

5 top tips for coaches on deselection and providing additional support to young elite footballers



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The ins and outs of deselection

Many professional football clubs worldwide have set up elite youth academies which aim to develop skilful and creative young players to potentially become professional football players in the future. However, it has been discovered that 90% of the young players within the academy set up fail to make it as professionals. These players that have been released by the club would have gone through the deselection process, meaning that this issue arises constantly for coaches.

This is the process which requires coaches to make a decision on the ability level of the athletes and their suitability to the team. It has been described as a very difficult part of a coach's job due to the impact it can have on young footballers. This is a very delicate issue as the way it is delivered often determines the way the young players react as an inappropriate method may negatively impact the young player's life through complete drop out from sport and/or the development of psychological distress.

It is within the coaches' responsibility to deliver the news respectfully, but, doing this may be difficult for coaches as the support/training within this area is scarce. However, the creation of this resource will educate coaches on how to deliver the message of deselection appropriately through 5 top tips.



- ✓ Direct method (1 on 1 meeting)
- ✓ Provide feedback
- ✓ Honesty, sensitivity and empathy
- ✓ A safe and appropriate environment
- ✓ Encouragement to continue

- **Direct Method (1 on 1 meeting):** Ensuring that the message of deselection is delivered through a face to face meeting which can involve the parents too. This method has been cited as the most respectful way to inform a young player of deselection and also enables opportunities for the coach to provide feedback to player.
- **Provide feedback:** Give the player an insight into why they have become deselected rather than not telling them. Also help individuals identify the areas they need to improve within to continue to develop.
- **A safe and appropriate environment:** Ensuring that the location where the meeting will take place is in a private, quiet and mindful setting (preferably in a meeting room or office situated within the stadium or training ground)
- **Honesty, sensitivity and empathy:** Be completely honest with the player and the parents. Also be empathetic as the players may have dedicated a huge part of their lives to become a professional player. Mention that additional career transitional support can be provided (*more information on next page*).
- **Encouragement to continue:** Encourage the athlete to stay involved within the game and continue to work hard (an additional opportunity may rise in the future – *Andrew Robertson of Liverpool as an example*). Remind them of their ability and mention that they would not have made it into an elite academy in the first place if they were not good enough.

Post deselection additional support

Many of the young players, who have recently been deselected, inevitably display negative emotions. This is because a lot of hard work, determination and sacrifices have been made by the individual over the many years spent at the academy club, which are now deemed as worthless as their overall career aspiration has potentially been deterred. It is normal for those who have been deselected to feel extremely sad and down, however, it is within the responsibilities of the coach to guarantee that further support is provided to ensure that negative consequences do not develop and a future career plan/ pathway is created for the individual.

It has been extensively reported that deselected young football players from elite academies are likely to develop depression, identity crisis and loss of self-worth because suitable support is not provided by the coaches. This is reiterated through a research study that found that without the appropriate skills and support from the coaches, the likelihood of a young player developing mental health issues was increased. Therefore this clearly emphasizes the need for providing support as mental health is a huge problem within today's society.

Similar to deselection, there is little evidence available that provides coaches with techniques and strategies to follow when providing support to young football players following their transition out of professional football. Therefore, this resource has created 5 top tips for coaches to use when engaging within this process.

Top tips on providing additional support

- ✓ Check-ups
- ✓ Entrance back into the pathway
- ✓ Counselling sessions (optional)
- ✓ Post deselection meeting
- ✓ Continuation of training (until end of the season)

- **Check-ups:** Regularly meet or phone the player to make sure they are on the right track and ask if they need supported in any other way. This ultimately shows how much you care.
- **Entrance back in to the pathway:** Help identify trials for other professional clubs OR find teams (Amateur/junior level) willing to take them on. Overall ensuring they remain playing.
- **Counselling sessions:** Providing the individuals with the opportunity to attend counselling sessions (with professionals) to help deal with emotional and psychological disturbances that may have occurred as a consequence of their deselection.
- **Post deselection meeting:** Meet with the player after a short period of time and help with career planning and set relevant career goals. Potential to keep them involved with the club through offering coaching jobs).
- **Continuation of training:** Allowing the player to remain as a part of the squad until the end of the season (if possible) in order to give them adequate time to come to terms with the situation and deal with it appropriately.