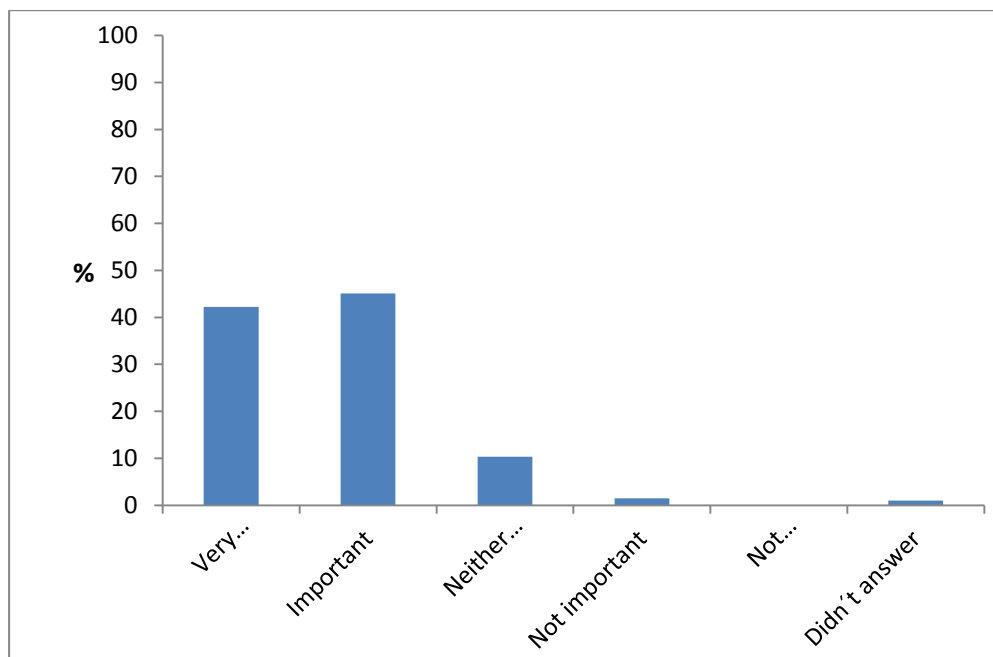
**Figure 1.** What year were you born?

The results showed us that young boys in football have a strong desire to win at youth level. When answering the question, how much or little does it mean to you, to win in a game. Chart 2 shows that 74% of participants answered very much so, with 22.1% answering quite a lot. This shows that over 96% of those who answered the questionnaire consider winning an important aspect of youth football. A very small percentage of participants answered that winning wasn't of importance or meant little to them.



**Figure 2.** How important or unimportant is it to win games at youth level.

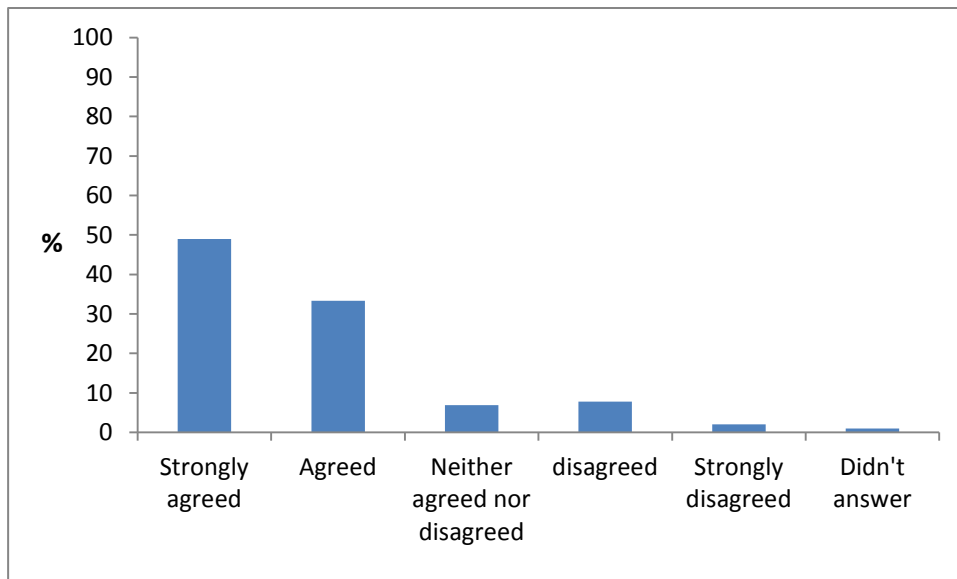
The results were of similar structure when the players answered the same question related to their respective coach. Results in chart 3 showed those players who interpreted winning games as significant importance or unimportance to their coach. 87.3% of participants answered that they thought winning games was important for their coach. 10.3% neither agreed nor disagreed that winning was emphasized or neglected by their coach. Similar to chart 2, results showed that very few participants viewed winning games at youth level as of little significance to their coaches.



