TALENT IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN YOUTH RUGBY PLAYERS: A RESEARCH REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Several South African studies were conducted during the past twelve years (1995 to 2007) as part of a research project on Talent Identification and Development. The main objective of this project was to compile the profile of a potential talented and elite youth rugby player, primarily within the conceptual research model proposed by Salmela and Régnier (1983). Hundreds of elite youth rugby players, within the age range 10 to 19 years old, were tested on several anthropometric, physical and motor abilities, game specific skills, and injury epidemiology. The research project was extended to England and New Zealand, and the data compared with that of South African teams. Other possible variables of talent identification, including proprioception, balance, plyometric strength, injuries, and ethical behaviour, were also investigated. The aim of this research review is to provide scientific evidence concerning the profile of an elite youth rugby player, thereby providing variables, assessment tools, and recommendations to coaches, selectors, administrators, and scouts, which may be used in the identification, selection, and development of future elite rugby players. Hopefully, this research review will furthermore stimulate future research on talent identification and development within youth team sport.

Key Words: Talent identification and development; Youth rugby; Research review; Anthropometric; Physical and motor abilities; Game specific skills; Injury epidemiology.