**Figure 3.** How important do you feel it is for your respective coach to win games?

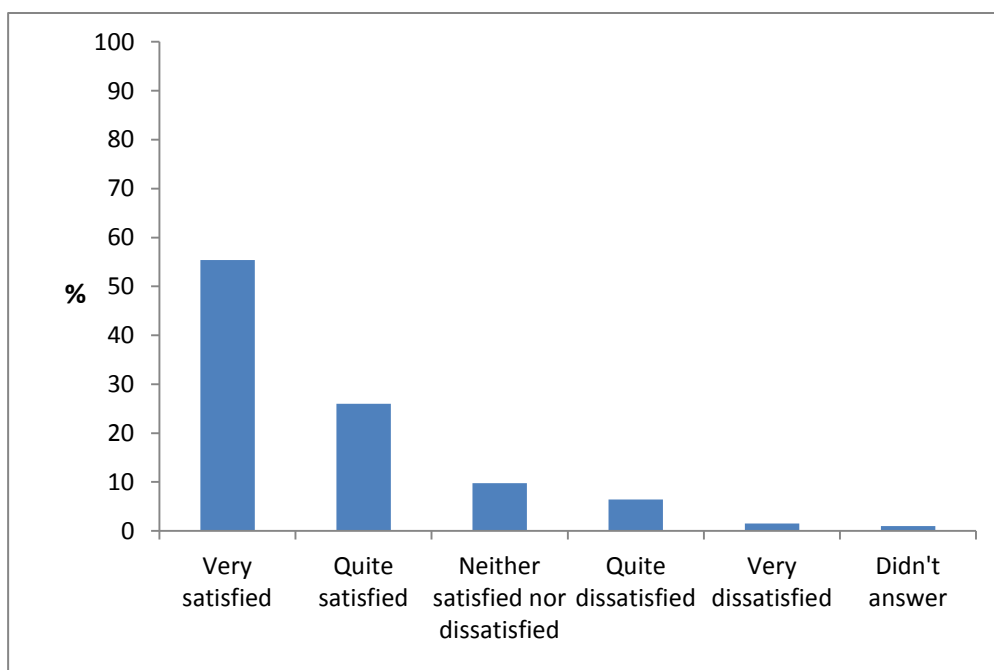
Results for chart 4 indicate that a high amount 82.3% of participants agreed that their respective coach emphasized the importance of coaching players' football understanding ahead of winning games at youth level. There were below 10% who disagreed with this statement, indicating that overall Icelandic coaches assessed in this study were focusing on developing players' football understanding ahead of emphasising winning games.





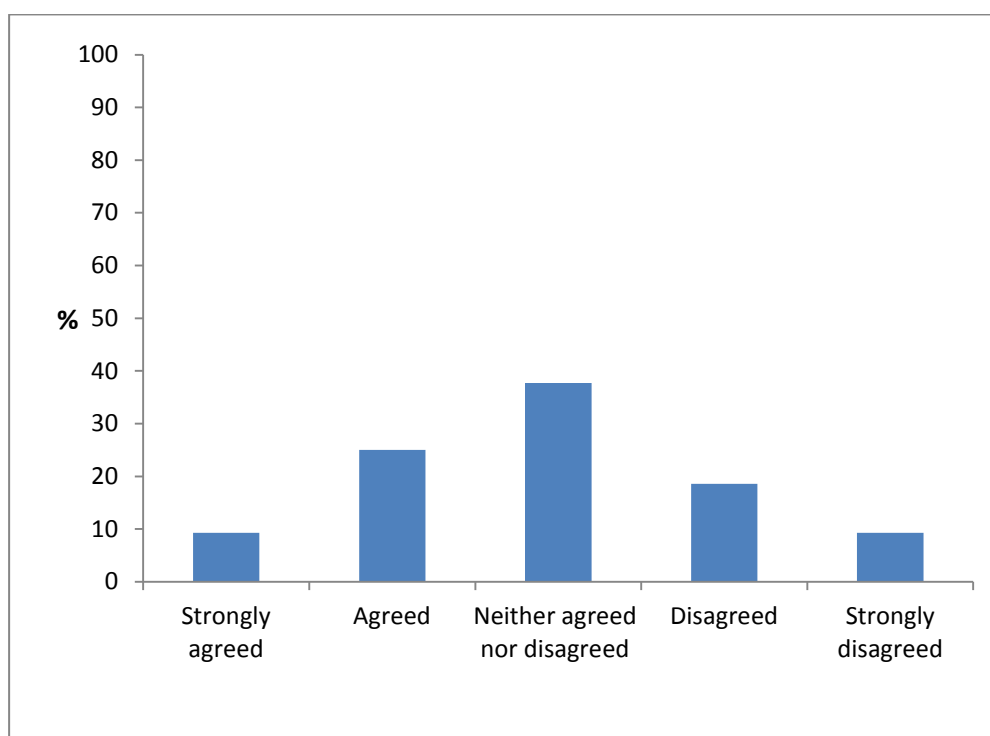
**Figure 4.** How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? My coach puts emphasis on developing my individual football understanding ahead of winning games.

Results for chart 5 were of similar structure to that of chart 4. With 81.4% of the participants satisfied to some degree with the abilities of their respective coaches. Only 7.9 were dissatisfied in some way. This again indicates that players' perceptions of their coaches were that of a positive one.



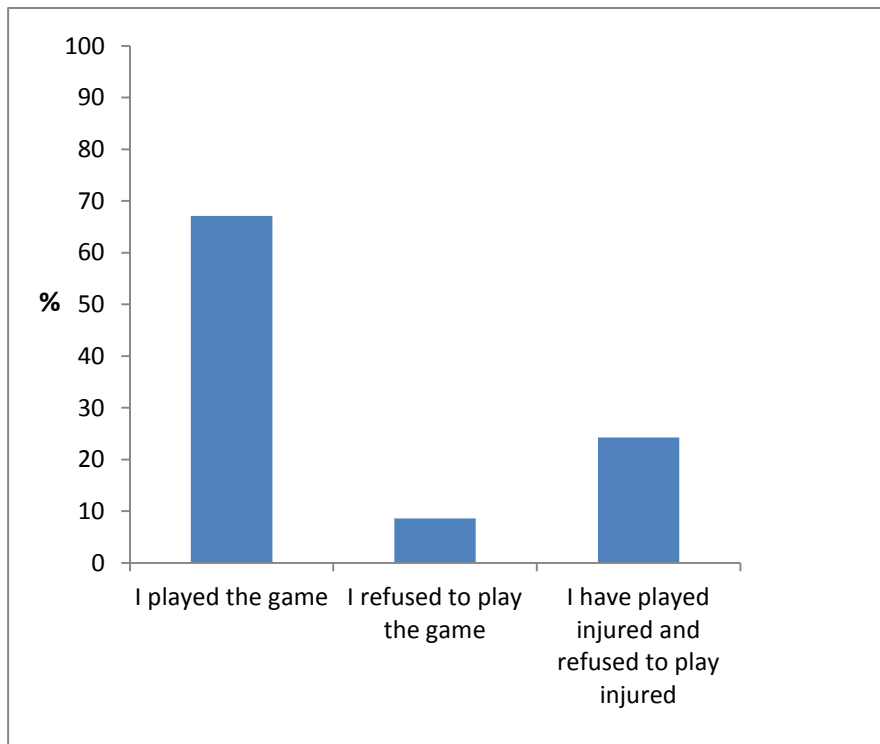
**Figure 5.** How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the ability of your coach, when it come to your personal development as a young footballer.

The results were of mixed opinions when participants answered the question which related to their respective coach overusing players to win football games. Results shown in chart 6 indicate that the biggest percentage (31.9%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement (Does your coach miss-use players to increase the chance of the team winning). 28.4% of participants disagreed and 13.2% strongly disagreed with this question. Only a small percentage (6.4%) strongly agreed and 19.1% agreed with the statement. The results show that player's had mixed feelings towards this issue, with a slightly higher percentage disagreeing that coaches are overusing players for the wrong reasons.



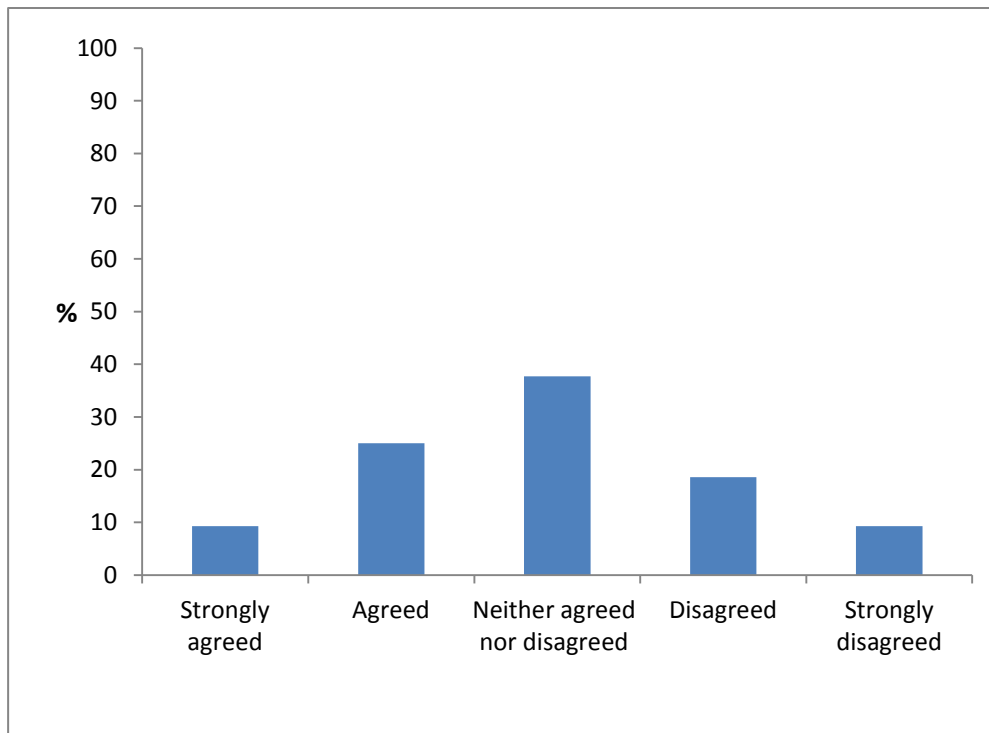
**Figure 6.** How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement. My coach over-uses players to win football games.

From the 204 participants that took part in the research, 70 had been asked to play while carrying an injury of some form. Results showed that of those 70 participants, a high amount 67.1% agreed to play in the game, with 8.6% refusing to play while injured. There were 24.3% of participants who said that they had partaken in games while carrying an injury and also declined to play while injured.



**Figure 7.** Have you been asked to play while carrying some form of injury? If answer is yes, what was your response?

Results for chart 8 indicate mixed opinions from the participants in this study. The highest percentage neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement (do Icelandic youth coaches emphasize winning too much at youth level). There were 9.3% who strongly agreed with this statement, but also 9.3% of participants that strongly disagreed with the above statement. There were a slightly higher percentage of participants who agreed (25%) compared to those who disagreed (18.6%).



**Figure 8.** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement. Coaches for youth teams here in Iceland put too much emphasis on winning games.

## Results from Interviews

When asked the question, what do you think are the most important roles from being head youth development coach and over-looking the whole youth structure, there were quite a lot of different thoughts and concepts behind this question from the coaches. There were however a couple of similarities in their answers. First of all, each coach described how it was of major importance that the coach who over-looks the whole youth structure needs to have a good relationship and rapport with his fellow colleagues. This was one aspect in which all four coaches were one hundred percent in agreement with each other. Along with the relationship factor, all coaches agreed that it is of great importance that all the coaches working within their respective youth setup were organized and planned ahead. Coach (B) talked about the organization and structure in place at his club “it is my job to make sure each coach works from the coaching manual we have in place for the youth structure, we want the coaches to train properly and work from inside this manual”. Coach (C) spoke about the observation qualities needed for the role of head youth coach “it is my job to make sure I know what my coaches are doing, most of the time it will be good but if it’s bad then I have to step in and

advise”. The three phrases used most often from the coaches when answering this question were; building relationships, planning ahead and advising when needed. The coaches agreed that personal communication and understanding others in their structure are crucial traits needed to perform this job effectively.

The answers that came about for the question related to winning at youth level gave many different views and opinions towards this issue. All four coaches said that it wasn't their main objective to win at youth level and it was more important to promote football players into the men's senior team, as this was their ultimate goal. One aspect that came to light from this question was the influence from outside sources towards the issue of winning at youth level. All four coaches described how parents in particular and board members of their respective clubs played a huge role in this process. Each coach related to this issue as a problematic aspect of youth football here in Iceland which in general is slowly improving but is still an issue that needs to be addressed for future gains at this level. Apart from the influences from external forces on winning (parents, club officials), each coach described the issue of winning at youth level from their own perspective. Coach (A) spoke about the importance of building character and mentality “winning at youth level can help build a stronger character for adult life, and make them winners in general, achieve more and strive for better. They need to play for a purpose and have ambition”. Coach (B) described winning as something that is incorporated into Icelandic nature “winning at youth level is just part of the Icelandic culture and has always been like that. Here in Iceland we have football competitions and rewards from ages 6-7, whereas other countries don't promote this aspect of football competition until later years. It doesn't matter if you win a title at 15 years old, if none of the players go on to represent the 1<sup>st</sup> team. However, everybody wants to win, us as youth coaches want to win as well while at the same time giving the players the best opportunities to improve as individual players”. Coach (C) spoke more about the meaningfulness of winning in general “no matter what the age or quality of the group, everybody wants to win, nobody wants to lose”. Coach (D) split winning into different aspects and relevance towards youth level “it depends on what the age group is and how talented the boys are within the team. Results aren't everything but there is always pressure to win”.

When asked the question is winning at youth level overly emphasized here in Iceland? The four coaches were without a doubt in agreement that winning games at youth football is overly emphasized and although improving it is still a delicate issue for all concerned. Again

the parents were mentioned by all the coaches as one of the major attributers towards the over-emphasis of success in competitive games in youth football. The coaches taking part in these interviews also spoke in general about the coaches here in Iceland and their individual needs and desires to win and strive for personal achievement. Coach (C) talked about the reoccurrence of this aspect of coaching here in Iceland “it is not uncommon here in Iceland for a coach to switch his teams for a better chance of success in a tournament E.g. the talented players who represent team (1) switching with the players in team (2) so they are competing against an inferior quality of opposition” (personal quotation, coach C). Coach (B) spoke about the benefits for a coach to win at youth level if he is wishing to further his own coaching career. Coach (A) spoke about how winning games and focusing on the result or outcome of games can obstruct football development and hinder the learning process. The coaches’ feelings or personal ambitions to win should never be a priority “Winning should never be prioritized over developing ability levels, we as coaches need to teach them the right way to play football. I would be happy to lose most games at under-18, 17 and under-16 level if I helped 4-5 players make it into the senior squad” (personal quotation, coach A).

When answering questions related to talented youngsters training and playing with more than one age group, there were more in-depth answers and feelings towards this issue at youth level. All four coaches agreed that this can be a sensitive issue and it is very hard to pin down to one simple solution. One aspect of this question in which all concurred on was that talented players should never take the step forwards or backwards for the wrong reasons, which will affect their individual development. Coach (D) related strongly to this particular issue “in my opinion, if a boy is to be moved up an age group he has to be as good; if not better than those who are already there otherwise it’s pointless in doing so”. Coach (A) spoke about a new structure that is being put in place at his club to try and combat this aspect of overusing players. He said “if a player has been training with two different age groups and there is a game for both teams within a short space of time (maybe one day apart) the player will play with the older age group. But, if he is on the bench and doesn’t play he may be available to play for his own age group” This was something that they as a club felt could help give their coaches more guidance and understanding towards this issue. All of the coaches who took part in these interviews agreed that players are moved up and down age groups for the purpose of helping their respective team win. In their own words they talked about how the players benefitted very little from this when the issue of winning is put ahead of developing their individual abilities.

When discussing the issue of over-training and burnout in youth football, there were mixed opinions towards this question. Coaches (A) and (C) spoke about the amount of training from other sports on top of the football practices which can have an effect on the individual in question. They both spoke about how some players train less in the winter months so they can be involved more with e.g. the handball training. Then this reverses in the summer time and football training takes priority over the handball. This was just one example of how coaches need to show flexibility and understanding towards the individuals training in other sports. Coaches (B) and (D) spoke more in general about how the coach of the group needs to be able to deal with these types of problems that can come about. It is part of their job to be able to see these problems and take action accordingly. They talked about how their role as head youth coach involves speaking with each coach and addressing such issues that can come about. This reverts back to the importance of communication and relationship building between the coaches and structure of the youth setup.

When addressing the issue of injuries in football and if a player should ever be asked to play while carrying some form of injury to help the team, some interesting answers came up. Coach (D) admitted to using injured players for big games in the past “We were playing in a semi-final and I only had few players available, so I had to ask one or two players who were slightly injured to play, as we had nobody else”. He then talked about some clubs who have an abundance of players in each age group and don’t have this problem as there is always someone who can take the injured players place. He generalized that no coach who has sufficient squad members should feel the need to use injured players “If the coach still picks an injured player even though he has others to choose from then this is clearly wrong” (personal quotation, coach D). Coach (B) echoed what coach (D) had already said, “We have a large amount of players for each age group, so this issue should never really come up. If a player indicates that he is injured, the coach should not even consider playing him in the game. How does it make the other players in the squad feel, if the coach is willing to use an injured player ahead of them” Coaches (A) and (C) said that this shouldn’t be an issue, if youth players are injured then they simply aren’t selected to play. The coaches’ answers showed that they were strongly against young players playing while injured.

The last couple of questions in these interviews related to the football structure in place at their respective club but also the youth structure here in Iceland. All the coaches said that they were generally happy with the structure in place at their respective clubs. Coach (B) referred back to the coaching manual and the positives that this has brought towards

improving the coaching quality and direction at his football club. Coaches (A) and (C) spoke about the structure they are currently trying to set in place for future improvements. Coach (D) was happy in general with the youth structure which is in place at his respective club. He did however mention that improvements can always be made and it is part of his job to work towards these improvements. He spoke about extra practices which had been added to the original training schedule for all ages and ability levels.

One aspect of the coaching structure which all the coaches touched on was the difficultness in coaching football players at youth level who have mixed abilities. This then makes it harder for the coach to develop players when they are at complete different stages of the coaching spectrum “It can be very hard for the coach to have 20 boys in a group. Maybe 5 players who are very good, then 10 who are average but have potential, then another 5 who have no football ability and just want to have fun and enjoy themselves” (personal quotation, coach A). The two coaches from this research who had a large number of boys training with their respective clubs said that this wasn’t so much an issue, as they can split up the players and organize the groups by talent. One coach spoke about the luxury of having quantity in numbers now, but also remembers his past experiences well “If you have a sufficient amount of players then it’s not a problem. But, I have also coached at other teams where this has been an issue and makes it very hard to build up good practices when there is mixed football ability standard within the group” (personal quotation, coach D). Despite the differences in quantity of players within each group, the coaches spoke about maybe a need to change the youth structure here in Iceland. By allowing the more talented football players to train and play with those of similar ability levels it can help further their development (personal quotation, coach A). This process can however increase tension, which the coaches again related to the parents and other external factors in becoming a slight problem. When teams are split up into different groups, which are formed by ability levels, parents often wish to address the coach and ask why their son is not included in the best team. One of the coaches discussed this topic as frequent annoyance “I don’t know how many times in the past I have had to answer a phone call from an unhappy parent as to why his son is not in a particular squad or starting 11” (personal quotation, coach D).

The interviews ended with the question, is youth coaching improving or getting worse here in Iceland? All the coaches agreed that youth football coaching is improving here in Iceland and is moving in the right direction. All the coaches mentioned the improvements with football facilities that are available for young footballers. They also spoke about the



improvements within the structures of their respective clubs which seem to be more goal orientated and focused, compared to that of the past. Coaches (A), (B) and (C) spoke about the education factor, how coaches are better educated and prepared to coach nowadays. One major factor that has contributed towards improvements is the fact that there are many more coaches who are 100% employed by their clubs. The coaches can concentrate and focus completely on football development and nothing else (personal quotation, coach A). These three coaches also mentioned how KSI (the Icelandic football federation) is playing more of a pivotal role in this educational process. Coach (C) related strongly to this feature “There has been a marked improvement in the coaching education, facilities and structure here over the last 5 years” (personal quotation, coach C). The only negative aspect that came about from this question was the issue that coach (D) brought up. He said that coaches today have less character and are more one dimensional than those of previous years. The overall perception was that of a positive one, where coaching quality seems to be improving for the better.

## Discussion

In line with previous research it does seem that winning football games at youth level is one of the major priorities of both youth players and coaches’ (Cote, et al., 1992; Van Lingen, 1997). It is generally recognised that young athletes aspire to win at all ages through the development learning process; this is just something that seems to be in our genes as young adults. With over 96% of the participants in this study aged between 13-19 indicating that winning football games at youth level was very important or important to them. The desire to win games will always be a big part of youth sport and youth football in particular (Van Lingen, 1997). However, previous research has indicated that player development and future gains in the sport will be increased by a coach who emphasises the mastering of a skill or developing personal excellence ahead of a win/loss record (see DeMarco, Mancini & Wuest, 1996; Miller, Roberts & Omundsen, 2003). The results from this quantitative research design indicated that coaches behaviours here in Iceland seem to be more result (win/lose) orientated than previous research has shown to be effective for appropriate player development (Gearity & Murray, 2010). More evidence towards this issue was given from the qualitative part of this research. All the coaches who took part in the interview process agreed that winning is over emphasized by coaches at youth level in general in Iceland (across all age groups). Players’

perceptions of their coaches' attitudes and the importance to win at youth level were especially high, with 87.3% of participants stating that winning games was of importance to their respective coach. These results initially showed that the coaches' behaviours may initially lie in the wrong place (Cote et al., 1992; Cote, 1998). However, despite the high percentage of participants stating that winning was of great importance to their respective coach/s. A very high percentage of this research group strongly agreed 82.3% or agreed with the statement; my coach puts the right emphasis on developing my personal game understanding ahead of winning football games. There was also a high percentage 81.4% of participants in this research who were very satisfied with their respective coach and his attitude towards their individual development as young footballers. This coincides with the concepts put forward by (Williams and Reilly 2003) and their belief, that appropriate learning takes place when players are provided with a suitable learning environment. It also gives backing to McShane (2002) and his thoughts that clubs need to develop young players as human beings who have fun and enjoy training. This also shows that the behaviours of the coaches and the coaching environment in general are focusing on trying improving an individual's game understanding and football ability ahead of winning games (see McShane, 2002; Williams & Reilly, 2003). This aspect of the research also gives evidence to Lyle (2002) that an elite coaching organization needs to be well defined and goal orientated for future success. If coaches are thinking about developing football understanding more than winning, it gives more indication into the medium-to-long term planning of the coaching setup, which is needed at junior elite level (see Lyle, 2002).

When addressing the issues of burnout and overuse in this research, mixed results were found. The results from the questionnaire survey indicate that there are no immediate dangers as to the risks and causes of burnout from this research. An incredibly low percentage 2.9% said that they had considered quitting football at some point due to the over-emphasizing of competitiveness in games (winning). However, when addressing the question relating to burnout and a possibility of quitting the sport altogether. The participants were only basing their answers on the issue of their coaches' desire to win football games and no other related burnout issues, e.g. injuries, lack of time, motivation and parental pressure, which have proved to be considerable indicators of burnout in past researches (see Cresswell & Eklund, 2006; Gould, Tuffey, Udry & Loehr, 1996). An overwhelming amount of participants 97.1% answered no to the question, have you ever considered quitting football because of a coach emphasising winning too much. This aspect gives credit to the theories put

forward by (Hill and colleagues, 2007) that burnout is maybe more of a personality disposition and can be caused by many different factors, physical or psychological. Despite the considerable support from the players towards their coaches on this issue. Results from the questionnaire also indicated that over one third of participants (34%) in this research had been asked at some point or another to play in a competitive game while carrying some form of injury. According to the coaches who participated in the interview process of this research, there should be no reason to ask a player at youth level to play injured. All the coaches who took part in these interviews agreed that the only reason a coach would use an injured player ahead of a physically fit player, would be to achieve a result (win). This coincides with Van Lingen, (2007) and how young individuals can be mistreated at youth level to increase the teams' hope of winning. It is maybe important to point out, that players of different ages and character might perceive the term injury in a different way. There was no clarification on the individuals' type of injury parse but more of an indication to see if they had been asked at some point or another by their coach.

One reoccurring feature from the qualitative part of this research that came to light on the issue of winning was the mention of the parents. The coaches related heavily to this subject and described it as an ongoing problem. All four coaches talked about the pressures to win at youth level often come from the parents, who associate winning as a form of success and development (see Van Lingen 1997; Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). The questionnaire however did not include any questions related to the issues of parents and winning, so this feature of the research could not be addressed properly. This was just the coaches' take on this particular problem in youth football, and the pressures they feel from these external influences.

Another feature of this assignment which I failed to assess through the questionnaire was the issues of rule breaking and cheating and the connection they have towards winning at a young age. Previous research conducted by Miller and colleagues (2003) revealed this to be a particular problem in adolescents who felt winning was of major importance. They also spoke about the connection between the coaches who emphasized a goal achievement approach over that of a task achievement approach. If winning was portrayed as important by their respective coach the players involved in competitive play were more likely to use malpractice as a way to win (Miller, Roberts & Ommundsen, 2003). This aspect of winning along with the parental issue I previously spoke about could be interesting features to look into for future research studies.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This research was originally set out to determine if Icelandic youth football was heavily built on the importance of winning and the role in which the youth coach played in this process. Winning rated as highly important for the participants in this study, which came as no surprise. The need to win at youth level for young athletes' seems to be a fixed personality trait that is part of our personality and makeup as children and young adults. The evidence from the quantitative part of this study indicates that even though winning may be slightly over-emphasized by coaches at youth level, the need to win is not obstructing players' future development in the game. Therefore coaches are not overemphasising the importance of winning games ahead of developing individual football abilities of their players. One cause for concern from the questionnaire results was the amount of participants who had been asked to play a game while carrying some form of injury. Future research may want to address this issue and conduct further work in this field to determine if it is an ongoing problem. Evidence from the quantitative part of the research shows us that coaches are not miss-using players to win games at youth level. However, the qualitative part of this research reviewed this particular issue to be a problematic aspect of youth football in Iceland which needs more understanding. The interviews also shed light on the problematic feature of the parents' role in youth football and their personal desires to win. It is therefore my recommendation that future research on the subject of winning football games at youth level should be directed towards this issue. More extensive work needs to be conducted in this area involving both coaches and parents to better understand the process. I also recommend that future research look into the issues of rule breaking and cheating in youth football as this is something this paper neglected to look into. These two features of winning at youth level may give more extensive answers towards this delicate subject of youth sport.

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## Questionnaire

Kæri þátttakandi

Eftirfarandi könnun er liður í B.Sc verkefni mínu í íþróttافرæði við Háskólann í Reykjavík. Könnunin er nafnlaus og ekki er hægt að rekja svör til einstaklinga. Farið verður með rannsóknargögn sem trúnaðarmál og verður þeim eytt að vinnslu lokinni. Líkt og í allri rannsóknarvinnu liggur áreiðanleiki niðurstaðna í því að sem flestir svari spurningakönnuninni og því er það von mín að þú sjáir þér fært að svara könnuninni.

Ef einhverjar spurningar vakna ekki hika við að hafa samband við undirritaðan

Með fyrirfram þökk fyrir þátttökuna

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Sp. 1. Hvert er fæðingarár þitt?: \_\_\_\_\_

Sp. 2. Með hvaða flokki /flokkum æfir þú knattspyrnu? (merkту við þá flokka sem við eiga).

- ☐ Meistaraflokkur
- ☐ 2. flokkur
- ☐ 3. flokkur
- ☐ 4. flokkur

Sp. 3. Hversu oft mætir þú að jafnaði á knattspyrnuæfingar í hverri viku? (Hér er átt við fjölda æfinga og leikja sem þú spilar)

- ☐ 1 sinni í viku
- ☐ 2 sinnum í viku
- ☐ 3 sinnum í viku
- ☐ 4 sinnum í viku
- ☐ 5 sinnum viku
- ☐ 6 sinnum í viku eða oftar

Sp. 4. Æfir þú einhverjar aðrar íþróttir en knattspyrnu?

- ☐ Nei, ég æfi eingöngu knattspyrnu
- ☐ Handbolta
- ☐ Körfubolta
- ☐ Frjálsar íþróttir
- ☐ Fimleika
- ☐ Aðra íþrótt, þá hvaða? \_\_\_\_\_

Sp. 5. Hversu miklu eða litlu máli skiptir það þig að sigra í leik?

- ☐ Mjög miklu
- ☐ Frekar miklu
- ☐ Hvorki miklu né litlu máli
- ☐ Frekar litlu
- ☐ Mjög litlu

**Næst koma spurningar um þjálfarann þinn – ef þú ert að æfa með fleiri en einum flokki skaltu svara spurningum miðað við þann þjálfara sem þú æfir mest hjá.**

Sp. 6. Hversu sammála eða ósammála ertu eftirfarandi fullyrðingu? Þjálfari minn leggur áherslu á að byggja upp leikmenn með góðan leikskilning framfar því að vinna leik.

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Hvorki sammála né ósammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

Sp. 7. Hversu ánægður eða óánægður ert þú með metnað þjálfarans þegar að kemur að þróá og þroska þig sem knattspyrnumann?

- ☐ Mjög ánægður
- ☐ Frekar ánægður
- ☐ Hvorki ánægður né óánægður
- ☐ Frekar óánægður
- ☐ Mjög óánægður

Sp. 8. Hversu miklu eða litlu máli skiptir það fyrir þjálfarann þinn að vinna leik?

- ☐ Mjög miklu
- ☐ Frekar miklu
- ☐ Hvorki miklu né litlu
- ☐ Frekar litlu
- ☐ Mjög litlu

Sp. 9. Hversu sammála eða ósammála ertu eftirfarandi fullyrðingu? Þjálfari minn ofnotar leikmenn sem skara fram úr til að auka sigurlíkur í leik.

- ☐ Mjög sammála
- ☐ Frekar sammála
- ☐ Hvorki sammála né ósammála
- ☐ Frekar ósammála
- ☐ Mjög ósammála

Sp.10. Hefur þú verið beðinn um að spila leik þrátt fyrir meiðsli?

- ☐ Já
- ☐ Nei

Sp. 11. Ef svarið við spurningu 10 var já, hvert var svar þitt?

- ☐ Ég spilaði leikinn
- ☐ Ég neitaði að spila
- ☐ Ég hef bæði spilað meiddur og neitað að spila

Sp. 12. Hefur þú á einhverju tímapunkti leitt hugann að því hætta að spila knattspyrnu vegna þess að þjálfarinn lagði of mikla áherslu á að vinna leiki.

- ☐ Já
- ☐ Nei

Sp. 13. Hversu oft á ferlinum hefur þú leitt hugann að því að hætta að spila knattspyrnu vegna þess að þjálfarinn lagði of mikla áherslu á að vinna leiki.

☐ Oft

☐ Stundum

☐ Sjaldan

☐ Aldrei

Sp. 14. Hversu sammála eða ósammála ertu eftirfarandi fullyrðingu? Þjálfarar í yngri flokkum á Íslandi, leggja of mikla áherslu á að vinna leiki.

☐ Mjög sammála

☐ Frekar sammála

☐ Hvorki sammála né ósammála

☐ Frekar ósammála

☐ Mjög ósammála

Þá er þessu lokið  
Kærar þakkir fyrir þátttökuna!